

## CHAPTER 9

# How Did Conflicting Worldviews Lead to the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Civilization?

By the beginning of the 1500s, Spain was starting to expand its power across the Atlantic. It had established posts on the Caribbean islands of Cuba and Hispaniola and had begun exploring the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. Soon, they would reach the Gulf of Mexico shores of the Aztec Empire.

The Aztec Empire had reached great heights of wealth and luxury. They had established control over wide expanses of Meso-America and tribute poured into their capital, Tenochtitlan. They knew nothing of other civilizations across the seas, but they had begun to receive reports of strange men in large boats exploring the Yucatan coastline.

Soon, these two empires would meet and their societies would be forever changed.

As you work through Chapter 9, you will explore answers to these questions:

How Did the Ambitions of the Aztec and the Spanish Lead to Conflict?

What Was the Aztec Understanding of the Spanish Before Their Arrival?

How Did the Spanish Conquer the Aztec?

Why Did Moctezuma and Cortés Make the Decisions They Did?

What Impact Did the Conquest Have on Aztec Society?

Focus on Inquiry: How Does the Experience of Canada's First People Compare to the Story of the Aztec and the Spanish?



## Worldview Investigation

In this investigation, you will share with the class the information and files that your group created about your hypothetical society of beings from another planet.

### Individually

Explore the files another group has created about their society. Consider all the details they have presented about the society. Write a media account or a historical account of first contact between their society and people from Earth. Draw conclusions about the worldviews of each group.

### As a group

Discuss what the Canadian government should do if it was to prepare for our first contact with beings from other worlds. Give each person an opportunity to express an opinion and to take a position on the issue.

In this chapter, you will learn what happened when the very different societies of the Aztec and the Spanish came into contact. Could you predict what would happen when they met face to face? How has history judged this encounter?

This Worldview Investigation is a continuation of the one you began in chapter 7 and continued in chapter 8.

Think about what you would say and do if you made contact with these beings. What would your actions reveal to them about your worldview?

## Taking a Position on an Issue

An issue is a concern or problem that has more than one solution. In order to express your opinion about an issue, you need to learn how to take a position.

- **Understand the choices:** There will be more than one way to solve the issue. What choices are there? Are there two, three, or more choices? Is the choice a yes/no or a for/against?
- **List the criteria you will use:** What will you consider when you judge the choices? Criteria may include cost, impact, and so on.
- **Be informed:** Gather information about each of the choices. Do not jump to a conclusion without checking the facts.
- **Evaluate the choices:** Weigh each of the options against the criteria. Which ones are most desirable?
- **Decide:** Pick one of the choices and be prepared to defend your position.
- **Be open to new information:** If new information about a choice becomes available, be ready to change your mind if needed.

## SKILLS CENTRE

Turn to **How to Communicate Ideas and Information** in the Skills Centre to review other ways to express your ideas.



Hernando Cortés

Cortés liked to write. He sent many letters about his exploits to the king, which established a direct link to the most powerful man in Spain.

## PROFILE

### Hernan Cortés (1485–1547)

At the age of 19, Hernan Cortés decided to leave Spain to seek his fortune in the new Caribbean colonies. He eventually settled on the island of Cuba where he gained political power and was twice elected mayor of Santiago. He proved to be **intelligent, clever, and ruthless**—qualities he would use in his dealings with the people of Meso-America.

When rumours of a wealthy empire on the mainland reached the Spanish governor of Cuba, Diego Velazquez, he urged Cortés to lead an expedition to find this wealthy civilization. As the ships were about to set sail, Velazquez changed his mind about sending Cortés, but Cortés was determined to lead the expedition, even if it meant angering the governor. He sailed from Cuba on February 18, 1519, before the voyage could be officially cancelled, with 11 ships, 16 horses, and 500 men.

Cortés knew that he would be imprisoned by Velazquez if he returned to Cuba, so he had to conquer and settle wherever he landed. He travelled to the island of Cozumel and then along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico to what is now Veracruz, a city on the east coast of central Mexico. He founded his own city where he landed and his crew became its citizens. He was elected the captain-general of the town council and eventually had this title sanctioned by King Charles V of Spain, Isabella's and Ferdinand's grandson.

Once he and his sailors had settled in Veracruz, Cortés feared they would mutiny since they were surrounded by enemy kingdoms. Fearing a mutiny, he ordered his fleet of ships burned, saying that they were no longer seaworthy. The crew was forced to stay in enemy territory. Cortés's personal goal was to conquer all of Meso-America. He wrote to the king stating that he wanted to capture the territory in the name of Christianity and the Spanish crown. He had been greatly influenced by the Spanish conquistadors of the Reconquista.

Cortés proved to be an exceptional strategist. He knew that he and his men were hopelessly outnumbered by the Aztec. He would have to use stealth and cunning to overcome his enemies, even though he had guns and they did not. Cortés's military strategies contributed to the success of the Spanish conquistadors.

# How Did the Ambitions of the Aztec and the Spanish Lead to Conflict?

## The Spanish Empire

By the end of the 15th century, the Spanish had claimed the Canary Islands and Christopher Columbus had landed on islands in the Caribbean.

The Spanish monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand, were expanding Spain's influence and prestige by

- establishing a large empire to compete with Portugal. Portugal had already embarked on building an empire in Africa, India, and China.
- building national unity. The monarchy felt that discovering and exploring new lands would become a national mission.
- increasing its colonies and gaining wealth from any new lands they conquered
- converting non-Christians in other lands to Roman Catholicism

When Cortés landed on the coast of Veracruz on the Gulf Coast of Mexico in 1519, Spain's explorers were aware they were in a new world. They found a rich, complex civilization never before seen by Europeans. It was a world they believed was theirs to take for the glory of Spain. They were acting within a worldview that believed Spanish imperialism was their right.

### Spanish Territories in the New World, 1513



By 1513, Vasco Núñez de Balboa had crossed Central America, through what is now Panama, and reached the Pacific Ocean. This exploration began from the colonies based in Cuba and Hispaniola that Columbus had established in the late 1400s.



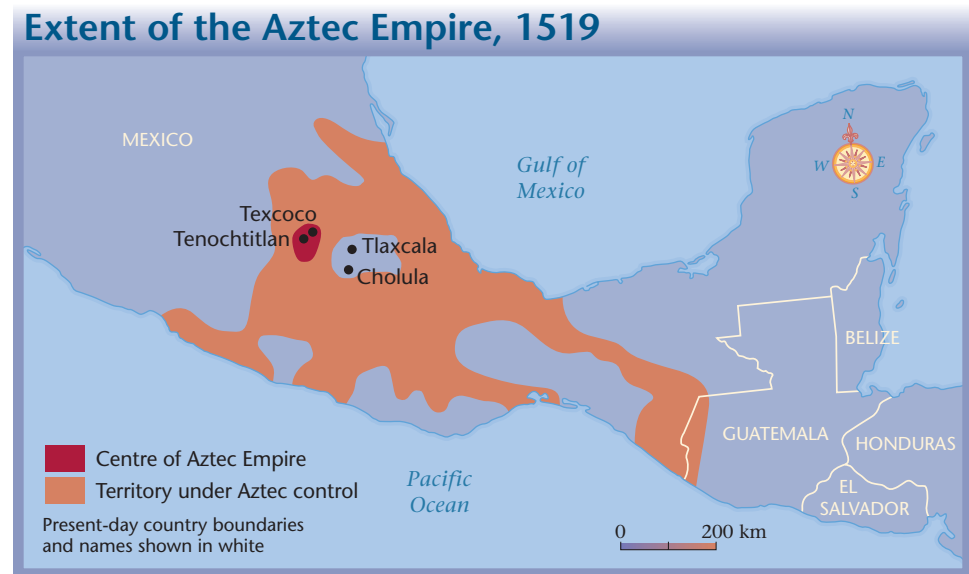
## The Aztec Empire

By the end of the 15th century, the Aztec had conquered most of Meso-America and created a unified civilization. They had established military outposts along their borders to help contain their enemies. The Aztec rulers built the most powerful civilization known in Meso-America and continued to

- expand the empire for the glory of their god Huitzilopochtli
- receive payments of generous tribute and taxes
- profit from trade and marketing throughout the empire
- take captives to be sacrificed to their gods

The Aztec saw Europeans for the first time when Cortés and his conquistadors landed on the coast of the empire in 1519. The Aztec were confronted with representatives of a civilization they knew nothing about. This lack of awareness of a worldview so different from theirs led to tragic consequences for the Aztec.

The lands of the Aztec Empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf Coast and from central Mexico to the present-day Republic of Guatemala.



### REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. You have been presented with a great deal of information about the Spanish and Aztec societies and their worldviews. Neither the Spanish nor the Aztec knew what to expect when they would finally meet.

Predict what might have occurred when the two societies met. Give reasons for your predictions based on what you know so far about their worldviews and their leaders.

## What Was the Aztec Understanding of the Spanish Before Their Arrival?

Historians today believe that about the same time he became king in 1502, Moctezuma must have heard reports of foreigners landing in the West Indies. The Spanish had established ports on some of the islands in the Caribbean and had explored the eastern Meso-American coastline, especially in the Mayan lands on the Yucatan Peninsula. For 20 years, the Spanish had heard rumours from the inhabitants of the islands about a wealthy civilization that lived on the mainland. Historians also believe that the islanders passed information about the Spanish to the Aztec. The rumours described their ships as floating towers. They had light skin, long beards, and hair that came only to their ears. These descriptions reminded the Aztec of stories of the god Quetzalcoatl.

The Aztec worldview included a belief in the powers of the gods and supernatural signs. They often consulted priests before taking any action. The beginning of anything important was determined by priests indicating lucky or unlucky days. Both Aztec and Spanish records show that during Moctezuma's reign, the Aztec experienced many frightening omens. The omens were warning of a disaster. These omens, and a belief that the god Quetzalcoatl was returning one day to reclaim his throne, confused Moctezuma and his advisors about how they should deal with the Spanish when they landed on the shores of the empire.

*Island Capital of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan, Luis Covarrubias, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City*



## INFLUENCE

## The Omens



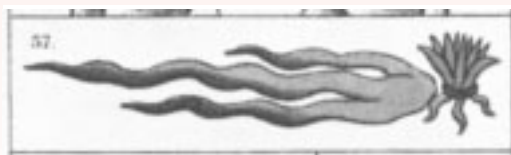
**The first omen:** Ten years before the Spanish first arrived, a flaming ear of corn crossed the sky and seemed to bleed drop by drop. This corn was very bright. It was wide at the base and narrow at the peak.



**The second omen:** The temple of Huitzilopochtli burst into flames, though no one set it on fire.



**The third omen:** A temple was damaged by a lightning bolt. There was no storm and it was only drizzling that day. The people thought the lightning bolt was an omen.



**The fourth omen:** Fire seemed to stream through the sky while the sun was still shining. It had a long train and was divided into three parts, giving off a shower of sparks.



**The fifth omen:** Wind came from far off and lashed the water until it seemed to boil. Then, the water rose up and flooded the houses.



**The sixth omen:** People heard a weeping woman night after night. She would cry out telling them that they should flee. She called them her children.



**The seventh omen:** A strange creature was captured in the nets. This bird wore a strange mirror in the crown of its head and the night sky could be seen in the face of that mirror. When the bird was brought to Moctezuma, he first saw stars in the mirror. Then, he saw people moving across a distant plain, in ranks like an army, riding on animals that resembled deer. Moctezuma called his magicians and wise men to look into the mirror, but they saw nothing.



**The eighth omen:** Monstrous creatures with two heads appeared in the streets of the city. When they were taken to Moctezuma, they vanished the moment he saw them.

## Omens and Gods

The Aztec worldview affected the way they interpreted natural events, dreams, and unusual happenings. They feared the world would come to an end if its balance was lost and looked for omens or signs that might predict an upcoming disaster. The Aztec also believed the powers of their gods dictated how they were to live. These beliefs about omens and the gods influenced their decisions and behaviours.

Aztec legends told how the serpent god Quetzalcoatl, god of life and learning, was fair-skinned and bearded. After he lost a fight with a warrior god, he was banished from the land. He disappeared into the eastern sky, but promised to return to retake his throne. He told the people when to expect him. The year on the Aztec calendar when the stories said Quetzalcoatl was to return was the very same year Cortés and the Spanish arrived on the eastern coast of the Aztec Empire.

In the ten years before Cortés arrived, the Aztec noted a series of strange and inexplicable omens. Many Aztec believed the omens were forecasting a great calamity. The arrival of Cortés, sailing in from the east, coincided with the heightened fears of Moctezuma and his people about the future of their world. His appearance also confirmed long-held expectations about the return of Quetzalcoatl and his accompanying gods.

Moctezuma consulted his magicians and soothsayers about these omens. He instructed them to report what they believed the omens meant.

The *Cronica Mexicana* by Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc (1891) tells how the magicians answered.

**What can we say? The future has already been determined and decreed in heaven, and Motecuhzoma will behold and suffer a great mystery which must come to pass in his hand. If our king wishes to know more about it, he will know soon enough, for it comes swiftly. This is what we predict, since he demands that we speak, and since it must surely take place, he can only wait for it.**

*I wonder ... what did Moctezuma think the great mystery could be?*

These predictions did not help Moctezuma make up his mind since the response from the priests showed they were as uncertain about Cortés and the conquistadors as Moctezuma was.

### REFLECT AND RESPOND

- How would you explain the omens experienced by the Aztec? Would you find any of these omens frightening? Explain.
  - Why would the Aztec interpret these omens as they did?
  - How do you think these omens would affect the Aztec reception of the Spanish?
- Why would the Aztec want these omens to be recorded? What reasons could the Spanish have for wanting them recorded?



# How Did the Spanish Conquer the Aztec?

## The Aztec Meet the Spanish

When Moctezuma first heard of the Spanish landing at Veracruz, he sent emissaries with gifts of jewels and fine featherworks for the Spanish leader. He hoped giving lavish gifts to Cortés would convince him to leave. In Aztec tradition, an individual who offered the richest gifts was more powerful than the one who received them. It meant that the person receiving the gifts should either submit to that power or depart.

The Aztec had many religious ceremonies in which people would be chosen to represent a god. Each god had particular regalia and the person would dress in the clothing of that god. People believed the person became the god on Earth when the clothing was worn. Prayers and offerings would be made to the person-god. Among the gifts Moctezuma sent to Cortés was the clothing of the god Quetzalcoatl. When Cortés put on the sacred feathered robes of the god, it confirmed the Aztec belief that he was the returning god, Quetzalcoatl. Cortés did not realize the importance of putting on this clothing; he viewed the clothing as just a gift.

When Moctezuma received word that Cortés had worn the sacred cloak, he believed this was an indication that Cortés was the returning Quetzalcoatl. But he wanted more proof. Moctezuma sent food containing human blood as a test. A god would eat the food. Cortés refused to eat it, not because he knew there was human blood in the food, but because he feared being poisoned. Moctezuma still could not decide whether Cortés was a god or a man.

On their return, one of the messengers also told Moctezuma about the appearance of the Spanish and described their boats, guns and cannons, armour, and horses. None had ever been seen before.

**A thing like a ball of stone comes out of its entrails; it comes out shooting sparks and raining fire. The smoke that comes out with it has a pestilent odor. ... If it is aimed against a tree, it shatters the tree into splinters. This is the most unnatural sight ...**

**They dress in iron and wear iron casques on their heads. Their swords are iron; their bows are iron; their shields are iron; their spears are iron. Their deer carry them on their backs wherever they wish to go.**

From the *Florentine Codex*, showing Moctezuma's emissaries arriving to greet Cortés. The Spanish show their weapons and armour.



## The Spanish Learn About the Aztec

Cortés knew he could not defeat the Aztec with only 500 men, so he would have to use other strategies. He learned that many city-states disliked being dominated by the Aztec and wanted independence from them. He used the existing political rivalries within the Aztec Empire to his advantage. In the eight months it took him to travel from the east coast to Tenochtitlan, Cortés gathered allies by means of trickery and force. He often killed the nobility of a city to frighten its citizens into submission. He showed off the firepower of his muskets and cannons — weapons these people had never seen.



Route taken by Cortés from the coast to Tenochtitlan



## Using the Tlaxcalans and Cholulas

The Tlaxcalans were enemies of the Aztec and had never been conquered by them. They also did not want to be under Spanish rule. In the summer of 1519, they attacked the Spanish, but Cortés held them off with guns and steel armour. The Tlaxcalans then decided it was in their best interests to make an alliance with the Spanish. They agreed to join forces with Cortés to defeat the Aztec.

When Moctezuma had first sent gifts to Cortés, he also directed Cortés to Cholula, the sacred city of Quetzalcoatl. La Malinche, Cortés's local interpreter, told him that there was a plot to ambush his men and him in Cholula. The Spanish and the Tlaxcalans attacked first and caused heavy losses among the Cholulas. The Cholulas then agreed to join with Cortés. They thought they might regain independence from the Aztec if they fought with the Spanish.

