

presence in Brazil. Proprietor Duarte Coelho Pereira, a former soldier and diplomat in India, recruited numerous settlers and expanded the region's economic base, previously centered on dyewoods, to include sugar production. He also cultivated good relations with Indians in Pernambuco. His brother-in-law married the daughter of a local chief, and the proprietor encouraged other colonists to do likewise.

In other respects, however, the development of these captaincies proved disastrous for the indigenous peoples of Brazil. During the first 30 years after Cabral's arrival, when Portuguese settlers were few in number, the natives retained substantial control over the terms of their interaction with the foreigners. They cut dyewood when and where they pleased and exchanged the logs for knives and other useful tools brought from Europe. The successful donatários and their accompanying entourages disrupted this simple barter economy, as aspiring sugar planters enslaved the natives and appropriated their lands.

== THE SPANISH IN MESOAMERICA AND THE ANDES

Meanwhile, the Spanish established sizable permanent colonies, well stocked with familiar plants and domestic animals, and forced indigenous peoples to extract gold from the islands' interior highlands. Almost overnight, the natives of the Caribbean went from trading partners to slaves. At the same time, explorations along the coast of Mesoamerica yielded tantalizing rumors of fabulous kingdoms on the mainland. In 1517 and 1518, two separate expeditions landed in Yucatán. Even in decline, the Mayan city-states were far more impressive than anything Europeans had seen thus far in the Americas. Then in 1519, Hernán Cortés led several hundred of his countrymen over the mountains to the great city of Tenochtitlan. The discovery of the Inca empire followed 13 years later.

Given the formidable military prowess and imperial grandeur of the Aztecs and the Incas, conflict with the invaders was all but inevitable. Victory in battle, almost always with the help of native allies, transformed the Spanish colonial project once again. The mainland held riches far greater than the islands of the Caribbean. The large and highly disciplined populations of Mexico and Peru appeared to be potential subjects of the Spanish crown, converts to Christianity, workers in the colonists' new enterprises, and active collaborators in building a new society.

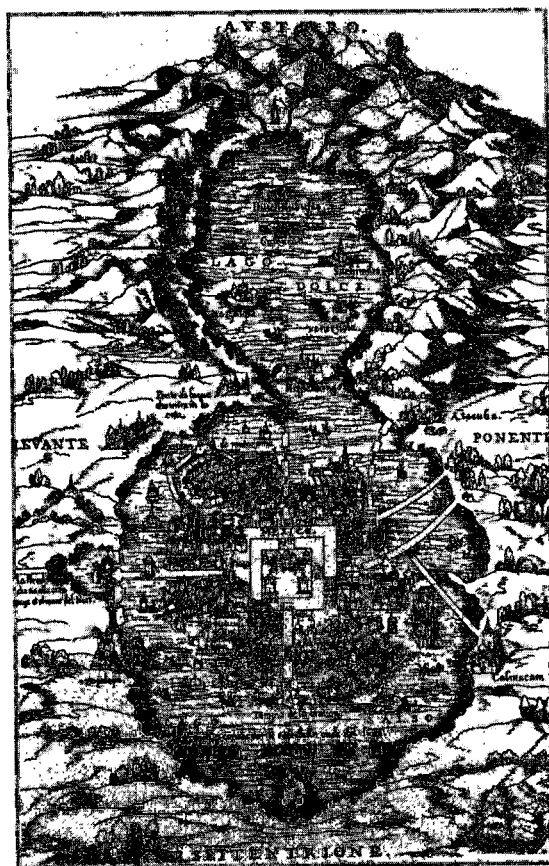
Cortés and the Aztecs

By 1518, Cuba had become the center of Spanish operations in the Caribbean, and it was from there that the expeditions to Mesoamerica were launched. With word of promising discoveries in Yucatán, Cuba's governor, Diego Velázquez, commissioned a local encomendero, Hernán Cortés, to lead an expedition to the mainland. Cortés prepared energetically for his new assignment, so much so that the governor began to see him as a rival and rescinded his commission. Ambitious and headstrong, Cortés set sail anyway, with 11 ships and about 500 men under his command.

