

## The European Conquest of the Americas

The impact of the arrival of the Europeans was especially profound on the Native Americans. Spanish conquistadors (conquerors) and priests arrived soon after the first explorers. They came to conquer native peoples, seize gold and silver, obtain natural resources, and convert natives to Christianity. Small numbers of Spanish soldiers using horses and firearms, and acting with local allies, quickly overcame large numbers of indigenous peoples and conquered the two greatest Native American empires of the time: the Aztec and Inca.

### **The Conquest of Mexico:**

Soon after Columbus' first voyage, the Spanish conquered the main Caribbean islands. In 1519, Hernando Cortes sailed from Cuba to Mexico with a small force of soldiers in search of gold and silver. Cortes met the Aztec emperor Montezuma. The Aztecs at first believed the Spaniards were gods, and showered them with gifts. Later, Cortes left the Aztec Capital and allied his forces with the enemies of the Aztecs.

With a few hundred Spaniards, and several thousand Native American warriors, Cortes attacked the Aztecs in 1521. Several factors explain his final triumph. The Aztecs fought with clubs, spears, and bows while the Spaniards had guns, steel swords, shields, horses, and cannons. The Spaniards also gathered a large force of native warriors who were hostile to the Aztecs. Finally, the Aztecs were worn down by smallpox, accidentally introduced by the Europeans, against which the Aztecs had no immunity. As a result, Cortes was able to conquer the powerful Aztec Empire.

### **The Conquest of Peru:**

In 1530, Francisco Pizarro set sail from Panama to conquer the Inca. Pizarro arrived just when they were recovering from a brutal civil war. High in the Andes Mountains, Pizarro and a handful of soldiers faced a much larger force of Inca warriors.

Again, the Native Americans proved to be no match for the more technologically advanced and determined Europeans. Pretending friendship, Pizarro invited the Inca Emperor to visit him. Pizarro and his army ambushed them and murdered the emperor. Pizarro was then able to conquer the Inca capital by 1533. In general, the Spaniards treated the conquered Native Americans harshly. Defeated peoples were forced to accept the Christian religion and to labor for their new rulers.

**Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.**

- 1) Why did the Spanish Conquistadors come to the Americas?
- 2) Explain how Cortes and Pizarro, with only a few hundred soldiers, were able to conquer the Aztecs and Incas.

# LATIN AMERICAN COLONIES AS A PUPPET OF SPAIN