*I wonder ... what was Cortés thinking while Moctezuma was welcoming him?*



## The First Meeting Between Cortés and Moctezuma: Two Worldviews

In 1519, two leaders with conflicting worldviews were about to meet. Cortés was determined to conquer the empire for his king, his God, and for riches, no matter how many lives were lost. Prior to the meeting with Moctezuma, with the help of La Malinche, Cortés sent messages saying that he was coming in peace and wished to meet the emperor to extend his greetings. By now, Cortés had established a fearsome reputation and entered the causeway to Tenochtitlan unopposed on November 8, 1519. When Moctezuma finally greeted Cortés in Tenochtitlan, he addressed Cortés as if he were a god, unsure whether or not Cortés was Quetzalcoatl.



## Records of the First Meeting

There are several records of the first meeting between Moctezuma and Cortés. These include the accounts told by surviving Aztec to Father Bernardino de Sahagun in the *Florentine Codex* and an account written by Father Diego Duran years later.

Aztec survivors related this account to Father Sahagun, showing that Moctezuma believed Cortés was the returning god, Quetzalcoatl.

When Montecuhzoma had given necklaces to each one, Cortés asked him, "Are you Montecuhzoma? Are you the King? Is it true that you are King Montecuhzoma?"

And the king said: "Yes, I am Montecuhzoma." Then he stood up to welcome Cortés; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: "Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy.

"The kings have gone before, your representatives, guarded it and preserved it for your coming. The kings, Itzcoatl, Montecuhzoma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc and Ahuizol ruled for you in the City of Mexico. The people were protected by their swords and sheltered by their shields.

...  
"No it is not a dream. I am not walking in my sleep. I am not seeing you in my dreams... I have seen you at last! I have met you face to face! I was in agony for five days, for

ten days, with my eyes fixed on the Region of the Mystery. And now you have come out of the clouds and mists to sit on your throne again.

"This was foretold by the kings who governed the city, and now it has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land my lord!"

When Montecuhzoma had finished, La Malinche translated his address into Spanish so that the Captain could understand it. Cortés replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche:

"Tell Montecuhzoma that we are friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. Tell him that we love him well and that our hearts are contented."

Then he said to Montecuhzoma: "We have come to your house in Mexico as friends. There is nothing to fear."

— *Florentine Codex*



Father Diego Duran recorded the Spanish perspective in the mid-16th century in *The History of the Indies of New Spain*:

**...now the god was coming to reclaim his throne, he placed himself in his service and gladly abdicated, because the prophecies and tales of his ancestors had announced and promised this to him; let him recover his rights, if he so desired, Montecgezuma would submit to his power; but if he had only come to visit him, he thanked him very sincerely and assured him that, to the bottom of his heart, he felt an intense pleasure and extreme joy because of this; he should rest and ask whatever he needed...**

**Montecgezuma affirmed his obedience, placing himself in his hands and in the service of His Majesty from that moment on, and he expressed his desire to be instructed in the holy Catholic faith. And hence, after this long halt in this sanctuary or little temple they left for the city of Mexico, the marquis on horseback and the powerful angry king carried on his palanquin as he had come, on the shoulders of his nobles.**

Thousands of Aztec warriors protected Moctezuma, and he could have ordered the death of Cortés at any time. Instead, Cortés and his men were treated royally and given luxurious accommodations. Moctezuma had his servants prepare a palace for the Spanish and their allies. For several days, Moctezuma toured them around Tenochtitlan. They were amazed at the marketplace and palaces, and were astounded at the size and architectural features of the beautiful temples.

Cortés knew that one word from Moctezuma to his royal warriors and they would kill him. Cortés waited for an opportunity. About one week after Cortés arrived, he took Moctezuma hostage in the palace Moctezuma had provided for him. Cortés replaced the Aztec idols in the palace where he was staying with statues of Roman Catholic saints. He had large idols from the main temple replaced. Moctezuma's advisors were disgusted that he had let the Spanish into the city and that he was allowing them to set up statues of the Spanish religion. They felt Moctezuma was weak and had let down his people and diminished their reputation. They deserted him, leaving him hostage with the Spanish.

### Population in 1500

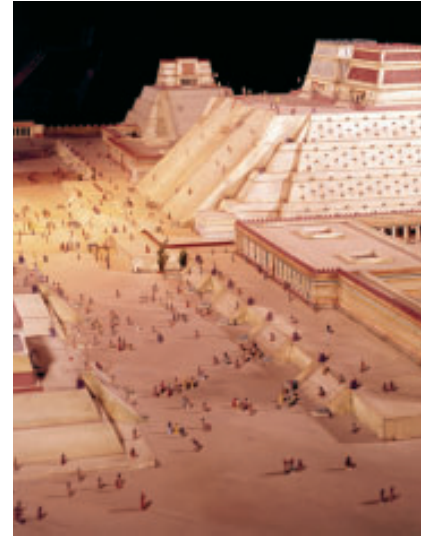
The population of the Aztec Empire in 1500 is estimated to have been approximately 5 000 000. Between 10% and 20% of the population is thought to have lived in Tenochtitlan. It was the largest city the Spanish had ever seen. At the time of the Spanish invasion, London had a population of about 100 000, Florence about 60 000, and Paris about 300 000. Tenochtitlan approached nearly 1 000 000 people. When the Spanish saw Tenochtitlan, they compared its beauty to Venice.

## How Did the Battles for the Empire Unfold?

### Massacre of Unarmed Aztec

For the next six months, Cortés and his men remained in Tenochtitlan. Tensions between the Spanish and the Aztec increased. Cortés received a message that Velazquez, the Spanish governor of Cuba, had sent men to arrest him for disobeying his orders. Velazquez's men had reached Veracruz and Cortés had to leave Tenochtitlan to stop them. He left Pedro de Alvarado in charge.

The Aztec began preparations for the main annual festival honouring the god Huitzilopochtli. Many nobles, priests, and warriors gathered at the courtyard of the main temple to dance at the celebration. Alvarado and his men surrounded the courtyard and massacred the unarmed worshippers. The Aztec were outraged. Nobles and priests had been killed. They gathered their arms and fought so ferociously that the Spanish had to retreat to Cortés's palace away from the centre of the city. Any chance of a peaceful agreement between the Spanish and the Aztec was gone.



This model of the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan is located in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

The *Codex Aubin*, composed on different dates and by different authors, gives a pictorial history of the Aztec. It describes events beginning with the Aztec migration from Aztlan and ends about the year 1607. This is how it describes the massacre:

**...But the songs had hardly begun when the Christians came out of the palace. They entered the patio and stationed four guards at each entrance. Then they attacked the captain who was guiding the dance. One of the Spaniards struck the idol in the face, and others attacked the three men who were playing the drums. After that there was a general slaughter until the patio was heaped with corpses.**

**A priest from the Place of the Canefields cried out in a loud voice. 'Mexicanos! Who said we are not at war? Who said we could trust them?'**

**The Mexicans could only fight back with sticks of wood; they were cut to pieces by the swords. Finally the Spaniards retired to the palace where they were lodged.**

There are two different accounts of Moctezuma's death. One account states that Moctezuma died from the stones hurled at him. Another account states that Cortés ordered Moctezuma killed because he was no longer of use to him.

### Noche Triste (Sorrowful Night)

Meanwhile, Cortés and his allies, the Tlaxcalans, defeated the Spanish who had been sent to arrest him. The survivors joined Cortés and his men, increasing the size of his army. When Cortés returned to Tenochtitlan, he found his men trapped, but managed to reach the palace where they were staying. He ordered Moctezuma to speak to his people to persuade them to let the Spanish return in peace. Moctezuma was jeered and seriously hurt by stones hurled at him. He died a few days later. Cuitlahuac (*kwee-tlah-WATCH*) was elected the new huey tlatoani.

Cuitlahuac continued the attack. In June 1520, the Spanish tried to escape from Tenochtitlan in the middle of the night to make their way to the coast, but the Aztec discovered them crossing the causeways and attacked. The Aztec attacked the Spanish from all sides, even from canoes in the water. Many of the Spanish were carrying stolen gold and could not move quickly because of the added weight. Unwilling to give up the gold, many were quickly killed or drowned. Several — 700 Spanish and 2000 to 3000 Tlaxcalans — were killed. The Spanish later referred to this battle and the huge loss of life as the Noche Triste.

Cortés's expulsion from Tenochtitlan





### An Unforeseen Enemy

Cortés, the conquistadors, and the Tlaxcalan allies retreated to Tlaxcala for about five months to recover from their wounds. Meanwhile, the Aztec began dying from smallpox that had been brought by the Spanish to the New World. The disease had existed in Europe for hundreds of years and Europeans had developed some immunity to it. Many Europeans carried the smallpox virus in their bodies, but did not suffer from it. The Aztec were newly exposed to the disease, and their bodies had no time to build any resistance to it.

