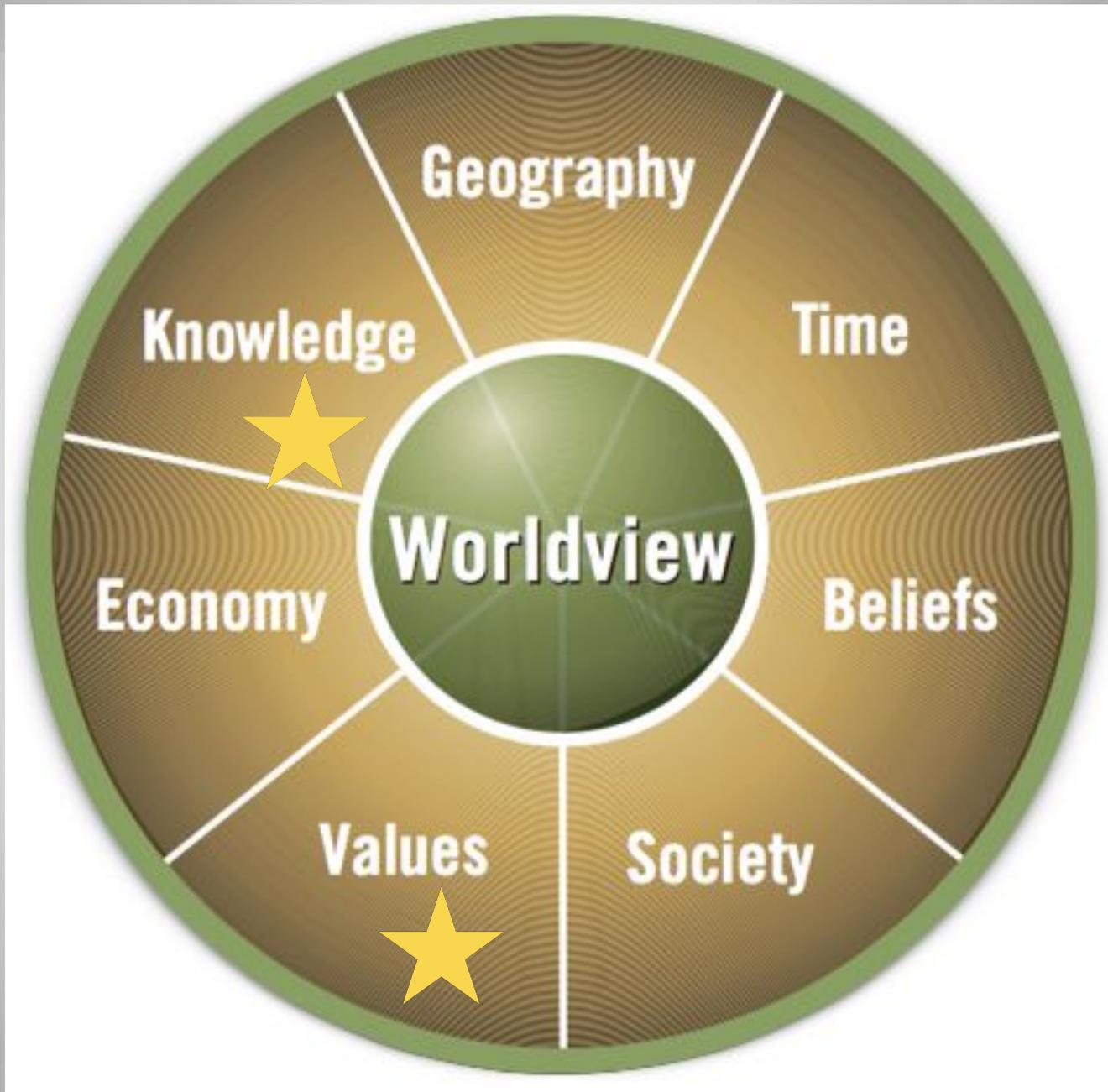


A Deadly Meeting

WORLDVIEW INQUIRY

How might differences in worldview contribute to the dominance of one culture over another?



