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A Spanish manuscript dating from the mid-1500s shows the Spanish arrival in Mexico (top). At bottom, Moctezuma listens to his messengers.

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Moctezuma Hears Strange News

In 1519, the Aztec ruler Moctezuma heard an astounding report from his messengers. They described unusual people who had just arrived in the region—people with white skin and yellow hair, clad completely in iron, who rode “deer” as tall as a house and had dogs with burning yellow eyes. According to a Spanish translation of native accounts, “When Moctezuma heard this, he was filled with terror. It was as if his heart grew faint, as it shrank; he was overcome by despair.”

Focus Question How did a small number of Spanish conquistadors conquer huge Native American empires?

Conquest in the Americas

Objectives

- Analyze the results of the first encounters between the Spanish and Native Americans.
- Explain how Cortés and Pizarro gained control of the Aztec and Incan empires.
- Understand the short-term and long-term effects of the Spanish on the peoples of the Americas.

Terms, People, and Places

- conquistador
- immunity
- Hernán Cortés
- Tenochtitlán
- Malinche
- alliance
- Moctezuma
- Francisco Pizarro
- civil war

Note Taking

Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence Keep track of the sequence of events that led to European empires in the Americas by completing a chart like the one below.

Spain Establishes An Empire		
Columbus	Cortés	Pizarro
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbus arrives in the West Indies. • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

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In 1492, explorer Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean islands that are now called the West Indies. The wave of exploration he spurred in the Americas would have drastic, far-reaching consequences for the people who already lived there.

First Encounters in the Americas

Columbus's first meeting with Native Americans began a cycle of encounter, conquest, and death that would be repeated throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Meeting the Taínos When Columbus first arrived in the West Indies, he encountered the Taíno (TY noh) people. The Taínos lived in villages and grew corn, yams, and cotton, which they wove into cloth. They were friendly and open toward the Spanish. Columbus noted that they were “generous with what they have, to such a degree as no one would believe but he who had seen it.”

Despite the friendly reception, relations soon soured. The Taínos offended the Spanish when out of ignorance they failed to pay proper respect to Christian symbols. Columbus's actions showed that he felt himself superior to the Taínos and could therefore decide their fate. He claimed their land for Spain, and then took several Taínos as prisoners to take back to the Spanish king.

Columbus's encounter was repeated by a wave of Spanish conquistadors (kahn KEES tuh dawrz), or conquerors, who soon arrived in the Americas. They first settled on the islands of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Throughout the region, the conquistadors seized the Native Americans' gold ornaments and then made them pan for more gold. At the same time, the Spanish forced the Native Americans to convert to Christianity.

Guns, Horses, and Disease Although Spanish conquistadors only numbered in the hundreds as compared to millions of Native Americans, they had many advantages. Their guns and cannons were superior to the Native Americans' arrows and spears, and European metal armor provided them with better protection. They also had horses, which not only were useful in battle and in carrying supplies, but also frightened the Native Americans, who had never seen a horse.

Most importantly, an invisible invader—disease—helped the conquistadors take control of the Tainos and other Native Americans. Europeans unknowingly carried diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza to which Native Americans had no immunity, or resistance. These diseases spread rapidly and wiped out village after village. As a result, the Native American population of the Caribbean islands declined by as much as 90 percent in the 1500s. Millions of Native Americans died from disease as Europeans made their way inland.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did Spanish conquistadors treat the Tainos?

Cortés Conquers Mexico

From the Caribbean, Spanish explorers probed the coasts of the Americas. They spread stories of empires rich in gold, but they also told of fierce fighting people. Attracted by the promise of riches as well as by religious zeal, a flood of adventurers soon followed.

Cortés Advances on the Aztecs Among the earliest conquistadors was Hernán Cortés. Cortés, a landowner in Cuba, heard of Spanish expeditions that had been repelled by Indians. He believed that he could succeed where none had before. In 1519, he landed on the coast of Mexico with about 600 men, 16 horses, and a few cannons. He began an inland trek toward Tenochtitlán (teh nawch tee TLAHN), the capital of the Aztec empire. A young Indian woman named Malinche (mah LEEN chay), called Doña Marina by the Spanish, served as his translator and advisor. Malinche knew both the Maya and Aztec languages, and she learned Spanish quickly.

Malinche told Cortés that the Aztecs had gained power by conquering other groups of people. The Aztecs sacrificed thousands of their captives to the Aztec gods each year. Many conquered peoples hated their Aztec overlords, so Malinche helped Cortés arrange alliances with them. They agreed to help Cortés fight the Aztecs.

