

# New Spain

- What is New Spain?
  - New Spain was the name of Mexico after the Spanish invaded. They seized control of the Aztec Empire by 1521 and named the land after their own country. This idea was not unusual. The northeastern colonies of the United States, which we now know as states are often referred to as New England.
- Why did the Spanish invade?
  - Many Europeans wanted to find land in the western world. They wanted to spread their culture, beliefs and religion. Land expansion was very important at this time. The early 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of the Renaissance period and much of Europe was becoming countries instead of empires and kingdoms. The Spanish knew there was much land out in the western world since at this time Brazil was discovered by their neighbor Portugal. Spain like many countries wanted to get in on this.
- Who did the Spanish find?
  - The Spanish encountered the last main Mesoamerican group as the Aztecs.
- How did the Spanish rise over the Aztecs?
  - It took only two years for this sophisticated group (The Aztecs) to fall to the Spanish and there are various reasons that contribute to the demise of the Aztec Empire, which we will discuss below.

**Hernán Cortés:** Hernán Cortés was a Spanish conquistador (conquerer). He was born in Spain in 1485. He was interested in sailing since a young age. Christopher Columbus was the first man funded by the Spanish King and Queen and was well-known in Spain. Columbus' voyage is what influenced Cortés to be a conquistador, as well. Cortés is known for “discovering” Mexico. We place the word “discovering” in quotation marks because we know that it had already been known to the indigenous tribes that were already living there. He discovered what we now call Mexico to the Europeans.

**Montezuma II:** Montezuma II was one of the last leaders of the Aztec people. He was the leader when the Spanish arrived in Mexico. At first, Cortés and Montezuma became friends. Montezuma believed that Cortés could have been a God and befriended him. Their relationship became rocky as many of the men that voyaged with Cortés were not comfortable with the relationship. Montezuma was eventually killed by the Spanish when they conquered the land and killed off many of the Aztecs.

- Why would the Aztecs believe that Cortés was a God?
  - Like the Mayan Calendar, the Aztec Calendar thought of life in cycles. They believed that they were about to enter the fourth cycle of life. This event was to take place in the year that Cortés arrived in Mexico. The premonition was that an old era would die and a new era of life would begin. The Aztecs believed that this was a good thing, so at a first encounter, they believed that Cortés must be a person of great importance and God-like power. This coincidence is part of the downfall of the Aztec people.

- Why did it only take two years for the Aztec Empire to fall?
  - There were many factors that contributed to the downfall of the Aztecs.
    - Weaponry: The Spanish had guns, advanced weaponry and trained animals brought with them from Europe. The weaponry of the Aztecs was no match for the Spanish.
    - Enemies: The Aztecs were very fierce warriors and valued strength. This created a lot of enemies for them. Many of the surrounding tribes did not like the Aztecs and Cortés and his men took advantage of this and used neighboring tribes to help them defeat the Aztecs.
    - Disease: Like many diseases, people develop immunity. The Europeans historically already had encounters with various diseases, especially small-pox. Most of them built immunity and had medicines to help with this ailment. The Spanish unknowingly brought smallpox to Mexico. Although it did not really affect them, it was new to the Aztecs. Many Aztecs died because of the outbreak of smallpox that the Spanish brought over.
    - Supplies: Montezuma's brother took over the Aztec people when Montezuma was killed. This was the time that the Aztecs were contracting the smallpox disease. The Spanish left Tenochtitlán for a while, but eventually cut off their water and food sources, killing off many remaining Aztecs that had survived the disease and warfare.

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- The city of Tenochtitlán finally fell in 1522 with Hernán Cortés and the Spain successful in their taking over of the land. Cortés named himself governor of the land. He developed Mexico City around the ruins of Tenochtitlán and made Christianity the religion of the land. Christianity was very important in Spain's culture and one of the reasons they set out to the western world. Cortés renamed this land New Spain as the new governor of the city.