The expedition headed first for Yucatán. There they met Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spaniard who had shipwrecked there 8 years before and was now fluent in the local Mayan dialect. Aguilar joined Cortés, and they proceeded along the coast to Tabasco, where native chiefs made a conciliatory offering of 20 young women to the Spaniards. As the expedition headed north along the Gulf Coast, Spaniards noticed that one of these women, known to history as Malintzin, could converse with Nahuatl speakers they encountered. She could also speak Mayan with Aguilar, who then translated her words into Spanish. Through these two interpreters, Cortés communicated with couriers dispatched by the Aztec emperor Moctezuma to investigate rumors of intruders on the coast.

The messengers begged Cortés not to venture on toward Tenochtitlan, but he and his men were not to be deterred. Early in the march inland, they learned of unrest within the Mexica empire, as one disgruntled chief offered them several hundred porters to help them carry weapons and supplies. Hearing next of Tlaxcala's long-standing enmity toward the Aztecs, Cortés proposed an alliance. The Tlaxcalans initially rejected his

A map of Tenochtitlan—Mexico City designed by Cortés. In the sixteenth century, the custom of placing north at the top of maps had not yet become standard. In this map, the southern part of the valley of Mexico, with its fresh water lake, is at the top.



overtures, but they sued for peace after a few days' battle. Cortés next set his sights on Cholula, a nearby town only recently under Aztec control. There the Spaniards and their native consorts massacred several thousand warriors as a warning to others who might stand in their way. Meanwhile, Moctezuma could not halt the Spaniards' advance to Tenochtitlan.

On November 19, 1519, Moctezuma and Cortés met on the causeway at the southern entrance to the Mexica capital. Perhaps hoping to placate the strangers, Moctezuma allowed them to enter the city and offered them lodging in a palace at the center of town. An uneasy calm settled over the Valley of Mexico for the next several months, as leaders of surrounding city-states grew increasingly suspicious of the strangers' motives. In the spring of 1520, Cortés learned that Governor Velázquez had sent an expedition from Cuba to oust him. Leaving 80 Spanish soldiers in charge at Tenochtitlan, he headed to the coast, where he defeated his rivals and added several hundred men to his own forces. Meanwhile, the Spaniards' position at Tenochtitlan deteriorated badly, when Cortés's lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado, ordered an attack on a large gathering of Aztec nobles and the Mexica revolted.

Arriving back in Tenochtitlan, Cortés attempted to restore peace. He brought Moctezuma out on a rooftop to see if he could calm the populace. Instead Moctezuma was killed—by his own people, according to Spanish accounts; by the Spaniards, according to indigenous sources. Cortés and his forces then beat a hasty and undignified retreat, sustaining heavy losses as they fled. They did not abandon hope of taking Tenochtitlan, however. At Tlaxcala, they began preparing for a new assault. In December of 1520, some 550 Spaniards and 10,000 Tlaxcalans set out for the Valley of Mexico once again.

The attack on Tenochtitlan began in May 1521. Swords, pikes, and armor made of steel, as well as crossbows, arquebuses, and cannons gave the invaders a clear advantage over adversaries armed only with wooden and obsidian weapons. Entering the city, however, they encountered fierce resistance. Block by block they advanced, destroying buildings and engaging defenders in hand-to-hand combat. On August 13, 1521, the battle for Tenochtitlan ended as the Spaniards captured the young king Cuauhtemoc. Cortés and his native allies then subdued the surrounding valley, and the mighty empire of the Mexica collapsed. Tenochtitlan became the city of Mexico, capital of the colony that Cortés called "New Spain."