Historians believe that as much as half the city population of Tenochtitlan may have died from smallpox in those five months. Cuitlahuac, chosen after the death of Moctezuma, died from the disease after being leader for only 80 days. His cousin Cuauhtemoc (*koo-ow-TAY-mohk*), Descending Eagle, succeeded him.

**The illness was so dreadful that no one could walk or move...  
A great many died from this plague and many died of hunger.  
They could not get up to search for food and everyone else was  
too sick to care for them.**

— *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*

*I wonder ... what would have happened if there had been no smallpox?*

### The Final Battle

After regrouping, Cortés returned to Tenochtitlan with his allies, the Tlaxcalans, as well as the warriors of Texcoco who had once been members of the Triple Alliance. They now turned against the Aztec as they saw the strength of the Spanish. The Aztec had no allies to support them in this battle, and with almost half the population already dead from smallpox, defending against the Spanish became even more difficult.

Tenochtitlan, centre of the Aztec Empire, is destroyed.





The Aztec in Tenochtitlan withstood the siege for 75 days. The Aztec Empire was crumbling. Cortés blocked the canals, the causeways, and the aqueducts, preventing food and water from reaching the city. Many of the citizens who had survived the plague died from hunger and contaminated drinking water. The last group of Aztec surrendered on August 13, 1521. The Aztec huey tlatoani, Cuauhtemoc, was taken prisoner and hanged. The great Aztec Empire was no more.

When Cortés finally took over the city, he wrote to King Charles V: **Indeed, so great was their suffering that it was beyond our understanding how they could endure it.**

Once the siege ended, the Spanish destroyed the city. They pulled down pyramids and temples, ripped down palaces and homes, and set houses on fire so no one could hide. They filled the causeways with rubble so none could escape by boat. In 1522, less than three years after he arrived on its shores, Cortés became governor and captain-general of New Spain.

It is believed that before the Spanish destroyed Huitzilopochtli's temple in Tenochtitlan, the Aztec moved the medicine bundle to a secret location.

#### REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. How did the Spanish worldview influence how Cortés treated the messengers and the way he viewed the Aztec?
2. If you were Moctezuma, how might you respond when you heard the messengers' description of the Spanish? How would his worldview have influenced his response?
3. Examine the two accounts of the first meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma.
  - a. Why might the emperor's name be spelled differently in each account?
  - b. Father Duran was a Roman Catholic priest. What different views about Moctezuma wanting to convert to Roman Catholicism might have been written by an Aztec priest?
4. Explain the role of disease epidemics in the defeat of the Aztec.
5. What are some points in the conquest where different decisions by Cortés or by Moctezuma might have led to very different outcomes? Explain.

# Why Did Moctezuma and Cortés Make the Decisions They Did?

## Moctezuma and the Aztec

Aztec religion was basic to Moctezuma's decision making in ruling the empire. He was the highest priest of the land. His decisions were made within a worldview that saw everything as being affected by the gods and every action of humans affecting the gods and the balance of the world.

His believed the stories about the god Quetzalcoatl, and the coming of Cortés and the conquistadors fit the stories well. The god was forecast to return from the Gulf of Mexico in the year 1 Reed. This is the year Cortés landed on the shores of the Aztec Empire. Quetzalcoatl was light-skinned, as were the Europeans. The Spanish arrived on wondrous vessels. They rode strange animals and had armour of metals never before seen. So many indications suggested to Moctezuma that this was the god Quetzalcoatl returning to claim the throne of the empire.

The omens that the Aztec experienced in the years before the Spanish arrived seemed to foretell evil times were coming. The belief that the omens and bad luck would come to pass created a sense that bad fate was going to befall them.

Moctezuma's belief was that if Cortés was indeed the god Quetzalcoatl, he dared not do anything that would show disrespect to him; thus, he welcomed Cortés into the heart of Tenochtitlan.

The Aztec had also never encountered a group with a worldview much different from their own. They had conquered many Meso-American societies, but all lived basically by the same values and beliefs. The Aztec had no idea of the motives of the Spanish and their ruthlessness in attaining those objectives. The Aztec believed that it was a duty to extend a gracious welcome to strangers, so it was necessary to welcome the Spanish and negotiate with them.



Conquistador on horseback

The Aztec view of warfare was very different from that of Europeans. To expand their empire, the Aztec would first try to negotiate a takeover of the desired territory. If negotiations failed, they would conduct a war to dominate the territory. The war was conducted by very specific rules. The aim was not to kill enemy soldiers, but only to capture them. Their wooden weapons with obsidian blades would injure the opponent, but would not usually be life threatening. The Aztec aim was to capture live warriors and civilian captives to take back as slaves or sacrificial victims. They did not destroy the property of the areas they conquered. It was much more valuable to leave the area intact so the Aztec could receive more tribute from the area. Moctezuma did not understand the ruthless behaviour of the Spanish on the battlefield. He believed their killing demonstrated disrespect for human life. Aztec religion believed that human life was precious and should only be sacrificed to the gods. They also did not understand the Spanish desire for gold or their desire to completely conquer their enemy.

The Aztec perceived Cortés and the conquistadors and their weapons as extremely fearful. The *Florentine Codex* describes the conquistadors on their horses:

**The stags came forward, carrying soldiers on their backs. The soldiers wore cotton armor. They bore their leather shields and their iron spears in their hands, but their swords hung down from the necks of the stags. The animals wear many little bells. When they run, the bells make a loud clamour, ringing and reverberating. These animals snort and bellow. They sweat a great deal and the sweat pours from their bodies in streams. Foam from their muzzles drips onto the ground in fat drops, like a lather of amole [soap]. When they run, they make a loud noise, as if stones were raining on the earth. The earth is pitted and cracked open wherever their hooves have touched it.**

The stone-bladed weapons of the Aztec were no match to the horses, guns, and steel swords of the Spanish.

The widespread death from the smallpox epidemic was the final blow to the morale of the Aztec. Disease was often seen as the will of the gods, and the records show that the Aztec began to believe that it was the will of the gods that their world was coming to an end.

## Cortés and the Spanish

During the long history of the Reconquista, Spanish conquistadors developed attitudes of **confrontation** and religious intolerance as they forced Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. These attitudes were similar to those of most Europeans at the time who believed that their culture and religion were superior to any other. Cortés brought these same attitudes when he met the Aztec. Like Moctezuma, Cortés had strong religious beliefs. He believed the only way to eternal salvation was through one's belief in the faith of the Roman Catholic Church. While Moctezuma's beliefs often prevented him from taking decisive actions, Cortés's religious convictions motivated him to act. He believed that it was his duty to spread the teachings of Christianity and was appalled at the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. He also thought that Spanish culture and beliefs were superior to those of non-Europeans and non-Christians.

Cortés was also motivated by a desire for the gold, silver, and other wealth that might be available in Moctezuma's empire. The motto of the conquistadors was "For God, Glory, and Gold." Cortés went to the New World to find and claim the rumoured wealth and riches of the Meso-American civilizations. When Moctezuma's emissaries brought gifts of jewels, gold, and fine feathers, Cortés did not interpret the elaborate presents as a threat, as Aztec worldview laid out, but became even more determined to acquire the riches of the Aztec.

Spanish warfare was very different from that of the Aztec. The differences reflected different worldviews. The Spanish planned surprise attacks and were interested in killing as many of the enemy as possible in order to defeat them. They regularly destroyed and pillaged the cities they conquered so the remaining survivors would be completely at their mercy.

Cortés brilliantly used existing political rivalries within the empire to his advantage. He was able to get his Tlaxcalan and Cholula allies to plan a revolution against the Aztec. He used a divide-and-conquer strategy that offset his being so outnumbered by the Aztec. This strategy added more warriors to fight alongside the Spanish. A straight-out direct attack against the Aztec would probably have ended in the conquistadors' defeat.

**confrontation:** the clashing of forces or ideas

Cortés at the Battle of Otumba, summer 1519, the conquistadors fighting against Tlaxcalan attacks





The Spanish knew that interpreters were essential to their military conquest of the Americas. Interpreters served as guides, as communicators, and as sources of military information. They also provided cultural information that helped the Spanish understand the best ways to deal with the societies they encountered.

*I wonder ... how would I feel if I were given as a gift to someone?*

The missionaries travelling with Cortés converted Dona Marina to Christianity. They gave her the name Dona Marina. She came to be called La Malinche by the people of Meso-America because Cortés was referred to as Malinche (Captain) and La Malinche was the Captain's Woman.

