The Spanish Conquest of Mexico: History and Legacy

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World History, 10th grade

Topics: analyzing the nature and legacy of the Spanish conquest in Mexico, assimilation, acculturation, hegemony, syncretism, culture of Aztecs during height of civilization and culture of Mayan peoples today, modern issues that stem from the history of colonization

Time Frame: Six block days of 1.5-hour classes

Unit Summary: In world history classes often the narrative of native peoples focuses on their status as victims of the conqueror. But the legacy of conquest is more complex than a single event and involves the assimilation and acculturation of two cultures. In this unit students will learn about two native peoples, the Aztecs (or Mexicas) and the Mayan peoples of Mexico, and their continuation after the Spanish conquest and colonization of Mexico. The unit will be divided into two parts: the conquest and the legacy of the conquest. Students will first look at the historiography of the Spanish conquest by analyzing the initial meeting of Cortez and the Aztec peoples from primary documents. The purpose is to help unfold the history of the meeting and conquest as two cultures with different objectives and belief systems. This will be followed by two lessons describing and analyzing the Aztec civilization through primary source documents and then learning about the events of the conquest through one academic’s theory on why the conquest was so successful. The second half of the unit will address the legacy of the Spanish conquest in Mexico, specifically discussing the impact on Mayan peoples of southern and central Mexico. Earlier in the course students learned about the Mayan civilization that flourished during the Classical Period. The idea that the Mayan people did not disappear after the Classical Period will be supported by reading about modern day Mayan culture and issues faced by the Mayan peoples of Chiapas. Students will be introduced to the concept of syncretism, thus furthering their understanding of the assimilation that occurs after conquest. Lastly, in order to help students fully understand the legacy of colonization that is woven into the economic and social fabric of a nation-state, students will read and discuss the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico during the 1990s. Thus, students will learn about the legacy of conquest through primary sources, PowerPoint notes, a lesson plan from The DBQ Project, Geography Alive!, and articles on syncretism and the Zapatistas. Assessments of student understanding will be gathered from a quiz, essay frame and class activities, such as readings, quick-writes and video notes, and a Socratic seminar.
Standards: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for World History

- TEK WH1D identify major causes and describe the major effects of the following important turning points in world history from 1450 to 1750: the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the influence of the Ming dynasty on world trade, European exploration and the Columbian Exchange, European expansion

- TEK WH6A compare the major political, economic, social, and cultural developments of the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations and explain how prior civilizations influenced their development

- TEK WH6B explain how the Inca and Aztec empires were impacted by European exploration/colonization

- TEK WH7A analyze the causes of European expansion from 1450 to 1750

- TEK WH16B analyze the influence of human and physical geographic factors on major events in world history

- TEK WH27B summarize the major ideas in astronomy, mathematics, and architectural engineering that developed in the Maya, Inca, and Aztec civilizations

- TEK WH29 The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:
  (B) explain how historians, when examining sources, analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view to interpret historical events
  (C) explain the differences between primary and secondary sources and examine those sources to analyze frame of reference, historical context, and point of view
  (D) evaluate the validity of a source based on language, corroboration with other sources, and information about the author
  (E) identify bias in written, oral, and visual material
  (F) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time
  (G) construct a thesis on a social studies issue or event supported by evidence

- TEK WH30 The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:
  (A) use social studies terminology correctly
  (B) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation
  (C) interpret and create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information
(D) transfer information from one medium to another

- TEK WH31 The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:
  (A) use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution
  (B) use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision

Unit Understandings: As stated in the unit summary, the intention behind this unit is to present conquest as a complex series of events that does not end once peoples have been politically and militarily conquered. This unit will focus on the conquest of the Mexican indigenous peoples as a case study. Students should understand the conquest of the indigenous peoples of Mexico from both the perspective of the Spanish and the indigenous peoples, thus discouraging stereotypes and linear ideas of the conquest itself. Students should gain an understanding of the cultures of the Spanish and the Aztecs before conquest in order to better understand the outcome of the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico. Next, it is important that students understand the legacy of conquest and the idea that conquest is not one event but, in Mexico, involved the assimilation of two cultures and the subjugation of one group of people by another. Colonization of the Mexican peoples has affected all aspects of Mexican life and this unit will focus on the indigenous peoples of Mexico, specifically the Mayan peoples of Chiapas. The Mayans are very poor and underrepresented in Mexican society and students should gain a better understanding of the “why” and “how” surrounding their current living conditions. However, students should also gain an understanding of modern Mayan life and the preservation of their culture in order to present the Mayans not just as victims of the Spanish. The Mayan peoples serve as a case study of people who are struggling to adapt to the modern world while preserving their traditions and as people who are enduring the harsh legacy of colonization, both economically and politically.

