

Title: The Fall of an Empire: The Factors that Led to the Conquest of the Aztecs

Presenter: Preston Hong, Saddleback College

Mentor: Margot Lovett

Between 1519 and 1521, Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes, his Spanish soldiers, and their indigenous allies were able to reduce the Aztec empire to a population of sick, weak and starving people before the final siege on the capital of the empire, Tenochtitlan. Despite being equipped with iron weapons and armor and a well-organized group of soldiers, they were still outnumbered 10,000 to 1. Spanish forces under Hernan Cortes and their indigenous allies were able to decimate and overthrow the Aztec empire using superior iron weaponry, armor, and tactics; alliances with neighboring cities for resources and reinforcements; and an outbreak of smallpox. While advanced weaponry and alliances with neighboring cities contributed to the conquest of the Aztec empire, the timing and effects of the smallpox epidemic and strategic military tactics were the most important reasons why the Spanish were able to conquer the Aztecs. While the Spanish already developed an immunity to smallpox, all Aztecs were in danger of contracting the disease as easily as breathing in contaminated air (Crosby 325). Shortly after, sores would erupt all over the victim's body, making it too painful to walk (León-Portillo 92-93). Those who didn't die from smallpox quickly died from extreme dehydration. Cortes utilized a divide and conquer technique to entrap the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan, attacking on all sides (Cortes 216). Consequently, the Spanish were easily able to cut off the freshwater to Tenochtitlan, further killing off the Aztecs. Ultimately, these factors allowed the Spanish to gain the upper hand in battle.

Works Cited

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