The Search for "Otro México"

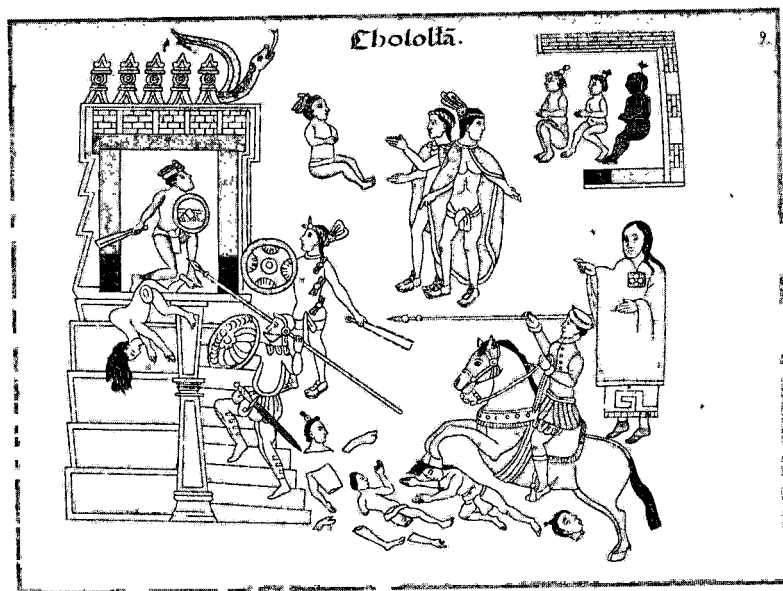
After seeing the splendors of Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards reasoned that the new continent must hold other magnificent kingdoms. During the 20 years following Cortés's victory, a flood of new immigrants joined veteran conquistadors in a frantic search for "another Mexico." In so doing, they reconnoitered a vast expanse of territory reaching across what is now the United States from the Carolinas to California, southward to Central America, Peru, and Chile, and the entire length of the Amazon River.

How Historians Understand

MALINTZIN AND THE USES OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Some historical figures capture the popular imagination, becoming the subjects of myth, fiction, and film. Sometimes too, they come to symbolize the preoccupations of later generations, even becoming scapegoats for collective anger and frustration. In the process, the real person and the historical context in which he or she lived are lost in emotionally charged debate. Such is the case of the Mexican woman baptized as Marina and more commonly known as Malinche or Malintzin.

As Cortés's interpreter, Malintzin played a pivotal role in the Spanish conquest of Mexico, but we know very few details about her life. She was born about 1500, near Coatzacoalcos on Mexico's southern Gulf coast, and spent her early years in a Nahuatl-speaking household. Later, she was sold as a slave to a Maya group and learned their language as well. She was initially "given" to one of Cortés's lieutenants, but when her linguistic ability became apparent Cortés appropriated her for himself. In 1521 or thereabouts, she gave birth to Cortés's son Martín, and a short time later she wed the Spaniard Juan Jaramillo in a Catholic ceremony. When Cortés departed Mexico City for Honduras, she and her husband went along, as did the deposed, captive emperor Cuauhtemoc. Along the way, Cortés charged that Cuauhtemoc was plotting rebellion and ordered him tried and executed. Malintzin reportedly translated as Franciscan friars heard the young king's confession.



The massacre at Cholula, by an Indian artist of the sixteenth century. Malintzin is shown on the right.

Meanwhile, she and Juan Jaramillo had a daughter, and shortly thereafter Malintzin died.