Essential Questions

- Who were the Aztecs? Is the historical reputation of the Aztecs as savages a stereotype or truth?
- Who were the conquistadors, such as Cortez, who conquered the Aztecs? Were they superior to the Aztecs or did they have an advantage over them?
- How has the conquest by the Spanish affected modern day Mayans?
• How do indigenous peoples preserve their traditional culture while adapting to modern life? (borrowed from Geography Alive!)
• What is syncretism? How is this form of assimilation? How is syncretism a way to keep your traditions while adapting to the new customs presented or forced on you?
• Who are the Zapatistas and how are they a response to the modern problems faced by the Mayan peoples of Chiapas? How are the Zapatistas presented in the media? Do you agree with their movement?
• Does understanding the history behind their movement change your perspective on their movement?
• Should the Mexican government be responsible for providing the Mayan peoples with more resources?

Learning Activities

Part I: Conquest

Day One Perspectives piece on the Aztecs and conquistadors. Students will look at primary documents from Aztecs and the Spanish to gain understanding of the different perspectives. Lesson plan and documents are attached.

Day Two Start with warm-up: Drawing on your work from last class, with what intent did the Spanish approach the New World? How does your intention shape your actions?

Next, students will watch Guns, Germs, and Steel by Jared Diamond and answer questions for video (worksheet and answer key are attached). The video is approximately an hour long. Teacher should lead discussion on the video and Diamond’s theory that geographic luck is what afforded the Spanish advantages over the indigenous peoples of Latin America. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this argument?

Resources:
• PBS: http://www.pbs.org/gunsgermssteel/educators/index.html Handouts for the video are provided on this website, as well as other great activities that accompany the three-part series.

Day Three Warm-up: What are stereotypes? How do you think they originate? Do they serve a purpose?

Students will watch video on Discovery Streaming about Aztecs and answer questions (worksheet is attached).
DBQ Project. Students should complete the DBQ “Were Aztecs Savage?” by the DBQ Project. Students will read primary sources to assess whether the Aztecs were savages and how the word “savage” can lead to basic understandings of a culture rather than the actual complexities of humankind and the societies we create.

*Depending on skill level, students can complete these individually, in pairs, or in groups. Also, teacher may take out some documents to differentiate for level of class or student learning.

Homework: Students will fill out an essay frame assessing the DBQ question and prepare for a quiz on the Aztec empire.

Resources:
- Discovery Streaming: [http://my.discoveryeducation.com/](http://my.discoveryeducation.com/) Ancient Aztecs is the second part of the video on Ancient Mayans and Aztecs and runs for 16 minutes and fifteen seconds.
- DBQ Project: Aztecs: What Should History Say? [http://www.dbqproject.com/worldhistory.html](http://www.dbqproject.com/worldhistory.html) An example of one of the documents is attached as permission was given by the DBQ Project authors (Document G, from Florentine Codex).

**Part II: Legacy of Conquest**

**Day Four** Before warm-up: quiz on Aztecs (attached). Next, take up essay frames from homework.

Warm-up: Students will complete a K-W-L chart on the Mayans. They should remember facts from previous unit on ancient Mayans.

Students will complete Ch. 10 of Geography Alive! “Indigenous Cultures: The Survival of the Maya of Mesoamerica.” This chapter addresses the Mayan peoples of the Yucatan peninsula in both Mexico and Guatemala. The chapter focuses on the cultural aspects of the Mayan peoples of this region, from their local government and communal norms to traditions. Interestingly, another topic addresses how Mayan people keep their traditions alive and adapt to modern life, both economically and culturally.

Students will complete the preview as a class and then the reading notes on their own. After finishing the reading notes, students will pair-share their answers. Next, they will complete the processing activity with their partner.
Last, the teacher will write the word “syncretism” on the board. Teacher will give the hint, “To be in sync means you work together or come together,” and let students brainstorm on what this word might mean. Teacher will explain syncretism as a form of assimilation. Teacher will show PowerPoint (available for download from this website: http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/lilas/outreach/mexico11/) section on syncretism, using the Virgin de Guadalupe and pictures of San Juan Chamula as examples.

Students will finish K-W-L chart as exit ticket.

Resources:
- PowerPoint: There is one only PowerPoint for this unit and it includes sections on San Juan Chamula, syncretism, and Chiapas. It is available for download from http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/lilas/outreach/mexico11/
- Background articles for the teacher to familiarize him/herself with Chamula and syncretism:
  * “San Juan Chamula” http://www.zapatistadolls.com/chamula/
  * “Christians don’t worship here anymore…” by Philip Coppens http://www.philipcoppens.com/chamula.html
  * “San Juan Chamula, Mexico: A Church out of Time” by Mark Pilkington, Fortean Times http://www.forteantimes.com/features/fortean_traveller/253/san_juan_chamula_mexico_a_church_out_of_time.html

**Day Five** Warm-up: Did the Mayans “disappear”? What evidence do you have to support your argument?

Students will look at the PowerPoint section on Chiapas.