*I wonder ... where might I find more information about Dona Marina's story?*

## The Most Useful Weapons — Information and Communication

Cortés needed interpreters to help win over his allies. He also needed interpreters to communicate with Moctezuma and his royal court. Luck provided Cortés with two invaluable interpreters: La Malinche (*lah-mah-LEEN-cheh*), a local woman who was named Dona Marina, and a Spanish sailor, Geronimo de Aguilar. Dona Marina spoke both Maya, the language of the Yucatan, and Nahuatl, the official language of the Aztec. Cortés did not kidnap her. After a battle, he was often offered gifts. Dona Marina was the property of a ruler in one of the coastal areas who gave her to Cortés as a gift. De Aguilar had been shipwrecked on the Yucatan coast and was rescued by Cortés after living with the Maya for many years. He spoke both Spanish and Maya.



Cortés and La Malinche meet the Aztec.

To communicate with the Aztec, Cortés spoke Spanish to de Aguilar, who then translated the information into Maya for Dona Marina, who then translated it into Nahuatl. Dona Marina would translate the Nahuatl response into Maya, which de Aguilar would translate into Spanish. **Eventually, La Malinche learned Spanish herself and could translate for Cortés directly.**

**Historians agree that without the help of Dona Marina, the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec would likely not have been achieved.** She provided Cortés with detailed information about the Aztec Empire, its worldview, and the possible ways Moctezuma would react to events. She was able to warn the conquistadors of a trap when Moctezuma first sent them to Cholula. Through her interpreting, she managed to gain the Tlaxcalans and Cholulas as allies to the Spanish.

Some have called her a traitor. Others claim that she was often able to negotiate agreements throughout the empire that prevented thousands of deaths and years of warfare.

#### REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. Cortés reached Meso-America with only 500 soldiers and yet he was able to defeat thousands of Aztec warriors.
  - a. Do you think the defeat of the Aztec was inevitable? Why or why not?
  - b. In what ways did the Aztec worldview contribute to their defeat?
2. a. Evaluate Moctezuma as a leader. What were his strengths and his weaknesses? What could he have done differently to avoid the conquest?
  - b. Do you believe Moctezuma really thought Cortés was Quetzalcoatl? Provide reasons for your opinion.
3. Using your knowledge about the Reconquista, could you have predicted Cortés's behaviour towards the Aztec? Explain your answer.
4. Did the worldview of Cortés and his men justify the actions of his treatment of the Aztec? Explain.
5. Moctezuma believed that killing on the battlefield showed disrespect for human life. How would Moctezuma explain that human sacrifice did not reflect disrespect for human life, but killing one's enemies did?
6. If you were Cortés, what questions would you ask Dona Marina about Moctezuma and the Aztec?

# What Impact Did the Conquest Have on Aztec Society?

## From the Words of the Participants

People today look back on events of the past through their present worldview. Values and beliefs may be very different from those of Cortés and the conquistadors, although their viewpoints and motivations may be understood. The worldview of the Spanish of the 1500s contained many aspects of the modern Western worldview. People living in a modern Western worldview would also interpret many things differently than the Aztec. Despite this, you can understand the commonalities of people as human beings.

As we read the words of people who experienced the conquest, we can still relate to the events and the human emotions they recorded. Reactions of both the victorious Spanish and the conquered Aztec have been preserved.

According to letters written to King Charles V by Cortés, and the histories and paintings that have survived, the siege of Tenochtitlan lasted 75 days. Cortés wrote of the danger the conquistadors experienced:

**Thus from the day we laid siege to the city, which was on the thirtieth of May of that same year, [1521] until it fell, there passed seventy-five days, during which time Your Majesty will have seen the dangers, hardships, and misfortunes which these, your vassals, endured, and in which they ventured their lives. To this, their achievements will bear testimony.**

In his letter, Cortés also wrote detailed descriptions of the suffering of the Aztec.

**These [Aztec] then came and I told them to observe how they could not triumph, and how each day we did them great harm and killed many of them and we were burning and destroying their city; and that we would not cease until there was nothing left either of it or of them. They replied that they had indeed seen how much they had suffered and how many of them had died, but that they were all determined to perish or have done with us, and that I should look and see how full of people were all those streets and squares and rooftops. Furthermore, they had calculated that if 25 000 of them died for every one of us, they would finish with us first, for they were many and we were but few.**



Many Aztec were as accomplished in poetry as they were in war. Epic poems and songs about the siege were handed down orally until they were finally written down. Many of the poems describe the final days of the siege.

Broken spears lie in the roads;  
We have torn our hair in our grief  
The houses are roofless now, and their walls  
Are red with blood.

Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas,  
And the walks are spattered with gore  
The water has turned red, as if it were dyed  
And when we drink it,  
It has the taste of brine.

We have pounded our hands in despair  
Against the adobe walls,  
For our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead  
The shields of our warriors were its defense.  
But they could not save it.

We have chewed dry twigs and salt grasses:  
We have filled our mouths with dust and bits of adobe.  
We have eaten lizards, rats and worms  
When we had meat, we ate it almost raw.

Massacre of the Aztec, scene from *Historia de los Indios* by Diego Duran



## Spanish Treatment of the Aztec After the Conquest

**hacienda:** estate; plantation

When Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean, he thought he had reached India. The Spanish began using the mistaken term *Indian* for all Indigenous people regardless of their individual nation, cultural origin, or usage of different languages.

In 1521, Cortés claimed the land of the Aztec for the Spanish crown and named it New Spain. The conquistadors were given huge tracts of land as reward for conquering the Aztec Empire for Spain. A land grant included control of all its original inhabitants. The conquistadors were the new nobility of New Spain; they would not do manual labour themselves. The Aztec and other conquered Indigenous societies were forced to work as slave labourers for the landholders on their **haciendas**.

Queen Isabella died in 1504. In her final will and testament, she decreed that the Indians “should not receive any offense to their person or properties but rather ensure they are properly and justly treated.” She was troubled by the news coming back of landholders mistreating the population on the Caribbean Islands.

In 1512, King Ferdinand repeated his wife’s views. He enacted laws that called for fair treatment of the Indians. These became the first laws written for Europeans in the New World. The laws gave great power to the landholders, but laid down specific rules to prevent abuse of the workers:

- Indians could not be used to carry goods on their backs like pack animals.
- Children under 14 and pregnant women were not to do heavy work in the mines.
- Spanish masters were prohibited from beating, whipping, or calling any Indian *dog*.

These laws were frequently ignored and not enforced.

Aztec slaves laying the foundation for the cathedral in Mexico City, 1522



The Spanish attempted to wipe out as much Aztec culture as they could. Aztec religion, arts, and sciences were destroyed. Almost all of their codices, sculpture, and other records were burned or smashed. Most of Tenochtitlan was razed. The first building the conquistadors destroyed was the Aztec Templo Mayor. Using its stones, the conquered Aztec were forced to build a Roman Catholic cathedral on the site of the temple. The conquistadors forced Aztec slave labour to build a new Spanish city on the site of Tenochtitlan: Mexico City. They gradually filled in and built over all of the lakes that had provided the Aztec with food, water, and protection.

The Spanish continued the tribute system that the Aztec had used. The haciendas were very productive. The conquistadors gained immense wealth. The gold and silver mines of the colony made the mother country, Spain, the wealthiest in Europe.

## Conversion

The Spanish viewed the Aztec as heathens. One purpose of the conquest was to convert the population to Christianity as quickly as possible. New churches were often the first buildings erected in conquered territory. Images of the Virgin Mary, Christ, and Roman Catholic saints were placed in the new churches. Initially, many of the Indigenous peoples adopted the Christian God **as just one of their many gods**, as had been common practice in their own worldview. Over time, the Roman Catholic faith replaced the Meso-American religions. Most of the citizens of New Spain eventually became devout Roman Catholics.

The Franciscan and the Dominican priests worked closely with the Aztec who had survived the conquest and converted them to Roman Catholicism. They worked first with the noble classes, hoping that if the aristocracy converted, the common people would do the same. The priests also established schools and hospitals to serve the communities. They organized the population into small villages. Each had its own priest and church. The Indigenous people farmed the surrounding areas to produce food for the landholders, to export to Spain, and for themselves. Although life was somewhat normal for them, they were expected to live more according to Spanish culture than that of the Aztec. European diseases continued to kill, often wiping out entire villages.

In 1821, after 300 years, Mexico finally regained its independence from Spain.

The Canadian government also took steps to prevent First Nations from participating in important spiritual practices. Most well known was the ban on certain ceremonies: the potlatch ceremony of coastal First Nations and the Sundance ceremony of prairie First Nations.