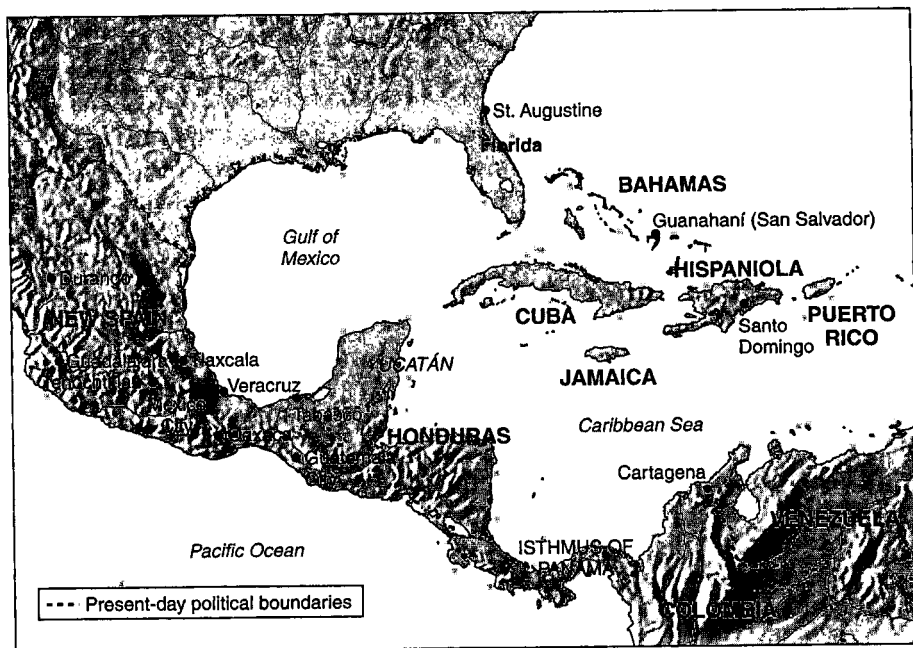
These are all the verifiable biographical details we have about Malintzin. From her own time forward many conflicting images of her have appeared. The conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo made her the heroine of his narrative on the conquest of New Spain, describing occasions on which she reportedly saved the Spaniards from ambush and certain death. Sixteenth-century native pictorial representations of Malintzin show her as a powerful figure much honored by her people. Later accounts present a highly romanticized story, full of patently false embellishments. Some, for example, have her traveling to Spain and being presented at the court of King Charles. Indians in Mexico down to today have appropriated her in folk dramas that depict the coming of Christianity.

Other portrayals of Malintzin have not been so kind. Nationalistic Mexicans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries vilified her for having "sold out" her own people, and the term "malinchista" came to mean "traitor." Because she bore the children of Spaniards, Malintzin has been cast as the archetypal mother of the Mexican nation, raped or seduced by the invaders. The Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz called her *la chingada*, a vulgar and highly pejorative term suggesting both rape and personal dishonor. Still other depictions trivialize her, presenting her as the love slave of Cortés. All of these accounts lack an understanding of Malintzin in the context of her situation. She and countless other native women were sexual objects in the eyes of native and Spanish men alike. What distinguished Malintzin was her linguistic capability. Her childhood experiences gave her knowledge of two languages, but the historical record suggests that she possessed an exceptional ability to understand various dialects in both Maya and Nahuatl. She also apparently learned Spanish readily.

Malintzin did what human beings in most other times and places have done, using her talents to make the best of a difficult situation. Those who blame her for betraying "her people" forget that the natives of the Americas saw themselves as many separate peoples, with no more in common than sixteenth-century Spaniards thought they had with Germans or Swedes. Their common fate as colonial subjects transformed them into "Indians," first in the eyes of Europeans, and only much later in the eyes of native peoples themselves. To cast her as a love-struck girl mesmerized by Cortés or as a duplicitous traitor is to make her something less than human.

Questions for Discussion

If a man had served as Cortés's principal interpreter, would the events of the conquest have been any different? Why or why not? Would the historical memory of a male interpreter have been different? If so, how? If not, why not?



Mexico and the Caribbean in the sixteenth century

Cortés himself spearheaded the quest for new worlds to conquer. He ventured first to Central America, reaching Honduras by 1524, and later sponsored expeditions in the Gulf of California. His key lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado, founded Guatemala City in 1524. Fifteen years later, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado set off on a journey that took him to the people who became known as the Pueblo in present-day New Mexico, while Hernando De Soto reconnoitered over a wide area from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River, but neither of these expeditions found anything comparable to Tenochtitlan.

The Pizarros and the Incas

In the South American Andes, however, the Spaniards did find "another Mexico." As early as 1523, word circulated in Panama that a large empire lay somewhere to the south. Among those eager to follow up these leads was Francisco Pizarro, a Spaniard who had resided on the isthmus for several years. In 1531, Pizarro sailed with 180 men to the coast of Ecuador and Peru, gathering information as he went. Learning that Atahualpa had defeated his rival and half-brother Huascar, Pizarro hastened to the mountains near Cajamarca, where the new emperor and his army were headquartered.