Next, they will use PBS Lesson Plan Five: *Letter from Marcos on the Zapatistas* and answer the questions that follow (attached). This lesson includes statistics about Chiapas and an overall description of the Zapatista movement. If students do not finish in class, they will finish the packet for homework.
Resources:

• PowerPoint on Chiapas: There is one only PowerPoint for this unit and it includes sections on San Juan Chamula, syncretism, and Chiapas. It is available for download from [http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/lilas/outreach/mexico11/](http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/lilas/outreach/mexico11/)
• Readings on Chiapas and the EZLN from PBS Conquistadors: Cortez and the Aztecs: [http://www.pbs.org/opb/conquistadors/teachers/teachers.htm](http://www.pbs.org/opb/conquistadors/teachers/teachers.htm)

Specifically, lesson plan five:
• Background article for the teacher to familiarize him/herself with Chiapas: “Chiapas Runs Hot and Cold” by Bob Schulman, Huffington Post
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-schulman/chiapas‐runs‐hot-and‐cold_b_578020.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob‐schulman/chiapas‐runs‐hot‐and‐cold_b_578020.html)

Day Six Warm-up: What is the legacy of conquest? Using what you have learned over the past few class periods, answer the following sections in your warm-up section.

1. Why is it a false assumption that conquest in Mexico ended when the Conquistadors won the battles?
2. Why is it a false assertion that the conquest ended when Mexicans gained their freedom?
3. How has the conquest of Mexico shaped politics and socioeconomics in Chiapas?
4. Do you think that the Mexican government should provide service for the Chiapan peoples? Why or why not?
5. Do you think that a case study could be written about the legacy of conquest for a country other than Mexico?

Students will participate in a short Socratic seminar. Desks will be arranged in a circle and the central question will be: Do the Zapatistas have a right to their movement?

Resources:

• Information on Socratic seminars:
Day One Lesson Plan: Using historical perspective when analyzing the Conquistadors and the Aztec

Documents (attached):
- “Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America” by Johannes Stradanus
- Hernan Cortés, Second Letter to Charles V, 1520
- Bartolomé de las Casas, “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies,” 1542
- Requerimiento, 1510
- Aztec View of the Conquistadors
- Omens of Doom

Objective: Analyze primary source documents to give perspective on the conquest of the Aztecs

1. Show students “Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America” without telling them the title of the picture. Students should give suggestions for title of picture and discuss what is going on in the picture. Next, share title with students and ask them what is inferred from this title.

   Ask: Why is America “sleeping”? What does the image tell us about how the Europeans view the Native Americans? What does the image tell us about how the Europeans saw themselves in the context of New World Exploration?

2. Students will be put into groups of five. Pass out all of the documents. Each student is responsible for answering the questions about his/her document. When everyone is finished with their research, they will teach the rest of the group what they learned from their document.

3. Re-group students in pairs or small groups. Each group will draw a two-face silhouette (can be substituted with a T-chart), where one side is an Aztec and the other a Conquistador. Student responses should be supported with quotes or citations from the texts. Next to the face, the students will write information about:
   1. How each side treated their initial meeting
   2. How each side viewed the other, such as descriptions
   3. Motive for each side (what did each group want from the other?)

4. Quick-Write/Exit Ticket: Students should answer the following question in paragraph form:
   How did each society’s differing cultural perspectives clash and what was the end result for the Aztecs?

   *Alternative or extra questions: Could there have been an alternate ending to this event? Why or why not? Did the Aztecs’ religious beliefs aide in their demise?
“Vespucci Awakens a Sleeping America”

Three halls are in this grand temple, which contain the principal idols; these are of wonderful extent and height, and admirable workmanship, adorned with figures sculptured in stone and wood; leading from the halls are chapels with very small doors, to which the light is not admitted, nor are any persons except the priests, and not all of them. In these chapels are the images of idols, although, as I have before said, many of them are also found on the outside; the principal ones, in which the people have greatest faith and confidence, I precipitated from their pedestals, and cast them down the steps of the temple, purifying the chapels in which they had stood, as they were all polluted with human blood, shed in the sacrifices. In the place of these I put images of Our Lady and the Saints, which excited not a little feeling in Moctezuma and the inhabitants, who at first remonstrated, declaring that if my proceedings were known throughout the country, the people would rise against me; for they believed that their idols bestowed on them all temporal good, and if they permitted them to be ill-treated, they would be angry and without their gifts, and by this means the people would be deprived of the fruits of the earth and perish with famine. I answered, through the interpreters, that they were deceived in expecting any favors from idols, the work of their own hands, formed of unclean things; and that they must learn there was but one God, the universal Lord of all, who had created the heavens and earth, and all things else, and had made them and us; that He was without beginning and immortal, and they were bound to adore and believe Him, and no other creature or thing.

—Hernan Cortés, excerpt from Second Letter to Charles V, 1520

Bartolomé de las Casas

**A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES**

written 1542, published 1552 [EXCERPTS]

**PRESENTATION** by Bishop don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas or Casaus, to the most high and potent lord Prince of all the Spains don Felipe, our lord

Most high and potent lord:

Because divine providence has ordered in this world that for the direction and common utility of the human lineage the world be constituted by Kingdoms and peoples, with their kings like fathers and shepherds (as Homer has called them) and therefore the most noble and generous members of the republics, for that reason no doubt of the rectitude of the royal spirits of those kings may be held, or with right reason might be held. And if any wrongs, failings, defects, or evils should be suffered in those kingdoms, the only reason for that is that the kings have no notice of them. For these wrongs &c, if they be present and reported, it is the duty of the king, with greatest study and vigilant industry, to root them out.

