

Later Spanish Exploration and Conquest

After Columbus's voyages, Spain was eager to claim lands in the New World. To explore and conquer "New Spain," the Spanish turned to adventurers called *conquistadors* (conquerors). The conquistadors were allowed to establish settlements and seize the wealth of natives. In return, the Spanish government claimed one fifth of the treasures they found.

Key Explorers In 1519, Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes and a band of conquistadors set out to explore present-day Mexico. From native people, Cortes learned about the Aztecs. The Aztecs had built a large and wealthy empire in Mexico.

With the help of a native woman named Malinche, Cortes and his men reached the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan. The Aztec ruler, Montezuma, welcomed the Spanish with great honors. Determined to break the power of the Aztecs, Cortes took Montezuma hostage.

Cortes now controlled the Aztec capital. In 1520, he left Tenochtitlan to battle a rival Spanish force. While he was gone, a group of conquistadors attacked the Aztecs in the midst of a religious celebration. In response, the Aztecs rose up against the Spanish. The soldiers had to fight their way out of the city. Many of them were killed during the escape.

The following year, Cortes mounted a siege of the city, aided by thousands of native allies who resented Aztec rule. The Aztecs ran out of food and water, yet they fought desperately. After several months, the Spanish captured their leader, and Aztec resistance collapsed. The city was in ruins. The mighty Aztec Empire was no more.

Four factors contributed to the defeat of the Aztec Empire. First, Aztec legend had told of the coming of a white-skinned god. When Cortes appeared, the Aztecs welcomed him because they thought he might be their god Quetzalcoatl. Second, Cortes was able to make allies of the

Aztecs' native enemies. Third, their horses, armor, and superior weapons gave the Spanish an advantage in battle. The Aztecs had never seen any of these things before. Fourth, the Spanish carried diseases that caused deadly epidemics among the Aztecs.

Aztec riches inspired Spanish conquistadors to continue their search for gold. In the 1520s, Francisco Pizarro received permission from Spain to conquer the Inca Empire in South America. The Incas ruled an empire that ran along most of the Andes Mountains. By the time Pizarro arrived, however, a civil war had weakened the empire.

In April 1532, the Inca emperor, Atahualpa, greeted the Spanish as guests. Following Cortes's example, Pizarro launched a surprise attack and kidnapped the emperor. Although the Incas paid a roomful of gold and silver for Atahualpa's ransom, the Spanish killed him the following year. Without their leader, the Incas' empire quickly fell apart.

The Impact of Later Spanish Exploration and Conquest The explorations and conquests of the conquistadors transformed Spain. The Spanish rapidly expanded foreign trade and overseas colonization. For a time, wealth from the Americas made Spain one of the world's richest and most powerful countries.

Besides gold and silver, ships brought corn and potatoes from the New World to Spain. These crops grew well in Europe. By increasing the food supply, they helped spur a population boom. Conquistadors also introduced Europeans to new luxury items, such as chocolate and tobacco.

In the long run, gold and silver from the Americas hurt Spain's economy. Inflation, or an increase in the supply of money compared to goods, led to higher prices. Monarchs and the wealthy spent their riches wastefully instead of building up Spain's industries.

The Spanish conquests had a major impact on

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the New World. The Spanish introduced new animals to the Americas, such as horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs. But they also destroyed two advanced civilizations. The Aztecs and Incas lost much of their culture along with their wealth. Many became laborers for the Spanish. Millions died from disease. In Mexico, for example, there were about 25 million native people in 1519. By 1605, this number had dwindled to 1 million.

Questions

1. What contributions did each of these individuals make to later Spanish exploration and conquest?
 - Hernan Cortes
 - Francisco Pizarro
2. What impact did later Spanish exploration and conquest have on the people of these continents?
 - Europe
 - the Americas