Father Bartolome de Las Casas

De Las Casas was so respected by Mexico's Indigenous peoples that in 1848, the city of Ciudad Real de Chiapa, capital of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, was renamed San Cristobal de las Casas in his honour.

## Father Bartolome de Las Casas

Father Bartolome de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Dominican friar, was the strongest defender of the Indigenous peoples of New Spain during the early years of Spanish rule.

De Las Casas was born in Seville and attended the University of Salamanca, studying both divinity and law. In 1502, he travelled to the New World, but returned to Spain to become a priest. In 1511, Father de Las Casas travelled with an expedition sent to occupy Cuba. He began working to improve conditions for the Indigenous peoples when he saw the way they were being treated by the Spanish landholders. Father de Las Casas returned to Spain to promote his cause and became known as the “Protector of the Indies.” He returned to serve the Indigenous peoples of New Spain, Nicaragua, Peru, and Guatemala.

Largely because of his pressure, Spain passed *New Laws of the Indies for the Good Treatment and Preservation of the Indians* in 1542. The new laws abolished Indian slavery and set controls on the landholding system that had brought such great hardship to the original inhabitants. There were massive protests from the landowners over these laws, so they were modified to maintain the old system until the death of the original landholder, making the laws almost ineffective for many more years.

De Las Casas was a well-known writer, his most famous work being *The History of the Indies of New Spain* in which he provided important archaeological and historical information. Although de Las Casas was looked down on by most of the Spanish colonists of the time, today he is appreciated for his anti-imperialism and anti-racism work. He was the first person in the Americas to become famous working for basic human rights.

Many historians estimate that the Indigenous population in the Americas in 1492 was about 50 000 000 people. They also believe that by the end of the 16th century, the population had declined to 8 000 000, mainly because of the diseases brought to the New World by the Europeans. Almost 90% of the population of the Americas died.

The term *genocide* refers to a mass extermination of human beings, especially of a race or nation. Many people consider the death of millions of Aztec and other Indigenous individuals of Meso-America by disease and mistreatment after the Spanish Conquest to be genocide.

## Adaptation to a New Society

Many of the surviving Aztec nobles began to adapt to the new institutions and Spanish ways. They learned bookkeeping and business practices and became merchants. They bought goods coming from Spain and then sold them in the colony, especially to the Indigenous peoples. Many of this new elite class learned to speak and write Spanish. By learning a written alphabet, many more chroniclers were able to document Aztec history and traditional culture. They could also document their lives under the Spanish. They often incorporated traditional pictographs into their work.

As the conquistadors settled their land grants, many took Aztec women as their wives. Soon there was a ruling class that was made up of the sons and daughters of mixed Spanish and Aztec blood. These people of mixed blood were called mestizos (*meh-STEE-sohs*). A new society developed, neither completely Spanish nor completely Aztec, but a new people who formed a culture that grew into modern Mexico.

In Canada, French and other European fur traders married First Nations women. Their children of mixed blood became known as the Métis nation.

### REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. What reactions do you have to the quotes from Cortés's letters to the king describing the hardships of the conquistadors and the Aztec?
2. What ideas or beliefs are presented in the Aztec poem on page 323? What is your reaction?
3. Historians have presented Dona Marina in two very different ways: the Mother of Modern Mexico and the Betrayer of Ancient Mexico. Having now read the outcome of the conquest, which description do you feel best describes her? Explain.
4. What insights about the worldview of the Spanish are provided by the laws that King Ferdinand enacted in 1512?
5. Discuss the following: Did the conquistadors deserve their large land grants and the landholding system because of the risks they took on behalf of Spain during the conquest?
6. Explain how Father Bartolome de Las Casas might be called a human rights activist.



Eagle warrior, found in Templo Mayor, Mexico City



Excavations at Yautepec, an urban centre in the Aztec Empire. Its ruins lie under the modern town of Yautepec, northwest of Mexico City. Yautepec is one of the most intensely studied Aztec cities outside of Tenochtitlan.

*I wonder ... would the descriptions written by one of Moctezuma's generals be the same as that of Cortés?*

## PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY

### What Records Detail Aztec Life and Conflict with the Spanish?

The Spanish attempted to burn all Aztec documents except lists of tribute and taxes. Yet many letters, documents, and books written in the 16th century that describe the Aztec Empire and its defeat still survived. Each of these historical documents was written for a specific purpose and reflects the point of view of the writer. Authors of any piece of writing decide which facts, ideas, and opinions they will include and which they will leave out. Their choices reflect the worldview of the time.

### Archaeological Finds

Archaeological discoveries have given many details about the Aztec. The Spanish tried to destroy all physical evidence of the Aztec way of life, especially their religion. Prior to the end of the 18th century, Aztec artifacts and buildings that survived the conquest were often either reworked or built over. At the beginning of the 19th century, more efforts were made to safeguard artifacts and protect archaeological sites.

Today, archaeologists and anthropologists have discovered sites that include palaces of Aztec rulers, the homes of both commoners and nobles, and locations where goods such as obsidian tools and jewellery were produced.

### Spanish Documents

The conquistadors and clergy recorded information about the Aztec in many ways. They wrote reports and letters, kept diaries, and wrote entire encyclopedias about the Aztec.

Hernan Cortés wrote five letters to King Charles V, still preserved today, detailing Tenochtitlan and its people; describes the siege and conquest of Tenochtitlan

Father Diego Duran wrote *The History of the Indies of New Spain*; describes Aztec political history, religion, and calendar; also collected surviving Aztec books

Father Andres de Olmos recorded a grammar of the Nahuatl language and a collection of Aztec poetry

Father Toribio de Benavente wrote about the early efforts to convert the Aztec; met with Aztec nobles and common people and recorded their accounts



Father Bernardino de Sahagun collected Nahuatl writings in the *Florentine Codex*, sometimes called the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, mid-1500s; consists of 12 preserved books; describes Aztec's first impressions of Europeans, Spanish goals in conquering the empire, and smallpox decimating the Aztec

Bernal Diaz del Castillo, a lieutenant of Cortés wrote *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain* in 1532; one passage describes the first meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma

Spanish government collected documents about tribute, taxes, and population



Bernal Diaz del Castillo, conquistador and historian

## Aztec Documents

The Aztec created hand-painted manuscripts called codices (singular: codex) recording histories, religious information, and **genealogies**. Most were burned in Texcoco in 1535 on the orders of the Archbishop of Mexico. Today, between 11 and 15 codices survive.

**genealogy:** family history

*Codex Borbonicus* a pre-conquest pictorial almanac containing drawings of a divinity calendar and the 260-day calendar

*Codex Mexicanus* a pre-conquest hand-painted Mixtec book of gods, birds, animals, flowering plants, and examples of temple architecture

*Unos anaes historicos de la nacion mesicana* (Manuscript 22) historical information and the destruction of the Aztec culture as witnessed by survivors, written around 1528

*Codex Aubin* written by an Aztec historian in 1576

*Angel Maria Garibay Kintana* Mexican historian; translated 40 Aztec accounts of the conquest into *The Broken Spears*, early 1960s



Page from the *Codex Borbonicus* showing the invention of the Aztec calendar

## REFLECT AND RESPOND

1. Predict how each of these people might document the same event — the Spanish conquest of the Aztec — differently.

- Hernan Cortés or another conquistador
- Aztec Jaguar warrior
- Roman Catholic priest in the New World

What points of view and worldviews would affect their recordings?

2. What types of documents might future historians use to study Canadian culture of the 21st century? What kinds of information would they research to learn about a Canadian worldview?

## TAKE AN INTERNET FIELD TRIP

### Primary Sources on the Internet

The Internet can be used to locate primary sources of information. A primary source is an original source of information, such as a diary, news report, eyewitness account, personal story, video or audio recording, photograph, or artifact. A secondary source of information is created by someone who has interpreted primary sources and other kinds of information to create a book, report, encyclopedia article, magazine article, or other resource.

A critical consumer of information knows how to judge if a primary source is authentic.