Considering, then, most potent lord, the evils and harm, the perditions and ruin — the equals or likes of which, never were men imagined capable of doing — considering, as I say, those evils which as a man of fifty years’ and more experience, being in those lands present, I have seen committed upon those so many and such great kingdoms, or better said, that entire vast and new world of the Indies — lands conceded and given in trust by God and His Church to the king and queen of Castile, to rule and govern them, convert them to belief in Christ and the Holy Catholic Church, and give them to prosper temporally and spiritually — this subject was not able to contain himself from supplicating with Your Majesty, most importantly, that Your Majesty not concede such licence nor allow those terrible things that the tyrants did invent, pursue, and have committed against those peaceable, humble, and meek Indian peoples, who offend no person. . .

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INTRODUCTION

... into and among these gentle sheep, endowed by their Maker and Creator with all the qualities aforesaid, did creep the Spaniards, who no sooner had knowledge of these people than they became like fierce wolves and tigers and lions who have gone many days without food or nourishment. And no other thing have they done for forty years until this day, and still today see fit to do, but dismember, slay, perturb, afflict, torment, and destroy the Indians by all manner of cruelty — new and divers and most singular manners such as never before seen or read of heard of — some few of which shall be recounted below, and they do this to such a degree that on the Island of Hispaniola, of the above three millions souls that we once saw, today there be no more than two hundred of those native people remaining. The island of Cuba is almost as long as from Valladolid to Rome; today it is almost devoid of population. The island of San Juan [Puerto Rico] and that of Jamaica, large and well-favoured and lovely islands both, have been laid waste. On the Isles of the Lucayos [Bahamas] ... where there were once above five hundred thousand souls, today there is not a living creature. All were killed while being brought, and because of being brought, to the Island of Hispaniola where the Spaniards saw that their stock of the natives of that latter island had come to an end. ... Two principal and general customs have been employed by those, calling themselves Christians, who have passed this way, in extirpating and striking from the face of the earth those suffering nations. The first being unjust, cruel, bloody, and tyrannical warfare. The other — after having slain all those who might yearn toward or aspire after or think of freedom, or consider escaping from the torments that they are made to suffer, by which I mean all the native-born lords and adult males, for it is the Spaniards’ custom in their wars to allow only young boys and females to live — being to oppress them with the hardest, harshest, and most heinous bondage to which men or beasts might ever be bound into. ...

The cause for which the Christians have slain and destroyed so many and such infinite numbers of souls, has been simply to get, as their ultimate end, the Indians’ gold of them, and to stuff themselves with riches in a very few days, and to raise themselves to high estates — without proportion to their birth or breeding, it should be noted — owing to the insatiable greed and ambition that they have had, which has been greater than any the world has ever seen before. ... All the Indians of all the Indies never once did

1 I.e., since 1502, the year las Casas first went out to the Indies with the expedition led by Nicolás de Ovando. Las Casas is, then, implying that his Brevísima Relación will be based on personal experience and observation. It should be noted that las Casas did not adopt the views expressed in this account until 1514, twelve full years after he came to the Indies. He was, in fact, an encomendero at first, one of those who exploited the Indians, and it was not until he was exposed to the ideas of Antonio de Montesinos, a Dominican who preached that the Indians were “men,” with souls, that las Casas’ eyes were opened to the brutality of the Conquest. [Knight & Hucy, p. 6]
ought hurt or wrong to Christians, but rather held them
to be descended from heaven, from the sky, until
many times they or their neighbours received from the
Christians many acts of wrongful harm, theft, murder,
violence, and vexation . . .

Las Casas proceeds to recount specific acts of cruelty
perpetrated on the people of Hispaniola, San Juan (Puerto
Rico), Jamaica, Cuba, Nicaragua, New Spain (Mexico), the
Yucatan, Guatemala, Venezuela, Peru, Granada and other
small Caribbean islands, and “Florida,” referring to Spanish
claims north of Mexico in North America.

TESTAMENT

I, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, or Casaus, friar of the
order of Saint Dominic, who by the mercy of God am
here today in this court of Spain, was persuaded by
the same notable persons resident in this Court . . . to
set down an accounting of the hell that is the Indies,
so that those infinite masses of souls redeemed by the
blood of Jesus Christ may not die for all eternity
without any help for it, but rather know their Creator
and be saved. And by the compassion that I have for
my native land, which is Castile, I pray that God not
destroy it for the great sins committed against its faith
and honour . . .

I have great hope that the emperor and king of
Spain, our lord Don Carlos, the fifth of that name,
may come to understand (for until now the truth has
always been most industriously covered over) the acts
of malice and treachery which have been and still are
being done upon those nations and lands, against the
will of God and his own, and that he may bring an end
to so many evils and bring relief to that New World
which God has given him, as the lover and cultivator,
as he is of justice.

