

The Power of Geography

Reading Guide for Chapter 9, Spain

An overview of the geography of Spain: “Spain is a vast fortress” with **Madrid** at its center, “but it has always struggled to get its regions to coalesce around its center.”

Fourth largest country in Europe, with an often-forgotten border with Morocco across the Strait of Gibraltar, and with the Pyrenees as a barrier between it & France....A dry country. Except for the Guadalquivir River—with **Seville** as its only large inland river port-- it lacks large, navigable rivers.



The arrival of the Muslim armies in 711 behind **Tariq Ibn Ziyad**. Called the **Moors**, they conquered the Iberian Peninsula, stopped only at **Tours** in 732 by **Charles Martel**'s army.... The amazing Moorish capital of **Cordoba**.



Spanish Christians slowly retook the peninsula (over the next 800 years!)
1492 **Ferdinand & Isabella** accepted the Moors' surrender.

New Christian rulers were ardent and fanatic in the expression of their faith. **Christian treatment of Muslims and Jews: Convert, leave, or die.** Still, the Moorish influence in Spanish culture is seen everywhere.

Columbus' expeditions & 'discoveries' of what was to be called the Americas led to Spanish conquests and their extraction of enormous amounts of silver and gold, as well as the enslavement of indigenous peoples and then of African peoples....Spain became the most powerful country on earth.

The Golden Age of Spain 1500-1681 ... much of its extracted wealth spent on wars in Europe.

The Spanish Armada's failed invasion of England, 1588.



Internal dissension in Spain: Basque Uprising 1630s, the Catalans in 1640—The Reaper's War.



Francisco Goya, "Third of May"

Spain began a long, slow decline. It lost Gibraltar to Britain in 1704, & it remains in British hands still...The Royal (i.e., British) navy destroyed the French & Spanish fleets at Trafalgar in 1805....Napoleon's French armies invaded in 1807; Spanish resistance is known as **the Peninsular War**—guerilla-style warfare.

In Latin America Simon Bolivar & Jose de San Martin wrested Latin America free of Spanish control.



Spain struggled at home: urban vs rural, conservative vs liberal.

1898 Cuba, Puerto Rico, & the Philippines pull away from Spain.

Early 20th century saw internal struggles—a clash of left- and right-wing politics, communists & fascists. 1931 the Republicans (left-leaning) win power and declare a republic, opposed by the Catholic Church, the military, the landed gentry, and the industrialists.

1936-1939, a bloody Civil War ensues. The Popular Front (left), supported lightly by Stalin, versus Francisco Franco's forces (right), supported substantially by Hitler and Mussolini. 500,000 to 1,000,000 dead.



Francisco Franco, Spanish general and dictator of Spain, pictured during the Spanish Civil War.



"Guernica" by Pablo Picasso (Wikimedia)

Franco rules as a fascist dictator ("El Caudillo") until his death in 1975. Regional identities were crushed by Franco.

Barcelona FC versus Real Madrid -- a proxy for Catalans versus Spanish government. Still echoes today.

The Cold War – the USA pulls Spain toward the West – The Pact of Madrid gave USA military bases in Spain, & Spain prospered with Western economic aid in the 1960s.

1975 King Juan Carlos succeeds Franco, & Juan Carlos forges a democracy out of Franco's Spanish dictatorship....Spain joined NATO in 1982, the European Union in 1986, & adopted the Euro in 1999. Fully integrated into Europe, but still struggling to unify its own peoples.

The Basque secession movement & ETA (1959-2018).

A republican mural in Belfast showing solidarity with the Basque nationalism. [800x1200] Modern

i.imgur.com/TZ4w0...



Supporters of independence for Catalonia demonstrate on September 11, 2012 in Barcelona. (Getty Images)

The Catalan push for full independence (2014 and 2017). Spain will not allow the most prosperous region of Spain to secede.

The rising strategic influence of China and Russia – complicating the **separatist** impulses of various regions.

Spain wants Gibraltar back, but 99% of Gibraltarians said no in 2002.

Spain has a powerful navy to defend its long coastline.

The Strait of Gibraltar between Spain and Morocco is the second-busiest shipping lane in the world. Spain and Morocco both wish to prevent mass migration from the Sahel into Morocco & Spain. So, Spain is involved in supporting government forces in the Sahelian states.

“For all its faults and problems, modern Spain is a success story.” A leader in renewable energy. Its biggest challenges are internal.