

What made native american peoples vulnerable to conquest by european adventurers

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What made Native American people vulnerable to conquest by European adventurers? The discovery of America by Columbus at the close of fifteenth century unwittingly started deep-rooted transformation in the global history whose repercussions are felt even today. One of the major events in the early phases was the Spanish conquest of the New World. In the next few decades of Columbus's discovery, the Spanish stretched their empire to the far west by conquering and colonizing large areas of America. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Spain dominated both North and South America and the people whose area and population far exceeded that of Spain. This paper tries to find the answer to the question that how so few Spanish managed to conquer so many American people. The triumphant conquest by the seven million Spanish and their imposition on the twenty million Americans has been puzzling the historians even today. The quest for the answer to this question has brought up varying answers and each of the answers are debatable and depends on one's perspective of that phase of American history. However, the common view that is shared by many historians is that there was a combination of many factors behind this. The triumphant capture of the American by the Spanish was due to the latter's superior technology in the military and naval fields, skills in creating alliance. But the most important contributory factor was the introduction of European diseases which were carried by the Spanish soldiers in the American land and which killed thousands of native people who till then never got exposed to viral diseases like small pox. This was the biggest advantage for the Spanish conquerors as these diseases wiped out a huge percentage of the native population resulting in demoralization of the natives and augmenting

the confidence of the conquerors (McDonnell). The Spanish conquest of the Aztecs which is modern day Mexico proved that the prevalent weaknesses of the natives were the reasons behind the beginning of Spanish rule in that region. The Americans were already in a state of decline even before the Europeans embarked on their mission of colonizing America. The natives in the land of America could easily be subjugated by the Europeans because of their inferior social and economic status. The Europeans also had superior military technology that included metal armors, cavalry and heavy weapons capable of inflicting incurable wounds. The Aztecs knew the technology of purifying gold but was not aware of the process of making tools and weapons. The superstitious nature of the Aztecs which made them believe that a falling comet forebodes danger was another cause of their annihilation. The Aztec population also had another weakness in the form of internal conflicts. Their emperor Moctezuma could have easily defeated the 600 Spanish soldiers if he would have had a united empire, but in reality many Indians abhorred the Aztecs and this went to the advantage of Hernan Cortez, the Spanish who led the conquest. All these favorable factors helped the Europeans to overpower the Aztecs and capture the region. The Aztec civilization was almost destroyed by this conquest (Henretta et al, 23-24). It is now established that the Spanish were able to manage such triumphant colonization in America because of many deadly combination of forces. The 600 Spanish soldiers had an arsenal of unwieldy arquebuses in addition to steel-edged swords, pikes and crossbows. They made maximum use of their weapon to create terror among the natives. They also took advantage of the pre-existing internal conflicts by employing divide and rule

policy in severe ways to make alliance with the native groups with their excellent negotiation strategies. These native groups hated the Aztecs and this implies that the Spanish practically needed only to impose themselves on an already chaotic society. Many of the Spanish conquerors even married into the native royal families to inherit their wealth and power. One such important example is the daughter of the Aztec emperor Moctezuma's daughter who married a Spanish soldier. Thus several Indian-Spanish lineages developed who were bestowed royal ranks by the Spanish crown, and many of them even migrated to Spain to enjoy higher ranks in the society. The Spanish invasion had a great impact on the lives of the Native Americans (McDonnell). Conclusion The social, economic, political and military backwardness of the native Americans were the major reasons for the remarkable success of the Spanish conquerors. The lack of socioeconomic conditions to support a prolonged war, the lack of weapons and also lack of immunity to diseases contributed largely for annihilation of almost an entire native population. The immense success of the Spanish conquerors encouraged the subsequent Europeans to begin colonization in America. References Henretta, James A., Edwards, Rebecca & Robert O. Self. America: A Concise History, Volume I: To 1877, USA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012 McDonnell, Michael. "The 'Conquest' of the Americas: The Aztecs". ANZASA. n. d., October 26, 2012 from: http://www.anzasa.arts.usyd.edu.au/ahas/conquest_overview.html