For political as well as religious reasons, including the
evidence from las Casas, King Charles issued the “New
Laws of the Indies” in 1542 to moderate the treatment of the
Indians. The New Laws were opposed and ignored by most
colonial officials in Spanish America.
They said: “No, we must keep on! We must report to our king, Motecuhzoma. We will tell him what we have seen, and it is a terrifying thing. Nothing like it has even been seen before!” Then they left in great haste and continued to the City of Mexico. They entered the city at night, in the middle of the night....The messengers went to the House of the Serpent, and Motecuhzoma arrived. The two captives [ordered by Motecuhzoma to be brought from the prison] were then sacrificed before his eyes: their breasts were torn open, and the messengers were sprinkled with their blood. This was done because the messengers had completed a difficult mission: they had seen the gods, their eyes had looked on their faces. They had even conversed with the gods! When the sacrifice was finished, the messengers reported to the king. They told him how they had made the journey, and what they had seen, and what food the strangers ate. Motecuhzoma was astonished and terrified by their report, and the description of the strangers’ food astonished him above all else. He was also terrified to learn how the cannon roared, how its noise resounded, how it caused one to faint and grow deaf. The messengers told him: “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, like that of rotten mud. This odor penetrates even to the brain and causes the greatest discomfort. If the cannon is aimed against a mountain, the mountain splits and cracks open. If it is aimed against a tree, it shatters the tree into splinters. This is a most unnatural sight, as if the tree had exploded from within.”

The messengers also said: “Their trappings and arms are all made of iron. 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. These deer, our lord, are as tall as the roof of a house. “The strangers' bodies are completely covered, so that only their faces can be seen. Their skin is white, as if it were made of lime. They have yellow hair, though some of them have black. Their beards are long and yellow, and their moustaches are also yellow. Their hair is curly, with very fine stands.

“As for their food, it is like human food. It is large and white, and not heavy. It is something like straw, but with the taste of a cornstalk, of the pith of a cornstalk. It is a little sweet, as if it were flavored with honey; it tastes of honey, it is sweet-tasting food.

“Their dogs are enormous, with flat ears and long, dangling tongues. The color of their eyes is a burning yellow; their eyes flash fire and shoot off sparks. Their bellies are hollow, their flanks long and narrow. They are tireless and very powerful. They bound here and there, panting, with their tongues hanging out. And they are spotted like an ocelot.”

When Motecuhzoma heard this report, he was filled with terror. It was as if his heart had fainted, as it if had shriveled. It was as if he were conquered by despair....

—Account of Aztec view of Conquistadors

Adapted from the Cronica Mexicana, accounts compiled by Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, the grandson of Motecuhzoma, ca. 1578. Source: National Humanities Center.
On the part of the King, Don Fernando, and of Doña Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castille and León, subduers of the barbarous nations, we their servants notify and make known to you, as best we can, that the Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created the Heaven and the Earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, all the men of the world, were and are descendants, and all those who came after us…

Wherefore, as best we can, we ask and require that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and Queen Doña Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this Tierra-firm by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.

If you do so, you will do well, and that which you are obliged to do to their Highnesses, and we in their name shall receive you in all love and charity, and shall leave you, your wives, and your children, and your lands, free without servitude, that you may do with them and with yourselves freely that which you like and think best, and they shall not compel you to turn Christians, unless you yourselves, when informed of the truth, should wish to be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith, as almost all the inhabitants of the rest of the islands have done. And, besides this, their Highnesses award you many privileges and exemptions and will grant you many benefits.

But, if you do not do this, and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us. And that we have said this to you and made this Requisition, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requisition.

—Requerimiento (1510). Written by Palacios Rubios of the Council of Castille. The Requerimiento was intended to be read to indigenous groups encountered in the ongoing conquest of the Americas.

Source: Samuel M. Wilson, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Texas–Austin, National Humanities Center

Curry – The Spanish Conquest of Mexico
p. 15
Beginning in about the year 1502, rumors were heard in the Aztec Empire about the appearance of bearded white men with strange behavior. Because Montezuma II was a very superstitious leader, he consulted his advisors, but then punished them for their lack of knowledge. For years before the arrival of the Spanish, he became more and more concerned about omens of doom concerning his reign and the continuation of the Aztec Empire.

Since the omens were not reported until after the Conquest, there are questions about whether they were true events, or only justifications for the Aztec defeat. Some people find disasters easier to swallow if it is believed that they were foretold.

**OMEN 1:** According to legend, the Aztecs believed that the god Quetzalcoatl had sailed east to join the sun god, warning that he would return on Quetzalcoatl's name day to reclaim his kingdom. This would be the end of the Aztec Emperor. The Aztecs believed that this would occur in the year One Reed (which happened to be 1519) and that the god could take many forms, including that of a pale-skinned, bearded man.

**OMEN 2:** A comet streaked unexpectedly across the night, "like a spear plunged into the very heart of the heavens." The next morning, the sun destroyed this fire, but it reoccurred again at night for the better part of a year. The people worried that maybe the sun would not be able to destroy this fire forever…and the source of all life would not rise in the morning.

**OMEN 3:** The lake surrounding Tenochtitlan swirled and suddenly boiled up on a calm day and flooded many houses built next to the water.