Pizarro and Atahualpa met on November 16, 1532. The Spaniards had a familiar routine for such encounters. Native rulers were summarily informed that the invaders

represented the true God and a great sovereign from across the sea and were "invited" to become Christians and subjects of the king of Spain. Atahualpa was not particularly impressed. His scornful response provided the Spaniards an excuse to attack his troops and take the emperor into custody. Atahualpa then offered a hefty ransom in exchange for his freedom, and arranged to have more than 13,000 pounds of gold and 26,000 pounds of silver brought to Cajamarca. Pizarro and his associates, however, decided that the emperor was a threat to their safety. In a mock trial, they convicted him of plotting against them and executed him in July of 1533. In the meantime, native warriors loyal to Atahualpa had killed Huascar.

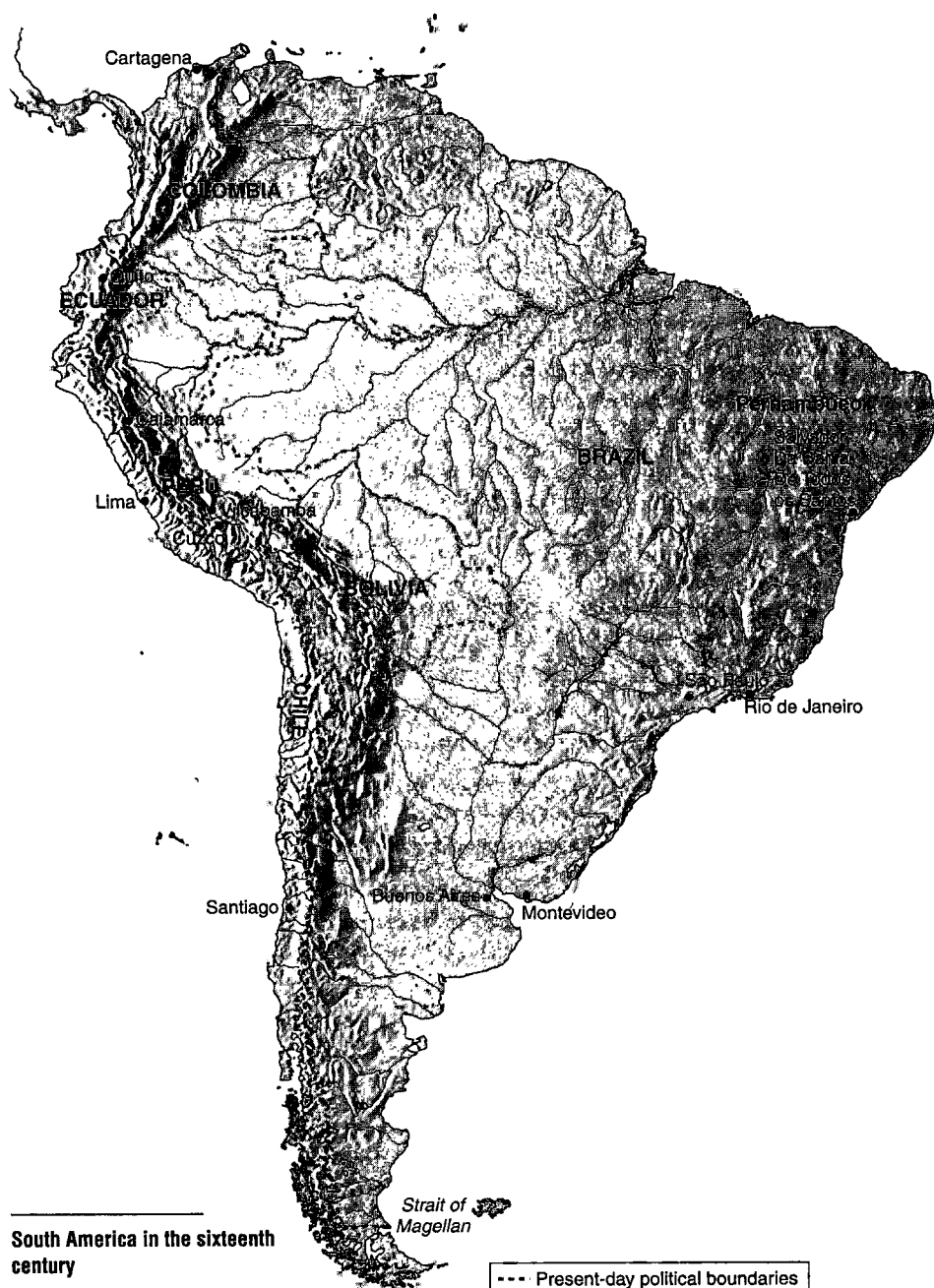
Meanwhile, Pizarro seized Cuzco with the help of Indians hostile to the Incas and installed Atahualpa's half-brother Manco Inca as emperor, naively expecting him to cooperate fully with the Spaniards. Pizarro declined to make Cuzco the capital of the new colony of Peru, choosing instead the city of Lima, on the coast, the "city of the kings," which he founded in 1535. Lima was well situated for Peru's integration in the emerging Spanish maritime empire, but it left Cuzco as a power base for his enemies, both Spanish and Indian. Other Spaniards marched northward into present-day Ecuador and Colombia.