Big Idea

The Aztecs fought hard to protect their civilization, but the Spanish had three advantages the Aztecs could not overcome.

Moctezuma had just spent a sleepless night. He was in his palace awaiting the arrival of his council of nobles and priests. He needed to discuss a grave situation with them.

Several months ago Moctezuma had sent officials to investigate reports of mysterious strangers in nearby territories. Now the officials had returned bringing stories of men in odd clothing and sailing boats as big as mountains. They rode animals that looked like giant deer and they carried sticks that shot fire. They were gathering supporters from surrounding tribes and heading toward Tenochtitlan.

Who were these strangers? What did they want of the Aztecs? Should Moctezuma welcome them into his empire, or send his army against them? He had to decide quickly — the strangers and their allies would soon be entering the Valley of Mexico.

In the end, Moctezuma decided to send a small group of Aztecs to greet the strangers and give them valuable gifts, including a mask made of turquoise and a fan of quetzal feathers. Surely these gifts would please them.



Cortés, the Conquistador

How does a leader's worldview affect his/her choices and decisions?

Definitions

Conquistador - the “conqueror”, was the term Spanish leaders in the Americas used to describe themselves.

Indigenous Peoples - the original or earliest known inhabitants of an area.

Cause - a person or thing that gives rise to an action or event

Effect - the change that is made as a result or consequence to an action

Cortes, the Conquistador

The man who was leading Spanish troops toward Moctezuma and the Aztecs was **Hernan Cortés**. He grew up in Spain during a period of great change. The **defeat of the Muslims** and the **Inquisition** had produced

political and religious unity in Spain. Cortes believed these changes made Spain a better place to live. It was because Cortes heard people talking about the gold that Columbus brought back from the Caribbean that made Cortes decide to go over. At the age of 19 he set sail for the “new world.”



In many ways Cortes embodied the Spanish worldview at the time. It was this worldview that drew Cortes to confront and eventually conquer the Aztec people.

Not-so-Secret Formula

FYI – Cortes' desire for gold inspired the story behind Pirates of the Caribbean – where a group of pirates are cursed for stealing Aztec gold from Cortes.

Who

Cortes'

The Conquistador's Formula

The Conquistadors' Formula

1. An expedition would set out from a recent colony.
2. After landing in a new region, the Spanish would try to meet peacefully with the first groups of Indigenous people they encountered. Their aim was to discover which group in the area was the most powerful.
3. The Spanish would invite the leader of that powerful group to a meeting to exchange gifts. Then the Spanish would seize the leader and threaten to kill him unless his followers obeyed their orders.
4. If they did have to fight, the Spanish would try to do so on open ground. Their horses, armour, and weapons gave them a huge advantage.
5. The leader of the expedition would remain as governor of the new colony and his second-in-command would organize the next expedition. The Indigenous peoples would be forced into slavery.

The Richest Men

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This was the opportunity that Cortes was waiting for. He had Velaquez finance an expedition to Yucatan. Cortes scoured Cuba for experienced soldiers and used loans to buy ships. In a few months he had 11 ships, 508 fighting men, 100 sailors, 200 indigenous slaves and 16 horses.

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Cortes' Expedition

Before leaving the harbor in Cuba, Cortes stood on a packing crate and made a speech to his forces. He wanted to inspire them to face the dangers and hardships that were ahead.

I know in my heart that we shall take vast and wealthy lands. We are waging a just and good war, which will bring us fame. Almighty God, in whose name it will be waged, will give us victory. . . If you do not abandon me, as I shall not abandon you, I shall make you the richest men who ever crossed the seas.

Velasquez suddenly came to try and stop the expedition. He was worried Cortes would get all the glory and not recognize his authority. But Cortes ignored the Governor and continued.

Cortes Arrives in Mexico

Before striking inland to the Aztec empire, Cortes **established a town**, La Villa Rica de la Veracruz, on the coast of Mexico, and **declared an independent government**. This meant that he was now responsible to King Carlos I rather than Velasquez (who had tried to stop his expedition).

- ❁ He sent one ship to Spain with all the treasure he had collected so far and then sank the other ten.

