


# Conquest of the Americas and Africa

1450- 1700





- Between 1450- 1700 European civilization spread through trade, imperialism, and colonialism

# Causes of European Conquests

- Rise of capitalism and mercantilism
- Gunpowder
- New ship designs: *Caravels, Galleons*
- New navigation tools and techniques
- Cartography and printing press
- Defeat of Arab kingdoms in Mediterranean and Northern Africa

# Guns, Germs, and Steel

- Jared Diamond: anthropologist, ethnographer, historian, author
- Environmental differences create social and technological differences
- Europeans enjoyed superiority of more diverse agriculture, building materials, access to diverse civilizations, and immunity/resistance to virulent diseases.
- Europeans “collected” everything learned and acquired while travelling the globe. “Networked.”
- Cultures entirely cut off from the rest of the world could not partake of pooled knowledge.

# Factors of Exploration and Conquest

- Capitalism- pre-capitalist society to capitalist society
- Searching for wealth
- Geography
- Technology
- The Search for Souls



# First voyages and settlements

- Christopher Columbus (1451-1506): sponsored by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain to see out India and China. Didn't know North America was in the way.
- First voyage (1492): lands on San Salvador or Dominica island (now Bahamas). Columbus notices gold, continues to explore Cuba and Hispaniola, takes Native slaves.
- Second voyage (1493): Columbus sails with an army, priests, and farmer colonists. Creates a permanent colony, explores Virgin Islands, Antilles, Puerto Rico, abuses of Natives continue.
- Third voyage (1497): Columbus discovers mainland of South America (Venezuela), although he thinks it is another island. The Spanish colony rebels against his rule and abuse of power, Columbus is arrested.
- Fourth voyage (1502): Explores Jamaica, Caymans, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, further colonies established on Jamaica.
- Abuses of power: Columbus was accused by other Spanish people of being more concerned with gold and slavery than with converting the natives, and of abusing the colonies, hoarding wealth for himself and his family.

# Homework Questions

Download Chapter 1 of Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States" from the class wiki, read carefully and answer the following questions:

- Compare and contrast European and Native American cultures and civilizations as the author describes them;
- What methods did Europeans use to conquer and subjugate natives and why?
- What is the author's purpose in presenting the history of America in this way? Is it important to examine history through the eyes of the victims?

# Pre-Columbian Civilizations

- Numbering between 50 to 70 million
- People of central America, southern North America and eastern North America undergoing their own agricultural revolution.
- South American (excluding Peru), western and central North American people still hunter-gatherers.
- Evidence of a lot of trade and cultural exchange, complex laws, development of writing by some civilizations, evidence of early metal-working but most civilizations are still using stone, wood and bone tools.
- Fire, but no simple machines.

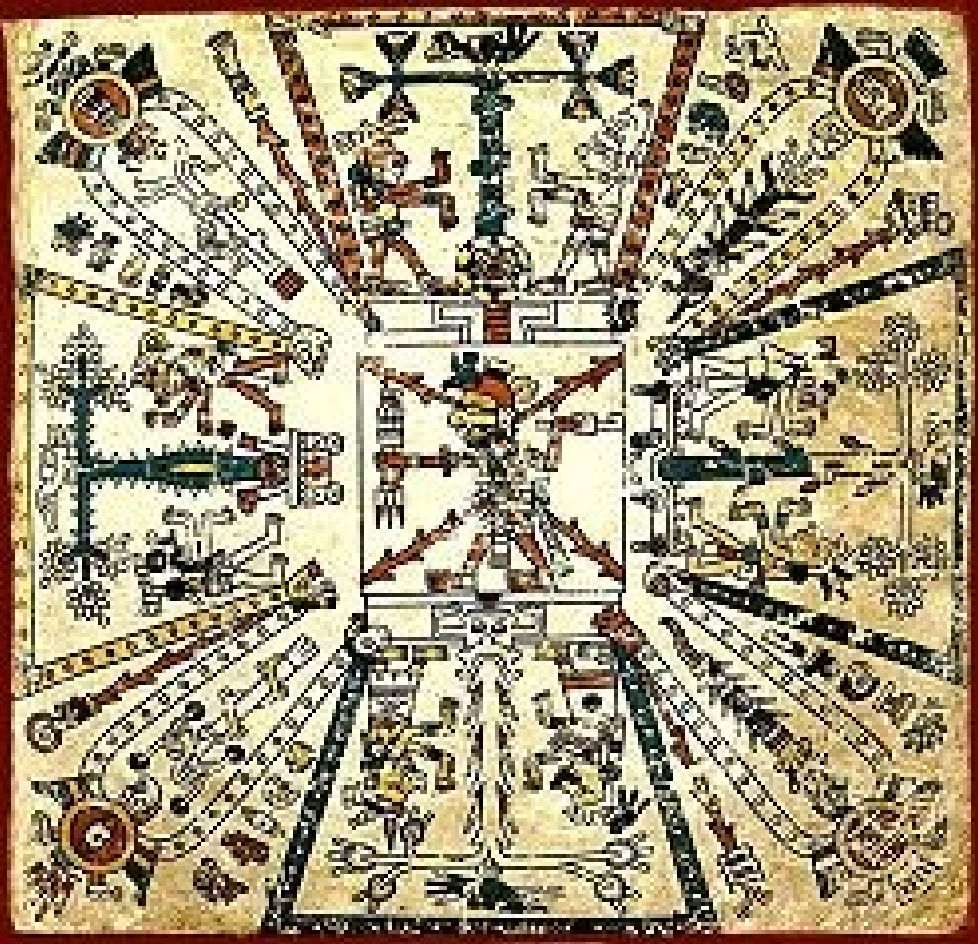




# Aztec Empire

- Most advanced pre-Columbian Meso-American (Central American) civilization
- The Aztec empire conquered and subjugated neighbouring tribes, ruled them through fear and constant warfare, which provided the Spanish with potential allies (enemies of the Aztecs)
- Fabulously rich by European standards
- At its height the Aztec empire might have numbered between 10-15 million people
- It was still a stone age civilization with no access to beasts of burden
- Devastated by smallpox before the Spanish arrive