Early in 1536, Manco Inca led a revolt, attacking Lima and besieging the Spanish settlers at Cuzco for nearly 8 months. Unable to dislodge the Spaniards from either locale, Manco Inca and his forces retreated to the remote mountain fortress of Vilcabamba north of Cuzco, where they maintained a rebel neo-Inca state for more than 30 years. Meanwhile, civil war brewed among the conquistadors. A key player was Diego de Almagro, a former supporter of Pizarro who felt he had not been suitably rewarded for his role in the conquest of Peru. In 1535, Almagro led an expedition to Chile, hoping to find there an alternative kingdom for himself. The venture yielded little, and 2 years later these frustrated would-be conquistadors straggled back to Cuzco to find the city in ruins and governed by Pizarro's brothers Hernando and Gonzalo. Almagro wanted to control Cuzco himself, and launched a revolt against the Pizarros.

The civil war lasted over a decade. Both Almagro and Francisco Pizarro died, and Hernando Pizarro spent 20 years in a Spanish prison for his role in the disturbances. In 1546, Gonzalo Pizarro and his supporters assassinated Peru's first viceroy, Blasco Núñez Vela, sent by King Charles to impose order and to enforce laws requiring that the colonists cease exploiting the Indians. Unrest continued until 1548, when a new governor arrived, defeated Gonzalo's forces, and had him beheaded. Although rivalry among the conquistadors continued, Spanish control of Peru now rested on a more stable base, and by the early 1570s they defeated the native rebels at Vilcabamba.

Military Conquest or Strategic Alliance?

Historians have long debated how just a few hundred Spaniards, far from home and often divided among themselves, succeeded in toppling the Aztec and Inca empires. Without question, European technology—steel swords, gunpowder, Spanish crossbows,



the ships that Cortés constructed for his marine assault on Tenochtitlan via Lake Texcoco—gave them certain tactical advantages. Their weapons enabled them to kill at greater distances than their enemies could. Steel armor provided better protection than the quilted cotton gear of native warriors. Spanish horses gave them superior mobility, at

least in open areas. Mastiffs, the huge dogs who accompanied the Spanish forces in Mexico, also inflicted casualties. European technological superiority did not guarantee victory, however. By August of 1521, Cortés's forces had only 80 horses and 16 artillery pieces. Pizarro set off for Peru in 1531 with only 30 horses. Guns proved useless when powder supplies ran out, horses could not maneuver well in the narrow mountain passes of the Andes or on the causeways leading to Tenochtitlan, and native warriors readily seized swords from fallen conquistadors.