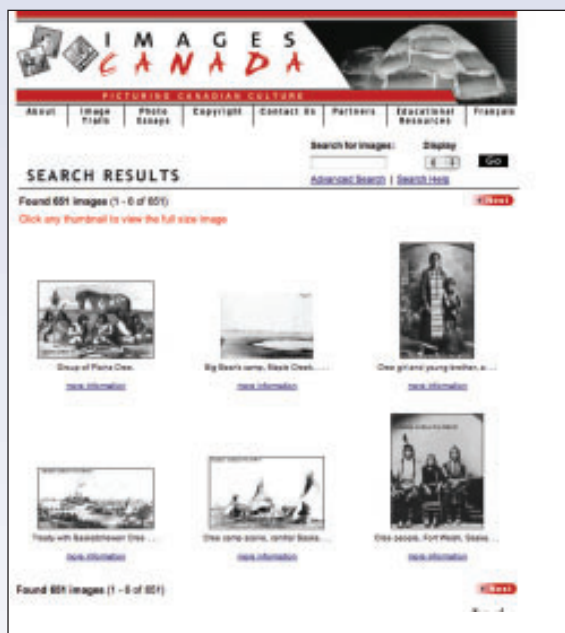
### How to Locate Authentic Primary Sources

In this activity, you will locate primary sources on the Internet. You will use a list of websites provided by your teacher as a starting point. Your challenge is to determine which of the sites provides trustworthy primary sources.

As you explore each site, try to answer these questions:

1. PURPOSE: Why were the items created? Who were the authors, artists, photographers, or creators? Are these factual accounts and pictures, or are they ideas and opinions?

Images Canada provides access to thousands of images located in museums, libraries, archives, and universities across Canada. Other countries also have image collections on the Internet.



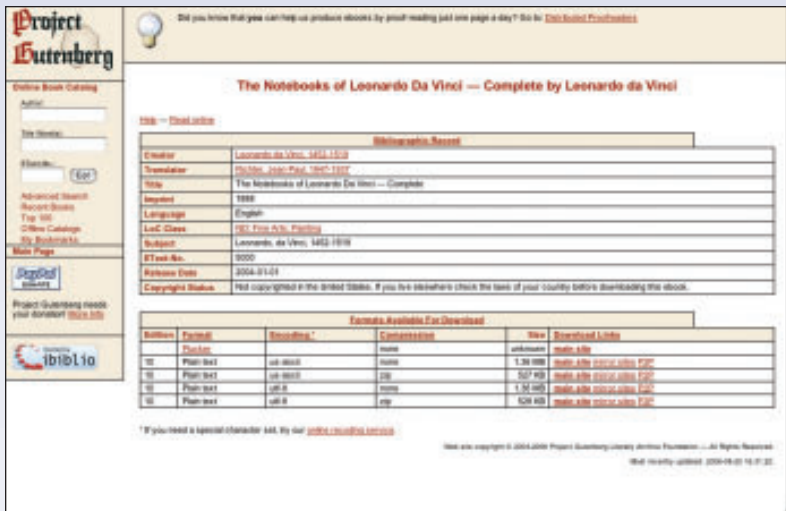
The University of Utah is an example of an educational institution that provides primary sources on the Internet. It has copied some Meso-American manuscripts, or codices, which are part of the library's collection.

2. SOURCE: Who is responsible for the website? The source is more likely to be trusted if it is from a government, university, or newspaper. If the source is one person or a special interest group, you should be cautious. Internet addresses that end in .gov, .edu, and .org are more likely to be authentic.
3. ACCURACY: Does the site provide photographs of original documents and artifacts? If the originals have been copied into text files or translated into another language, how do you know that they are accurate?

*I wonder ... what primary records have been created this week that might be of interest to historians in the future?*



Newspapers are sources of primary records when they report on events as they occur. Most newspapers are available on the Internet, making it possible for subscribers to search for archived stories.

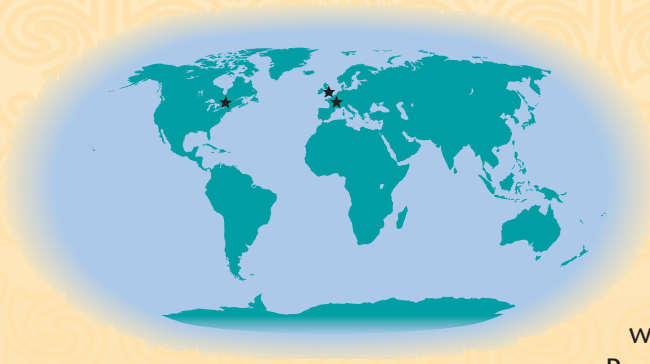


Project Gutenberg is a collection of more than 10 000 books that can be downloaded from the Internet. The books are generally ones for which copyright has expired. This means that most of the books were written in the 1920s or before.



## Same Time, Different Place

### Building Empires



**protectorate:** country under the protection or control of another

As the Age of Exploration and discovery began in the 1400s, western European nations were motivated by similar political, commercial, and religious reasons, as were the Aztec, in wanting an empire. Politically, both the Aztec and the European rulers wanted greater power and wealth. Each believed their religious beliefs and practices were superior. The Aztec wanted everyone to pray to their patron god, Huitzilopochtli. The Europeans wanted to convert all people to the Christian faith.

Portugal and Spain were the first European countries to establish colonial empires. Other countries such as England and France followed.

#### France

The empire of France eventually expanded throughout much of the world with holdings throughout Canada and the Great Lakes region, the Mississippi River, the West Indies, French Guiana in South America, and trading posts along the coast of West Africa. Today, territories under French rule are the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon off the Canadian coast and Guadeloupe and the Isle of Martinique.

#### England

The British Empire ruled territories all over the world. By the early 1900s, it ruled over 25% of the world's population and territories. At various times, the empire ranged from the American colonies in the west, Australia and New Zealand in the east, Canada in the north, and large areas of eastern and southern Africa, as well as Egypt in the north. Today, former British colonies and **protectorates** have gained independence.

#### Control of Northern North America

First France, and then Britain, wanted control of the great wealth generated by the North American fur trade. They struggled with each other from the mid-1600s to the mid-1700s. In 1759, Britain gained control of French territories in Québec. By the mid-1800s, Europeans had settled the Maritime provinces, Québec, and most of southern Ontario. The country of Canada was formed in 1867. As Canada extended control westward, its aim of settlement led the government to enter into treaties with the First Nations. It gained control of most of the land and promoted the immigration of Europeans to western Canada.

## FOCUS ON INQUIRY

### How Does the Experience of Canada's First People Compare to the Story of the Aztec and the Spanish?

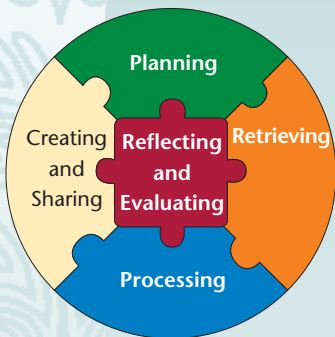
During this case study, you learned how conflicting worldviews led to the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec civilization. This is just one example of how the Aboriginal peoples of North America and South America experienced changes to their ways of life when the Europeans came to these continents. In Western Canada, First Nations original experience with Europeans was meeting French and English fur traders of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Think about how the experiences of Aboriginal people in Western Canada compared to the experiences of the Aztec in Meso-America. Think about how the worldviews of the French and English, coming from Western Europe, would have been similar to the Spanish in many ways. Their worldviews were also different from each other.

Think about why the First Nations of Canada were not conquered as the Aztec were. Many negotiated treaties, and all have special status in the Canadian constitution. Think about why Aboriginal people in Canada continue to work to improve their lives, such as negotiating land claims and pressing for the fulfillment of treaty rights.

*I wonder ... how do I respond to someone with different ideas about what is important?*

The Fur Traders at Montréal (Québec). As the economy changed from being based on the fur trade to being based on European settlement, First Nations signed treaties with the Crown.





## Using Your Inquiry Skills

In this case study, you learned and practised these inquiry skills:

- making a map by choosing pertinent information and making connections and inferences
- collecting information, organizing information, and drawing conclusions
- locating primary sources of information on the Internet

In this Focus on Inquiry activity, you will use these skills and learn more about using media sources to understand contemporary issues and how worldviews affect your understanding of these issues.

### Planning Phase

#### *Step 1 — Identify an Aboriginal issue in the media*

- As a class, select a news story about Aboriginal people in Canada from a newspaper, television, radio, or a newspaper on the Internet.
- Read the news story and describe the issue in your own words.
- Pose several questions that you can research to help you to understand the historical background of the issue.

#### *Step 2 — Analyze a news story*

- Identify the facts in the story. Are any facts missing? Consider the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the story. Do you have any questions that are not answered in the news story? Do you think there are more facts needed to completely understand the story?
- Critically examine the news story. Is the story factual or a columnist's opinion? What sources did the writer use? Does the story provide historical background information or is it someone's interpretation of what happened? Do the facts presented slant the story in any way? Has enough background information been given to show all sides of the story?
- Pose more questions that you will need to research.