**OMEN 4:** The sound of a woman wailing could be heard at night, saying "O my beloved sons, we are all going to die."

**OMEN 5:** The thatched roof of the temple of Huitzilopochtli on top of the Great Pyramid burst into flames.

**OMEN 6:** The temple of the god of fire was destroyed by a noiseless thunderbolt.

**OMEN 7:** Aztec fishermen brought an ashen bird like a crane with a crest on its head like a mirror to Montezuma. When the king looked in the mirror, he saw the heavens and stars and warriors riding on deer. When Montezuma asked his advisors to examine the bird, it disappeared.

**OMEN 8:** A comet fell from the sky, divided into three, and scattered sparks throughout the Valley of Mexico.

**OMEN 9:** Strange, two-headed people appeared. When taken to Montezuma's special zoo for misfit human beings, they disappeared.

Requerimiento: This is a letter written to the native peoples of America from the Spanish.
1. What is the intent of the Spanish? Explain and give evidence from the text.
2. What is the tone of the letter? Supply evidence and direct quotes as to when the tone of the letter changes.
3. What assumptions are made by the Spanish in their views of the native peoples? In other words, do they view them as subordinate, wild, uncouth, etc.?

Omens of Doom
1. How might these omens, whether or not they were actual events or gossip spreading like wildfire, affect the Aztec view of the Spanish?

Aztec View of Conquistadors
1. How does this document indicate the Aztecs’ lack of technology compared to the Spanish?
2. What is the tone of the article?
3. Do you think the Aztecs would have viewed the Spanish in the same light if they had not heard the omens of doom?

Letter from Bartolomé de las Casas
1. Is de las Cases critical of the natives or the Spanish?
2. Why might he write a letter like this to the King?

Letter from Cortes
1. What did Cortes do that angered the Aztec people in the temple?
2. How does the Requerimiento justify Cortes’s actions?
3. Was Cortes justified in his actions?
4. What if Cortes honestly believed that the natives needed to become Christians in order to attain eternal salvation, are his actions justified now? Explain your answer.

Per my instruction, please get into groups of 2–4. You will draw a two-face silhouette, where one side is an Aztec and the other a Conquistador. Next to the face, you will write information about:
1. How each side treated their initial meeting
2. How each side viewed the other, such as descriptions
3. Motive for each side (what did each group want from the other?)
Viewing Guide: Teacher’s Answer Key
Viewing Guide:
Guns, Germs, and Steel: Episode 2

Directions: Before viewing the film, read each question below so you know what information and ideas you should be looking for as you watch Episode 2. Record your answers to each question by providing as many facts, details, and examples as possible to answer each question. Be prepared to discuss your answers with the class.

1. At the time that the Spanish conquistador’s invaded the Inca Empire, they were armed with state of the art weaponry. Describe this weaponry.

2. What is Jared Diamond’s explanation for why the Spanish had advanced to steel swords while Inca’s were still making tools and weapons from bronze?

3. How did the battle tactics used by the Spanish conquistadors help the small army defeat the Inca army that outnumbered it by the thousands?

4. According to Jared Diamond, what made the Europeans “accidental conquerors”?

For more GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL lesson plans...go to: www.pbs.org/gunsgermssteel/
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Viewing Guide: Teacher’s Answer Key
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1. At the time that the Spanish conquistador’s invaded the Inca Empire, they were armed with state of the art weaponry. Describe this weaponry.

   Answers will vary but should include: horses that made them appear like god-like half man, half beast warriors, body armor, guns, and steel swords.

2. What is Jared Diamond’s explanation for why the Spanish had advanced to steel swords while Inca’s were still making tools and weapons from bronze?

   Answer: Because Europe was geographically close to the Fertile Crescent, they inherited the 7,000 years of metal technology that had been developed there. Because they had a diversified society that allowed for specialization, the Spanish devoted time and effort to producing the longest, strongest, sharpest swords possible.

3. How did the battle tactics used by the Spanish conquistadors help the small army defeat the Inca army that outnumbered it by the thousands?

   Answer: The Spaniards begin by surprising the Incas, firing their guns and coming out of hiding on horseback. As they rode, the conquistadors used their swords to hack, cut, and stab the Incas who were panicking and fleeing rather than standing firm. Had the Incas known more about this style of fighting, they could have been victorious by sheer numbers if they had stood their ground against the cavalry.

4. According to Jared Diamond, what made the Europeans “accidental conquerors”?

   Answer: Because of their geographic location and history, the Europeans were the first to acquire guns, germs, and steel, therefore they could conquer other lesser developed civilizations.

For more GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL lesson plans...go to: www.pbs.org/gunsgermssteel/
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Name:
Worksheet on United Streaming: Aztecs

1. When did their civilization flourish?
2. What colors are in the Mexican flag?

3. Name one modern country that the Aztecs lived in.
4. How did the Aztecs get around?

5. In Aztec times, lush gardens grew on artificial islands, called chi____________________.
6. What was the focus of Aztec life?

7. In addition to the gods of rain and fertility, what god did the Aztecs hold in high esteem?
8. Why were calendars essential to Aztec life?
9. What was a key element in Aztec religious ceremonies?