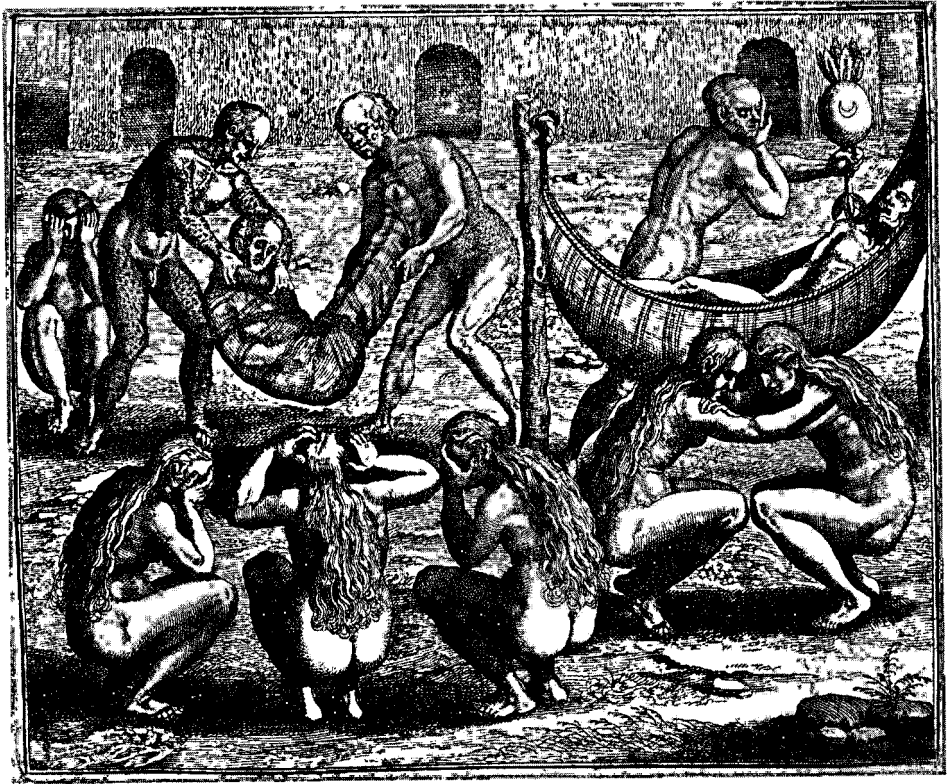
Infectious diseases also played a role in the conquests of Mexico and Peru. Smallpox struck Hispaniola in 1518 and apparently reached Mexico in 1520. It then spread to Peru well in advance of the conquistadors themselves. The disease disrupted native leadership, claiming the lives of the Mexica emperor Cuicahuac, who succeeded Moctezuma, and the Inca Huayna Capac, father of the rivals Huascar and Atahualpa. The smallpox virus undermined the natives' will to resist the invaders, but it killed many native allies of the Spaniards as well.

Some historians and many popular writers have stressed psychological factors in explaining the victories of Cortés and Pizarro. They have portrayed Moctezuma as a fatalistic mystic incapable of decisive action as the bearded strangers drew near his capital. These writers have made much of later Spanish and indigenous reports, compiled well after the fact, that the Nahuas viewed Cortés and his men as gods, but there is no evidence that these claims are anything more than justifications crafted by descendants of those defeated. Cortés's own account shows no sign that the people of Mexico took him for a god.

Perhaps the most decisive factor in the "Spanish conquest" was the assistance of thousands of indigenous people. As many as 200,000 natives assisted Cortés as warriors and porters. Shrewd native chiefs looked to enhance their own political positions by ordering their soldiers to battle, not so much as allies of the Spanish, but as enemies of the Aztec and Inca states. These leaders understood the invaders had a significant technological edge, one that might well bring the downfall of Tenochtitlan and Cuzco. They could not have foreseen the consequences of this tactical maneuver—the creation of a colonial society in which Spaniards claimed the upper hand.

== BUILDING A COLONIAL SOCIETY

For the native peoples of the Americas, the brutal slave raids and the defeat of the Aztec and Inca empires constituted just the first phase of the European occupation. Far more deadly were the diseases the intruders unwittingly brought with them. Their burdens mounted as conquistadors looked to translate what they had won on the battlefield into positions of power and wealth for themselves and commandeered native workers to help them build their colonies. Meanwhile, a new society was taking shape, as thousands of European immigrants and African slaves crossed the Atlantic during the sixteenth century.