This made it impossible for any soldiers who were loyal to Velazquez to defect from his expedition and return to Cuba.





SPANISH AZTEC WAR

An Unequal Fight

In what ways did technology and disease contribute to the Spanish dominance over the Aztecs?

An Unequal Fight

How can powerful weapons affect the outcome of a war? What are the most powerful weapons today? Both the Spanish and the Aztec has powerful tools of war, but they weren't evenly matched. Which side do you think had the technological advantage?

Aztec Weapon

War Club

- A war club could cut like a knife, but shattered against very hard surfaces like Spanish armour.
- It was designed for swinging or chopping, but was so heavy that a soldier had to use both hands to swing it.

Wooden Spear

- The spear ends were sharpened wood that had been hardened in a fire.
- The Aztecs would try to get in close to the enemy and thrust the spears at unprotected areas, such as the eyes and throat.

Atlatl (Spearthrower)

- An atlatl was a piece of jointed wood that allowed an Aztec soldier to throw a short spear great distances, with much more force than using his arm alone.
- The Aztecs also had bows and arrows, and slings.

Spanish Weapon

Sword

- These steel swords were double-edged, needle pointed, and sharp as a razor.
- With this metre-long weapon in his hand, a fighter could both slash and stab at an enemy with deadly effect. His other hand was free to carry a shield or hold the reins of his horse.

Halberd

- A halberd was over two metres long and had a spear blade, an axe point, and a hook.

Crossbow

- A crossbow could shoot a wooden arrow with such force that it could penetrate even the thickest armour.



FIGURE 10-10 Aztec war club



FIGURE 10-11 European swords



FIGURE 10-12 Aztec spear



FIGURE 10-13 A halberd



FIGURE 10-14 An atlatl



FIGURE 10-15 A crossbow

Weapons Unknown

The Spanish also brought with them a kind of weapon that took the Aztecs completely by surprise:

- ❁ **muskets**, which were long rifle-like guns that were fired from the shoulder
- ❁ **cannons.**

These firearms were common in Europe but unknown in Mexico. When the Aztecs first heard the firearms go off, they thought it was thunder and lightning.

After he got news of the Spanish landing, Moctezuma sent ambassadors to their camp to find out what they wanted. Cortes ordered his men to **fire their weapons** as intimidation.

The Horse as a Weapon

The next military advantage the Spanish had over the Aztecs was the **horses** they brought with them. Because the Aztecs and other Indigenous people had never seen horses, Cortes was able to use the animals to his advantage. Their size, power, and speed fascinated the Aztecs.

- ❁ **The Spanish were able to ride the horses and fight at the same time.**

The Aztecs on foot could not compete.



The Role of Disease

In our Renaissance unit we saw how the Black Plague was an important factor in bringing about change to Europe.

In the conflict between the Spanish and the Aztecs, **disease** gave the Spanish an advantage. At a critical point, **small pox** broke out in Tenochtitlan, killing vast numbers of Aztecs and weakening their ability to fight.

European explorers and traders brought smallpox, measles, and other disease to the Americas.



Zoom In > Why Did Smallpox Devastate the Aztecs?