Moctezuma Faces a Dilemma Meanwhile, messengers brought word about the Spanish to the Aztec emperor Moctezuma (mahk tih ZOO muh). Terrified, he wondered if the leader of the pale-skinned, bearded strangers might be Quetzalcoatl (ket sahl koh AHT el), an Aztec god-king who had long ago vowed to return from the east. Because Moctezuma did not know for sure if Cortés was a god, he did not know how to respond to the news. He sent gifts of turquoise, feathers, and other goods with religious importance, but urged the strangers not to continue to Tenochtitlán.

Cortés, however, had no intention of turning back. He was not interested in the Aztec religious objects, but was extremely interested in the gold and silver ornaments that Moctezuma began sending him.



This passage from a Maya book written in the 1500s describes life before the arrival of the Spanish. What does the writer say was the main effect of Europeans on the Maya?

Primary Source  AUDIO

“There was then no sickness; They had then no aching bones; They had then no high fever; They had then no smallpox; They had then no burning chest. . . At that time the course of humanity was orderly. The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here.”

Malinche Shapes History

Malinche's parents sold her as a slave when she was a child, believing that she was born under an unlucky star. Despite her unfortunate beginning, she left a major mark on the history of the Americas.



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Díaz Sets the Record Straight

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a Spanish soldier who came to Cuba in 1514. In 1519, he accompanied Hernán Cortés on his conquest of the Aztecs. More than 40 years later, Díaz wrote his *True History* because he felt other accounts of the conquest—written by historians who had not been there—were inaccurate. He insisted that as an eyewitness of events he was a better historical source. For example, Díaz was there when Moctezuma took Cortés to the top of the great temple to look at Tenochtitlán, his magnificent capital city on the lake.



Cortés became more determined than ever to reach Tenochtitlán. Fighting and negotiating by turns, Cortés led his forces inland toward the capital. At last, the Spanish arrived in Tenochtitlán, where they were dazzled by the grandeur of the city.

Tenochtitlán Falls to the Spanish Moctezuma welcomed Cortés to his capital. However, relations between the Aztecs and Spaniards soon grew strained. The Spanish scorned the Aztecs' religion and sought to convert them to Christianity. At the same time, as they remained in the city, they saw more of the Aztec treasure. They decided to imprison Moctezuma so they could gain control of the Aztecs and their riches.

Cortés compelled Moctezuma to sign over his land and treasure to the Spanish. In the meantime, a new force of Spanish conquistadors had arrived on the coast to challenge Cortés. In the confusion that followed—with various groups of Spanish, Aztecs, and Native Americans all fighting for control—the Aztecs drove the Spanish from the city. More than half of the Spanish were killed in the fighting, as was Moctezuma.

Cortés retreated to plan an assault. In 1521, in a brutal struggle, Cortés and his Indian allies captured and demolished Tenochtitlán. The Spanish later built Mexico City on the ruins of Tenochtitlán. As in the Caribbean, disease had aided their cause. Smallpox had spread among the Aztecs from the 1519 encounter, decimating the population.

- ✓ **Checkpoint** What impact did the Aztecs' religious beliefs have on Cortés's approach to Tenochtitlán?

Vocabulary Builder

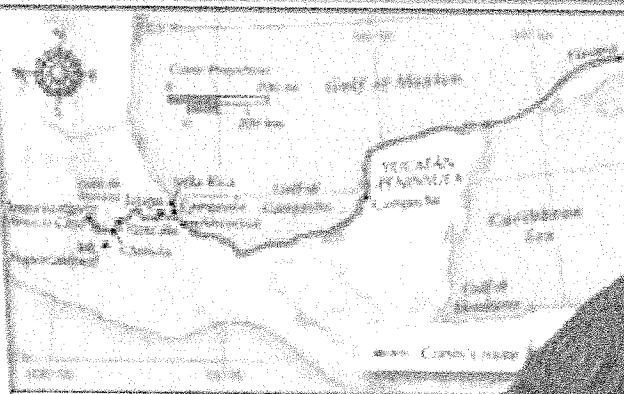
compel—(kum PEL) *v.* to force

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“When we saw so all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading toward [Tenochtitlán], we were astounded. These great towns and [pyramids] and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision... Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.... It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.”

“We turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling. The mere murmur of their voices was loud enough to be heard more than three miles away. Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so filled with people.”

— Bernal Díaz del Castillo
from *The True History of the
Conquest of New Spain*



Hernán Cortés ▶

Thinking Critically

1. Draw Inferences Why do you think Díaz included the opinions of “some of our soldiers”?
2. Make a Reasoned Judgment Do you agree with Díaz that the best historical accounts are written by people who participated in or witnessed the events? Explain your answer.

Pizarro Takes Peru

Cortés's success inspired other adventurers, among them Spaniard Francisco Pizarro (pee SAHR oh). Pizarro was interested in Peru's Inca empire, which was reputed to have even more riches than the Aztecs. Pizarro arrived in Peru in 1532, just after the Incan ruler Atahualpa (ah tah WAHL puh) had won the throne from his brother in a bloody civil war. A civil war is fought between groups of people in the same nation.