# Aztec Society

- First Encounter- 1519 Hernan Cortes (Cortez)
- Great Cities- Tenochtitlán (Huge Temple, Numerous Canals, Royal Palace)
- Practised slavery, human sacrifice and limited cannibalism to maintain order and inspire fear.
- Highly Structured Society- Based on Agriculture and Religion, rigid classes of priests, warriors, merchants, farmers, and slaves.
- Primary sources of food were: corn, beans, gathered foods, and wild game.
- The Emperor of Aztecs at the time was Motecuzōma Xocoyotzin (better known as Moctezuma II or Moctezuma, or **Montezuma** by the Spanish) – a weak and ineffectual leader

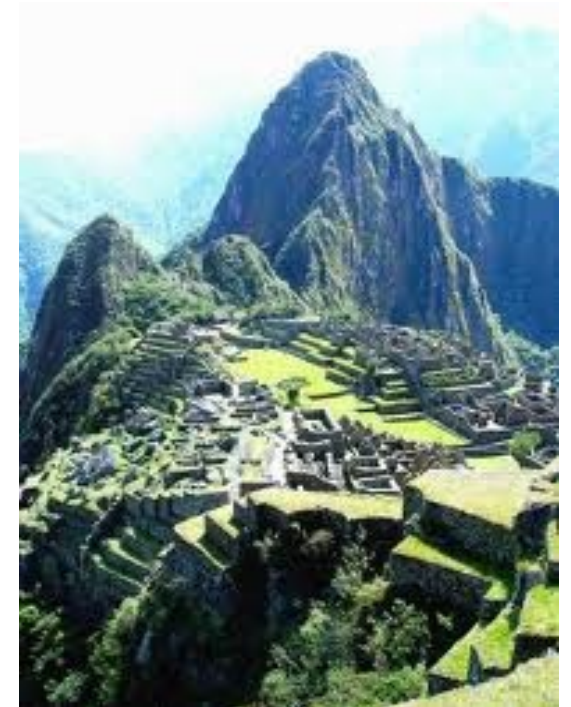
# Spanish Conquest

- The Spanish were initially viewed as gods or otherworldly beings.
- Spanish had ships, steel armour, metal weapons, horses, and gunpowder. Moreover, European diseases devastated and destabilized Aztec empire before the Spanish even arrived.
- Cortez was able to exploit the hatred of many tribes for Aztecs, as well as Aztec style of politics and war (war was ritualized by the Aztecs, and political betrayal was uncommon)
- Radical depopulation due to warfare, starvation and disease
- Forced labour and slavery
- Demoralization
- Introduction of cattle, sheep and goats and European-style agriculture



# Incas

- Extremely wealthy civilization
- Complex political organization and culture
- Accomplished amazing feats of engineering using only human labour (network of roads and cities) but no simple machines.
- Highly advanced knowledge of medicine and surgery (invented trepanning long before Europeans)
- Slavery and human sacrifice was common
- No knowledge of practical metal working or the wheel
- Weakened by decades of civil war and famine caused by European diseases.



- Series of European attacks (1525- 1572)
- Francisco Pizarro led the initial Spanish forces
- Defeated large Incan armies with only 160 men
- Captured the Incan Emperor Atahualpa (inspired by Cortez' example)
- *Encomienda* System – virtual slavery or serfdom, leads to plantation system
- Disease







OCEANVS ATLANTICVS

TROPICVS CANCRI

MARE MEDITERRANEUM

AQUINOCTIALIS CIRCVLVS

OCEANVS INDICVS

AFRICA  
TABULA  
NOVA

TROPICVS CAPRICORNI

INDIA OCEANVS



# Exploration of Africa

- North Africa was well-known to the Europeans, but was dominated by Muslim kingdoms.
- Circumvention of Africa and construction of trading ports and resupply stations was crucial for European trade with India
- Portuguese, Spanish, Genoese explorers exploring western coast of Africa as early as 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- Portuguese were the first to create permanent settlements and forts in Africa (present-day Ghana) and to go past Cape of Good Hope (southern-most point of Africa) in 1488 (Bartolomeu Dias)



# Exploration of Africa cont'd

- 1497-1498 Portuguese captain Vasco de Gama maps eastern coast of Africa and Madagascar, makes contact with Chinese traders in Kenya and opens route to India
- 1510 Portuguese set up permanent colony of Goa in India
- African interior remained unexplored until 19<sup>th</sup> century due to difficulty of travel, diseases deadly to Europeans, and hostile natives.
- Nonetheless, Africa was seen by Europeans as a valuable source of gold, ivory, spices, sugar cane, coffee and **slaves**. Trans-Atlantic slave trade beginning as early as 1520s.





# Treaty of Tordesillas

Treaty between Portugal and Spain negotiated by the pope in 1481, and renegotiated in 1494

Divided the non-European world for conquest between Portugal and Spain

Portugal receives the coast of modern Brazil, West African coast, the Indian Ocean route to India, and the Pacific

Spain receives the western Atlantic Ocean and most of Americas

