

Name: _____ Date: _____

Conquest and the Columbian Exchange

Conquest and the Columbian Exchange

Part I: Famous Explorers

The European conquest of Latin America began in 1492 with the voyages of Christopher Columbus. He and other Europeans depopulated large parts of the Caribbean as they enslaved native peoples and searched for gold. When little was found they desperately hunted for the mythical Seven Golden Cities of Cibola in North America and the fabled kingdom of El Dorado (“the Golden One”) in South America.

Two years after landing a small force in Mexico in 1519, Hernando Cortes conquered the mighty Aztec empire. This was possible in large part because of thousands of indigenous allies and superior Spanish weapons: steel armor, swords, ferocious trained dogs, war horses, and loud (if somewhat inaccurate) firearms. But above all, germs were the deadliest factor. Europeans unwittingly brought smallpox, influenza, bubonic plague, and other maladies that slew millions, including allies. With governments, armies, and economies wrecked by disease, the Indians struggled to maintain organized defenses. Within a century populations in many areas had dropped by 90 percent.

In the 1530s Francisco Pizarro applied lessons learned from Cortes to his own conquest of the Inca empire of South America. Among the epoch's other notorious conquistadors were Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Francisco Coronado in northern Mexico, Vasco Núñez de Balboa (who crossed Panama to “discover” the Pacific Ocean)... Pedro Álvares Cabral claimed Brazil for Portugal in 1500. The hunter-gatherers of the Pampas and rainforests were more successful at resisting invasion (until the 1800s) because of their dispersed settlements, because of their hit-and-run tactics, and, ironically, because they lacked strong centralized governments.

Directions: Answer the following questions as you read.

1. Which explorer conquered the Aztecs in Mexico in 1519?
2. Name three factors why the Spaniards were able to defeat the Aztecs.
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.
3. What was the biggest reason why the Spaniards defeated the Aztecs?
4. What explorer conquered the Incas of Peru?

Part II: The Columbian Exchange

For all its tragedy and turmoil, the conquest of the Americas was also the meeting of two hemispheres. In this so-called Columbian Exchange, Europe brought not only diseases and people but also cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, wheat, bananas, olives, sugar, and coffee. Meanwhile the Americas changed the world by giving it potatoes, tomatoes, squash, corn (maize), hot peppers, and cacao (the source of chocolate)—and new plantations exported huge amounts of sugar back to Europe. Of course, many of these exchanges brought more trouble, including soil erosion from overgrazing sheep in the Americas and diabetes and tooth decay from growing sugar consumption in Europe.

5. Define the “Columbian Exchange.”
6. Identify three products that the Europeans brought to the Americas.
7. Identify three products that the Americas provided for the Europeans.
8. Why did people in Europe end up getting tooth decay?