Many Canadian communities host an annual heritage festival to celebrate the contributions of different cultural groups to Canadian society. In Canada today, there are often a variety of worldviews held by different cultural groups, but the different groups, for the most part, tend to live and work together peacefully.





## Retrieving Phase

### Step 3 — Find other sources of information

- Locate sources of primary information that you can use to check the facts of the story. Use secondary sources of information, if necessary.
- List other sources that will have different perspectives about the story. Plan to find out what the Aboriginal Elders and leaders think of the issue.

## Processing Phase

### Step 4 — Collect and organize information

- Consider how the media can affect a news story.
- Use your research questions to organize the information that you collect, making an outline or a mind map. Always keep your key inquiry question in mind.
- Use a variety of other strategies to organize the ideas and information that you collect — charts, Venn diagrams, graphic organizers, and so on.

### Step 5 — Draw conclusions

- Do different sources present the issue through the lenses of varying worldviews?
- How does your worldview affect the way you view the issue?
- What conclusions can you make about the ways that worldviews might affect the way issues are presented in the media and the ways that the audience might interpret them?
- Explain what the different solutions for resolving the issue could be. Do you think one is the best approach? How might varying worldviews come to play in resolving the issue?
- How does this issue illustrate the differences between the Aztec experience and Canada's First Peoples experience with the coming of Europeans?

## Reflecting and Evaluating Phase

- Think about how the people who write about contemporary and historical stories affect our understanding of the world.

## SKILLS CENTRE

Turn to **How to Analyze the Impact of the Media on Current Affairs Issues** in the Skills Centre for details about analyzing a news story.

# End-of-Chapter

## Conclusion

Spanish monarchs and Aztec emperors both wanted to rule over vast and wealthy empires. They both succeeded. Spanish imperialism, however, brought an end to the Aztec civilization and its empire.

Europeans believed that representatives of any Christian country who discovered unknown lands (previously unknown to them) had both the right and the responsibility to take charge of them. When Columbus landed in the Caribbean, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella saw it as their responsibility to convert the peoples of these lands to Christianity, make them loyal subjects of the crown, and exploit the colonies for the good of Spain.

Explorers such as Cortés had goals similar to those of the conquistadors of the Reconquista: to explore, conquer, and occupy the new territories; to change the political institutions of the territories; to convert the people to Christianity; and, in addition, to gain wealth for Spain and themselves.

Cortés was a brilliant military strategist who had the confidence to act decisively. He was amazed when he saw the beautiful sights of Tenochtitlan, yet was revolted at the practice of human sacrifice. Yet, according to the Spanish worldview, Cortés believed the Aztec were inferior to Europeans; it was his right to conquer the empire. He believed, like other Spanish citizens, that the riches of the Aztec Empire were for their taking.

Moctezuma was a powerful leader who extended the boundaries of the Aztec Empire. He had nearly unlimited power over his people and received untold wealth in tribute from the empire.

A number of factors led to his downfall at the hands of the Spanish:

- His religious beliefs dominated his worldview and affected his ability to deal with Cortés. He could not decide whether Cortés was a god or an enemy.
- He had no knowledge of the Spanish worldview, so he did not understand the motives and ruthlessness of Cortés.
- His beliefs about warfare, keeping the world in balance, and dealing with opponents in a gracious way did not let him deal effectively with the Spanish.

Whereas Cortés looked down upon Moctezuma and his people, Moctezuma treated Cortés and his followers with dignity and respect.

The conquistadors nearly wiped out all traces of the Aztec Empire after the conquest. The Spanish monarch granted them huge tracts of land in thanks for conquering New Spain and claiming it for Spain. Exploitation of the Aztec occurred for many years. Gradually, a new society was created by the Mestizo population.

*I wonder ... did this worldview make it easier for Cortés to pursue the Aztec with force and brutality or did he have misgivings about destroying their civilization?*

## Review and Synthesize

1. Work in a group to write a script for a play about contact between the Aztec and the Spanish. The script should list the characters and describe the settings. There should be four scenes in the play:  
**Scene 1:** Preparing to Meet the Unknown  
**Scene 2:** The First Meeting  
**Scene 3:** Battles for Control  
**Scene 4:** Conclusion
2. As you plan the script for the play, make a list of key events that should be included. For each event, write notes about what Cortés was thinking and what Moctezuma was thinking. The notes should include the strategies they were considering and the values and beliefs that affected their decisions.
3. As a class, develop an assessment rubric to judge the quality of each play. The criteria should include historical accuracy, character development, and sequence of events. What other criteria should be included? For each criterion, what should be included in a high-quality play?

## Inquiry

4. Plan an appropriate setting for each scene in the play about contact between the Aztec and the Spanish. Decide what backdrops and props will be included so that the setting is as authentic as possible. Think about how playwrights and movie directors try to avoid anachronisms (people, things, or events in a time in which they don't belong). How will you use primary and secondary sources of information to plan the settings and props?

## Show What You Know

5. The worldviews of the key figures in the story of contact between the Aztec and the Spanish determined what would happen. Describe how the actions, decisions, and behaviours of each of the following people reflected their worldviews. Explain the results of their decisions and actions.
  - Isabella and Ferdinand
  - Moctezuma
  - Hernan Cortés
6. Select one key event during the months of contact between the Aztec and the Spanish. Describe what happened from two perspectives — Cortés and Moctezuma. Explain how the worldview of each man affected the decisions he made during this event.
7. List the changes that occurred in the Aztec way of life following their defeat by the Spanish. How did these changes reflect the Spanish worldview?

## Closure

8. **Share:** Host an event in which the groups present the plays developed in question 1. You may decide to have each group present only one scene from your script.
9. **Discuss:** How does the Western view of human rights differ from the worldviews of the Aztec and the Spanish in the 1400s and 1500s?
10. **Reflect:** Spend a few minutes in personal reflection. Think about times when you have felt conflicted or confused because people or events don't fit with your worldview. How is this similar to what Moctezuma and Cortés must have felt? What can you do when you get these feelings?



## CASE STUDY THREE

# Conclusion

### Who Are You? An Individual

**character traits:** the qualities or features that distinguish one person or group from another

Think about what you have learned from this case study that can affect you in your daily life. For example, you learned that the values and beliefs of Cortés and Moctezuma and the way they viewed the world influenced their decisions and how they interacted with each other. As a result, Cortés was able to overpower the Aztec and destroy their civilization, while Moctezuma was unable to act against the Spanish to save his people. Their actions were influenced by the worldviews of their societies as well as by their personal **character traits**.

- Think about Cortés. What kind of person was he? What were his strengths and weaknesses? What do you think you would have done if you were him?
- Think about Moctezuma. What do you admire about him? What things about him bother you? What do you think you would have done if you were him?

George W. Bush was the president of the United States when the Iraq war began in 2003. What was it about the way he viewed the world that made him decide to take the United States into war?



Nelson Mandela, a former president of South Africa, was imprisoned for 27 years because he fought against apartheid. What was it about his character and the way he viewed the world that made him a leader?



Mother Theresa of Calcutta devoted her life to helping poor people in India. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 2003. What was it about her character and the way she viewed the world that made her decide to devote her life to others?

Think about how the way you view the world, as well as your personal character traits, affects your choices, decisions, and how you interact with others.

- Your character is shaped by your values, beliefs, and the way you view the world. A good character is based upon core human values that are the same for all cultures and religions — honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect.
- You are responsible for your actions. As you mature, you can become more self-disciplined and always act in ways that are consistent with your core values.
- Your family may place limits on your choices, but the decisions are yours. It is normal to feel some tension between what you want and what your family wants of you. When you think about doing something that your parents wouldn't like, your values help you think through your choices and decide what to do.
- Your decisions affect other people and things. Try to be empathetic and think about what will happen from the perspective of other people. Respect their rights and needs.

### THINK ABOUT IT

1. Learn more about good character.
  - Research the rights and responsibilities of people in a democratic society such as Canada. To what extent does the Charter of Rights and Freedoms describe good character in the citizens of Canada?
  - Select a person in the news who has an influence on a group of people in the way that Cortés or Moctezuma did. Analyze the character of the person and explain how his or her worldview influences his or her decisions.
2. Think about good character by discussing ideas with others.
  - Imagine that a new student has come to your school from another country. If this were you, how would you want to be treated?
  - Do you agree with this statement? Character is doing the right thing when no one is looking.
3. Think about your character.
  - In what ways are you like Cortés? In what ways are you like Moctezuma?
  - Who of your family and friends influences the choices and decisions that you make? In what ways?
  - Reflect on your life experiences. Think of a time when you showed good character. Think of a time when you did not. What did you learn from each experience? What will you do differently in the future?