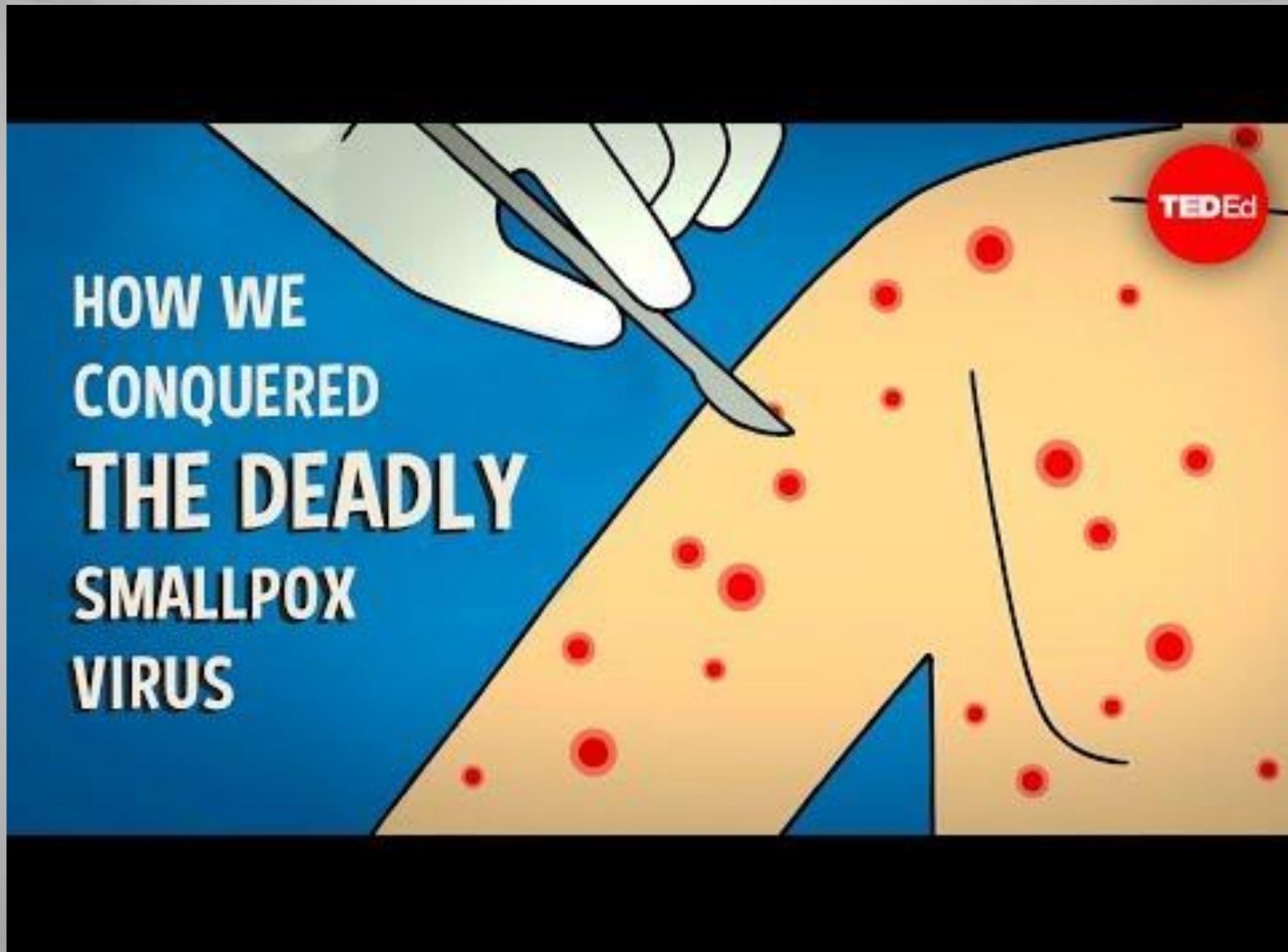
Although no one knows for sure, it is thought that a Spanish slave brought smallpox to Mexico. The Spanish themselves had been exposed to the disease in Europe and, over time, had built up some immunity, or resistance, to the smallpox virus. Because they had some immunity, some Spanish never caught the disease, and of those who did, not all died. However, since the Aztecs had never

been exposed to the disease before, they had no immunity.

- What was the primary effect of the epidemic?
- What was the secondary effect?
- Why do you think there is no mention of medical help?

**HOW WE
CONQUERED
THE DEADLY
SMALLPOX
VIRUS**

TEDEd



Invasion

How did the worldviews of the Spanish and Aztecs influence the strategies they used against one another?

Definitions

Epidemic - the rapid spread of infectious disease to a large number of people in a given population

Intermediary - a person who acts as a link between people in order to try to bring about an agreement or reconciliation;

Mayan -va society of people who lived in southern Mexico and northern Central America — a wide territory that includes the entire Yucatán Peninsula; dating to 2000 BC. They lived in city-states.