Engraving by the sixteenth-century Flemish artist Theodor de Bry, based on a woodcut published in 1557 by Hans Staden, a German soldier held captive by Tupis for several years. Images such as this circulated widely in Europe, helping fuel the Black Legend, the idea that the Spanish and the Portuguese were exceptionally brutal conquerors.

The Ecological Conquest

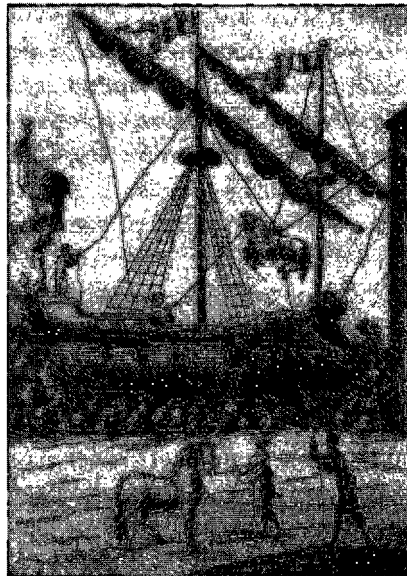
Plants, animals, and unseen microbes that crossed the Atlantic with the human settlers brought about a transformation of the natural environment unprecedented in human history. Smallpox struck some people even before they saw their first European, and it took many victims even as people of Tenochtitlan waged war on Cortés's forces. But these outbreaks were just the beginning of a cycle that repeatedly ravaged native peoples for many generations to come. Periodic episodes of smallpox, measles, influenza, plague, and typhus took thousands of lives and severely disrupted native society. Even those who survived an epidemic could become its victims. When illness struck at a crucial point in the agricultural cycle, few hands were available to plant or harvest crops, and famine loomed. Malnourished and weakened by the invaders' excessive labor demands, native people were in turn left more vulnerable to the next outbreak of disease. Because the epidemics took so many adults in the prime of their reproductive

years, birth rates plummeted in native societies, and children who lived might have had no one to care for them.

In the Caribbean, the native population all but disappeared within a couple of generations. Fifty years after Columbus's landfall, fewer than 2000 Indians remained on the island of Hispaniola. Coastal Brazil lost an estimated 95 percent of its aboriginal population during the sixteenth century, so that by 1600 only about 5000 Tupi survived. Estimates of the precontact population of the highland empires of Mexico and Peru vary widely, but there is no doubt that the population declined precipitously, perhaps by as much as 90 percent, over the first century following the Spanish invasion. Central Mexico had at least 10 million inhabitants when Cortés arrived, and perhaps as many as 25 million, while a century later the native population stood at just over 1 million. Only after the mid-seventeenth century, as native peoples began to acquire some resistance to the new diseases, did their numbers begin slowly to climb.

Diseases were just one element in the ecological conquest of the Americas. The Europeans brought many animals previously unknown to the native peoples. Although in time the Indians adopted horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, donkeys, goats, pigs, and chickens for their own uses, the immediate impact of these animals was severe damage to the ecosystem. Animals spread disease, trampled newly planted crops, and polluted water supplies, while their grazing denuded the landscape and led to soil erosion, a problem further exacerbated by the Europeans' insatiable demands for timber and firewood. In coastal Brazil, on the other hand, the forest gained a reprieve with fewer natives to exploit its resources, but with the disappearance of the indigenous population, vital knowledge of the many uses of those resources was lost.

Not all effects of the ecological conquest were negative. Imported animals provided new sources of protein. The natives also supplemented their diets with fruits and vegetables introduced by the Europeans. By the end of the sixteenth century, one could find apples, pears, and plums in many places, and citrus fruits wherever the climate was warm enough. But even when the effects were beneficial, without question the European invasion radically transformed the landscape of the Americas and the daily lives of native peoples.



Transporting horses
to America.