10. Who was the Aztec ruler when the Europeans arrived? M___________________ II.
11. Who was the Spanish conquistador who led the Europeans?
12. Who did the Spanish execute when they ruled the Aztecs?
13. What disease swept across the land?
14. Name one interesting fact that you learned about the Aztecs:

Words that might be hard to spell: chinampas, Montezuma
ESSAY FRAME

Prompt:

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH:

Thesis (Introduce topics, Where are you taking the reader?)

Body 1: TOPIC:

TOPIC SENTENCE: (must introduce topic, link to thesis; can only be one sentence)

Supporting Factual Information:

1.___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________

2.___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________

3.___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________

4.___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________________________

Body 2: TOPIC:

TOPIC SENTENCE: (must introduce topic, link to thesis; can only be one sentence)

Supporting Factual Information:

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Body 3: TOPIC:

**TOPIC SENTENCE, mini-thesis:** (must introduce topic, link to thesis; can only be one sentence)

Supporting Factual Information:

1. 

2. 

3. 

**CONCLUSION:** (must be three sentences, why does your opinion matter/go global (but not too global), wrap-it-up)

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
Pre-AP Example of Excellent Thesis.


The Aztecs have often been painted by Spanish histories as a cruel and bloodthirsty native civilization. The lack of history showing the Aztecs in a good light has been conspicuously absent until very recently, when new discoveries were made showing a different side of one of the greatest old world nations. These discoveries must be taken into account and that calls for the entire history of the Aztecs to be rewritten for a more unbiased view. History should describe the Aztec civilization as tough, because of their ruthless conquests and graphic human sacrifices, but civilized as well, because of their farming, city, and family life.
They strike open the wretched Indian’s chest with flint knives and hastily tear out the palpitating heart that with the blood, they present to the idols in whose name they have performed the sacrifice. Then, they cut off the arms, thighs, and head, eating the arms and thighs at their ceremonial banquet. The head they hang up on a beam, and the body of the sacrificed man is not eaten but given to the beasts of prey.

**Note:** Bernal Díaz accompanied Hernán Cortés and the other conquistadors on the 1519 encounter with the Aztecs. He wrote an extensive and informative journal of the experience.
QUIZ. Use the information from your DBQ, Guns, Germs and Steel, and the short video from class yesterday to answer the following questions.

1. Describe the land that the Aztecs settled on using three words.

2. In the Aztec empire, lush gardens grew on artificial islands, called ____________________.

3. What disease, to which the Aztec had little immunity, killed millions of their people?

4. Were the Aztecs monotheistic or polytheistic?

5. Who was the Aztec ruler when the Europeans arrived?

6. Who was the Spanish conquistador who led the Europeans?

7. Jared Diamond asserts in Guns, Germs and Steel that the Europeans had “geographic luck.” Explain this concept and why Diamond believes it helped the Spanish defeat the Aztecs.

8. What was the main focus of Aztec life?
   A. Religion
   B. Politics
   C. Farming
   D. Weaving

9. Why were other tribes around the Aztecs willing to join with the Conquistadors?
   A. They believed the Sun god was going to take them to another world.
   B. They were bitter about the tribute they had to give the Aztec empire.
   C. They were promised to return to Europe with the Conquistadors.
   D. Nearby tribes did not ally with the Conquistadors but helped the Aztecs.

10. Use the graphic to answer the following question.
    What aspect of Aztec life does this graphic portray?
    A. Politics
    B. Dinner
    C. Religion
    D. Economy
Colonialism Case Study: The Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico

Documents taken from

On New Year’s Eve, 1993, the Mexican state of Chiapas was thrust upon the international scene as the Zapatista guerrilla army seized control of the colonial city of San Cristobal de las Casas and 5 towns in the surrounding Chiapas highlands.

Once the breadbasket of the indigenous civilizations, when the Spanish arrived the indigenous peoples were progressively pushed off the Chiapas lands by the expansion of plantations owned by Spanish-speaking Ladinos (people of mixed Spanish and Indian descent). By 1900, the fertile lands of the region were occupied by cattle ranches and sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations. The indigenous people of Chiapas were forced to farm the thin, rocky soils found on the steep slopes of the highlands. They lost their lands and have been victims of centuries of fierce racism and discrimination on the part of the dominant Ladino society, which continues to this day.

In the 1950s, the shrinking plots of land in the highlands could no longer support the Indian population and the poorest began to move toward the last frontier, the Lacanon jungle area to...
the East. These colonists cleared tracts of rainforest land and exposed red clay soils that loser their fertility within one to three crop cycles. Spanish-speaking peasants fleeing poverty in many other areas of Mexico soon joined them. Oil booms and economic improvements have occurred in other parts of Mexico, but the situation in Chiapas remains dire. Thus, the beginning of the EZLN and the “Letter from Marcos”, its direct spokesperson.

The Zapatistas. Named for betrayed revolutionary war hero Emiliano Zapata, father of the agricultural reform which, unfortunately, never reached the southernmost Mexican state of Chiapas. One could say the revolution passed Chiapas by altogether, leaving it living in the last century. This is where the Zapatistas found themselves. This is why they started a war not to fight, but to be heard. Their revolution rung in the new year at about 4am January 1, 1994. They battled the Mexican army for 12 days before a cease-fire was called. It has held, but meanwhile, the Mexican army has used the time to spread itself throughout the territory which supports the rebels, wreaking havoc on the local communities. Independent human rights groups estimate the Mexican army presence in Chiapas at between 30-40 thousand troops or one third of the entire Mexican armed forces.