Pizarro's secretary described Atahualpa as

Primary Source

“a man of thirty years, good-looking and poised, somewhat stout, with a wide, handsome, and ferocious face, and the eyes flaming with blood...”

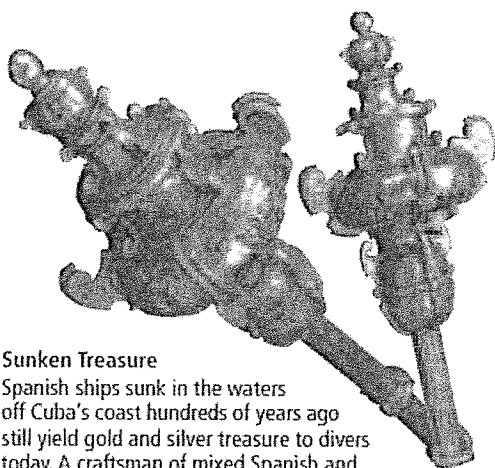
—Francisco de Xerez

Atahualpa refused to become a Spanish vassal or convert to Christianity. In response, Pizarro, aided by Indian allies, captured him and slaughtered thousands of Inca. The Spanish demanded a huge ransom for the ruler. The Inca paid it, but the Spanish killed Atahualpa anyway.

Despite continuing resistance, Pizarro and his followers overran the Incan heartland. He had superior weapons, and the Inca were weakened by European diseases. From Peru, Spanish forces surged across Ecuador and Chile. Before long, Spain had added much of South America to its growing empire. Pizarro himself was killed by a rival Spanish faction a few years after he established the city of Lima.

✓ **Checkpoint** What factors encouraged Spanish success in Peru?

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Sunken Treasure

Spanish ships sunk in the waters off Cuba's coast hundreds of years ago still yield gold and silver treasure to divers today. A craftsman of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry made these ceremonial weapons in 1631.

Effects of the Spanish Conquistadors

The Spanish conquistadors accomplished a major victory in the Americas. Within a few decades, a few hundred European soldiers—helped by superior weapons, horses, and especially disease—had conquered millions of Native Americans. The Spanish had seized huge quantities of valuable goods. And they had used Native American labor to establish silver mines in Peru and Mexico to finance their new empire. In the 1500s and early 1600s, treasure fleets sailed each year to Spain or the Spanish Philippines loaded with gold and silver. With this wealth, Spain became Europe's greatest power.

The effect on Native Americans, however, was quite different. Some Native Americans believed that the disasters they suffered marked the world's end. As tens of thousands of Indians died, some of the bewildered and demoralized survivors felt that their gods were less powerful than the god of their conquerors. They therefore stopped resisting. Many Native Americans converted to Christianity in the hopes that their suffering would end.

Yet many Indians continued to resist the Spanish in any way they could. For centuries, the Maya fought Spanish rule in Mexico and Central America. Long after the death of Atahualpa, revolts erupted among the Inca. And throughout the Americas, Indians resisted European influences by preserving aspects of their own culture, including language, religious traditions, and clothing. In time, Native American culture came to influence the culture of Latin America.

The early encounters between the Spanish conquistadors and Native Americans had long-lasting impacts that reached far beyond these two groups. By establishing an empire in the Americas, Spain dramatically changed the pattern of global encounter set in motion with the first European exploration of Africa. For the first time, much of the world was now connected by sea routes, on which traveled ships carrying goods, people, and ideas.

- ✓ **Checkpoint** In what ways did Native Americans resist Europeans?

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-quiz with vocabulary practice
Web Code: naa-1511

1 Assessment

Terms, People, and Places

1. What do each of the key terms listed at the beginning of the section have in common? Explain.

Note Taking

2. **Reading Skill: Recognize Sequence**
Use your completed chart to answer the Focus Question: How did a small number of Spanish conquistadors conquer huge Native American empires?

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

3. **Determine Relevance** Which factor was the most important in aiding Spanish success in the Americas?
4. **Summarize Information** How did Cortés gain control of Tenochtitlán?
5. **Recognize Cause and Effect** How did the Incan civil war affect the Spanish outcome in Peru?
6. **Identify Alternatives** How might the history of Europeans in the Americas have been different if the Indians had not been killed by European diseases?

Writing About History

Quick Write: List Things to Compare
When you write an expository essay comparing and contrasting two things, you first need to decide which things are useful to compare. List several people, places, or activities from this section to compare. The things you choose should be appropriate for comparison. For example, comparing Malinche and Columbus would not make sense because their roles and purposes were so different from one another.

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