Nahuatl - Aztec language

House Arrest - a person is confined by the authorities to their residence

Spanish Strategy

After establishing his colony on the coast, Cortes decided that it was time to march to the heart of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlan. On the way, he encountered a number of indigenous people. Before Cortes could proceed, he needed to either befriend or conquer these people.



FIGURE 10-22 This is a contemporary portrait of Malinche by Argentinian-born artist Rosario Marquardt. The symbol near Malinche's mouth is a reference to the symbol showing speech in some Aztec codices. How does this painting reflect her role? Why might a Latin-American artist show Malinche as "two-faced"?

March to Tenochtitlan

Cortes continued his march to Tenochtitlan and met different groups along the way. Each group responded differently to Cortes, which meant he had to constantly adapt his strategy.

- ◆ The Totonacs invited Cortés to Zempoala, their capital city, and complained about the tribute the Aztecs collected. Cortés agreed to give them protection from the Aztecs in exchange for warriors.
- ◆ The Tlaxcalans (tlahsh-CALL-lahns) fought the Spanish, but the Spanish soldiers held them off and offered to make peace. The Tlaxcalans agreed, and added 1000 of their own soldiers to the Spanish forces.
- ◆ The Cholulans (choh-LOO-lahns) were loyal allies of the Aztecs. Malinche overheard a conspiracy to attack the Spanish and she alerted Cortés. As a result, the Spanish conquered the Cholulan people.

Aztec Strategy

In a crisis situation is it better to act, to make the first move, thereby shaping how events will unfold? Or is it better to sit back and wait – to give yourself time to see what the other side will do before deciding how to act yourself?

Moctezuma chose the second course. As the Spanish drew closer and closer to Tenochtitlan:

- ❁ Moctezuma waited and thought about what to do.



FIGURE 10-24 This image of the meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma appeared in an Aztec codex.

Eventually,

- ❁ Moctezuma decides to allow Cortés to enter Tenochtitlan, exchange gifts, and welcome him.

The Battle for Tenochtitlan

Cortes and his forces were taken to live in the palace of Moctezuma's late father. Then the Aztecs showed them the glories of their city. The Spanish were particularly amazed by their market. They saw more evidence of the golden treasures of the Aztecs. This wealth and the desire to lead this mighty society finally caused Cortes to attack.

The Spanish placed Moctezuma under house arrest in his palace. They looted gold from the royal palaces and melted it down. Then they forced Moctezuma to become of subject of Spanish rule.

The Battle for Tenochtitlan

Cortes was forced to leave to deal with Spanish soldiers that had been sent by Velazquez to arrest Cortés. He defeated Velazquez's forces and convinced them to join him in the fight against the Aztecs.

When Cortes returned, Tenochtitlan was in uproar. The man he had left in charge had allowed the Aztecs to hold a festival, but had his troops massacre all the dancers.

The Battle for Tenochtitlan

Cortés had Moctezuma speak to his people to calm them, but they threw stones at their emperor. Shortly after this, **Moctezuma died** either as a result of these injuries or by being strangled by the Spanish.

- ❁ The Aztecs attacked the Spanish and their allies, killed many of them, and drove the rest out of Tenochtitlan.

The Battle for Tenochtitlan

By the time Cortes returned and attacked Tenochtitlan with a stronger force about six months later, the **smallpox epidemic** had killed off 25 percent of the Aztec population. The Spanish cut the **aqueducts** to the city and after a siege of about 80 days the **Aztecs were defeated.**

Only 60,000 Aztecs survived the city, which lay in ruins around them.

❁ **The Aztec empire had ceased to exist.**

In its place, Cortes would lay the foundation for another Spanish colony.



Conclusion

The Aztecs fought hard to protect their civilization, but the Spanish had three advantages the Aztecs could not overcome.

- 1. Weaponry**
- 2. Strategy**
- 3. Disease**

Chapter Activity!

What do you think was the most significant thing that caused the collapse of the Aztec empire?

1. Write a diary entry from the point of view of a Spanish Conquistador on the most significant cause of the collapse.
2. Then write an entry from the point of view of an Aztec soldier.