Economics of Chiapas: A handful of businesses, one of which is the Mexican State, take all the wealth out of Chiapas and in exchange leave behind their mortal and pestilent mark: in 1989 these businesses took 1,222,669,000,000 pesos from Chiapas and only left behind 616,340,000,000 pesos worth of credit and public works. More than 600,000,000,000 pesos went to the belly of the beast.

In Chiapas, Pemex [the national oil company] has 86 teeth clenched in the townships of Estación Juárez, Reforma, Ostuacán, Pichucalco, and Ocosingo. Every day they suck out 92,000 barrels of petroleum and 517,000,000,000 cubic feet of gas. They take away the petroleum and gas, and in exchange leave behind the mark of capitalism: ecological destruction, agricultural plunder, hyperinflation, alcoholism, prostitution, and poverty. The beast is still not satisfied and has extended its tentacles to the Lacandona jungle: eight petroleum deposits are under exploration. The paths are made with machetes by the same campesinos (peasants) who are left without land by the insatiable beast. The trees fall and dynamite explodes on land where campesinos are not allowed to cut down trees to cultivate. Every tree that is cut down costs them a fine that is 10 times the minimum wage, and a jail sentence. The poor cannot cut down trees, but the petroleum beast can, a beast that every day falls more and more into foreign hands. The campesinos cut them down to survive, the beast to plunder.

Chiapas also bleeds coffee. Thirty-five percent of the coffee produced in Mexico comes from this area. The industry employs 87,000 people. Forty- seven percent of the coffee is for national

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consumption and 53% is exported abroad, mainly to the United States and Europe. More than 100,000 tons of coffee are taken from this state to fatten the beast's bank accounts: in 1988 a kilo of pergamino coffee was sold abroad for 8,000 pesos. The Chiapaneco producers were paid 2,500 pesos or less.

The second most important plunder, after coffee, is beef. Three million head of cattle wait for middle-men and a small group of businessmen to take them away to fill refrigerators in Arriaga, Villahermosa, and Mexico City. The cattle are sold for 400 pesos per kilo by the poor farmers and resold by the middle-men and businessmen for up to ten times the price they paid for them.  
(Excerpt from Zapatistas! Documents of the New Mexican Revolution by Unk and Members Of Emiliano Zapata Liberation Movement)

Statistics about Mexico and Chiapas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>Chiapas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent urban</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent rural</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with running water</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with access to electricity</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Read the “Letter from Marcos.” Explain the following quote:

We were born between blood and gun powder, between blood and gunpowder we were raised.

1b. When Marcos writes of “the country of money putting itself in the middle of all of the flags,” what country do you think he is referring to?

1c. What is the tone of this letter?

2. What do you think the policy of the Mexican government should be toward the EZLN and Chiapas?

3. Do you think that the United Nations or the United States should intervene in this area? Why or why not?

4. In conclusion, how do you think this case study in Chiapas relates to the legacy of the Spanish Conquest?

5. If the people of Chiapas are primarily of native ethnic origin, such as Ladino and Mayan descent, why do they accuse the Mexican government of racism? (Remember that the Spanish took power and mixed with the locals, creating an ethnicity that dominated the new country called Mexico).

6. What might have happened had the Spanish not conquered the Mayan peoples?
Excerpt from a letter sent anonymously ("Marcos") to a journalist of the Reforma.

January 1999

Madame:

I recently read your letter, published in the pages of the Reforma newspaper on December 31, 1998. I am grateful for your lines, as well as for the sincerity which inspires them and the honest interest which, from the beginning of our movement, you have had in Chiapas, and the Mexican indigenous in general....

Good, let's get on to your letter. You ask if the Zapatista indigenous communities are worse off than before the uprising. No. We continue without schools, teachers, hospitals, doctors, medicines, good prices for our products, land, technology in order to work it, fair salaries, food of sufficient quality and quantity, decent housing, exactly the same as before 1994. The communities which are not Zapatista are in the same circumstances. We have not accepted the government's hand-outs. We have not accepted them, nor will we, because, as demonstrated by the living conditions of the indigenous who have accepted them, the problems are not resolved, and the quality of life does not improve on the most minimal level. But, above all, we do not accept them because we did not rise up for schools, credits and Conasupo stores for ourselves. We rose up for a better country, one where, among other things, our rights as Indian peoples are recognized, we are respected and we are considered to be citizens, and not beggars. Despite everything, we have tried to improve our conditions, and, in order to do that, in some places we have started schools, clinics and pharmacies with health workers. This little we have, we have built and re-built (because one of the "heroic" tasks of the federal Army in Chiapas is the destruction of schools, clinics, pharmacies and libraries) through our own efforts and with the help of good persons, organized and not, who come to these lands.....

Source, and link to full text of letter, Communitas: