

PART ONE

Indians and Europeans

New World Encounters

The contact between two worlds, a “new” one and an “old” one, permanently changed the way people on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean lived and thought about themselves. For Europeans who had spent centuries in the impoverished western margins of the Old World, Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the New World afforded many opportunities to amass fortunes in precious metals, exotic spices, and new intoxicants. More important, the emerging European nations of the North Atlantic would eventually reconfigure the entire world, shifting its center away from the great civilizations in the East and building global empires from the fertile land, cheap labor, and high crop yields of the New World. This age of discovery, exploration, and conquest would touch off a scientific and commercial revolution, making Western Europe the cosmopolitan center of the world by attracting new ideas, technologies, and new forms of wealth and redistributing them across the world.

For the native peoples of what would come to be called the Americas, “discovery” was a catastrophe. European settlers, soldiers, and missionaries, along with Africans, introduced new plants, animals, and technologies that disrupted and radically reoriented life in the New World. Within fifty years of contact, Old World pathogens such as smallpox had killed some thirty million natives of the New World, because of their lack of immunity and the brutal tactics of European conquest.

The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas’s report of the Spanish conquest of the West Indies — islands named by explorers who wrongly believed they had found a Western passage to Asia — captures the horrors of that first colonial encounter between Europeans and American Indians. This pattern of brutality, violence, and subjugation of indigenous peoples would be repeated many times during the following five centuries. Yet, as the Spanish *conquistador* Hernando Cortés shows in his tale of the conquest of Mexico, the campaign

not merely one of violence and enslavement but was also one of politics and persuasion. For centuries following Columbus's voyage, various indigenous nations played independent and sometimes powerful roles in the diplomacy of the Western Hemisphere. Their adaptations and cultural exchanges with one another and with European settlers continued, even while many tribes maintained distinct political and cultural identities into the present. Since the 1960s native peoples have played increasingly important political and social roles in the Americas, leading both indigenous and nonindigenous scholars to seek new ways of understanding the coming together of these two worlds that go beyond Spanish accounts of triumph and the myth that Europeans were taken as gods by the natives of the New World. Recently discovered as well as long forgotten Nahuatl accounts of the conquest, like the selection from the Florentine Codex included in this chapter, suggest that these early relationships between indigenous peoples and Europeans, in what is now Mexico, may have been more open and mutual than those occurring later in North America where segregated and unequal societies on both sides brought much bitterness and many prejudices to the encounter. The visual portfolio "New World Images" (pages 37–41) illustrates the way that Europeans viewed Native Americans and suggests some of these transformations.

Captain John Smith's description of Virginia's Indians shows cultural differences, probably both real and imagined, between Europeans and natives. And Father Paul Le Jeune, representing the French empire in the New World, suggests how little understanding often existed even between friendly whites and receptive Native Americans.

Indigenous peoples throughout the colonial era and well into the nineteenth century provoked fear and mystery. Stories about what happened when whites were captured by Indians, beginning perhaps with John Smith's account of his supposed rescue by Pocahontas, remained popular for more than two centuries, making captivity narratives among the first best sellers produced in North America. Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity among the Wampanoag illustrates how Anglo-Americans domesticated their anxieties about Indians and wrapped them in an aura of romance and danger that often contrasted with surprisingly ordinary, everyday encounters.

POINTS OF VIEW Contact and Conquest (1502–1521)

I

HERNANDO CORTÉS

Dispatches of the Conquest from the New World

The discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus set off a speculative economic frenzy in Spain and Portugal. Merchants, military men, and adventurers rushed to equip ships and send soldiers in search of the gold, slaves, and spices promised by this vast new world. Twenty-five years after Columbus's discovery, however, the payoff remained elusive. The Spanish colonies in the New World were little more than a few Caribbean islands with sparse populations of settlers, African slaves, and captive Taino natives, who often died of European diseases for which they had no immunity. It was contact with and conquest of the Aztec empire on the mainland and the creation of New Spain (present-day Mexico and Guatemala) in 1521 that finally brought Europeans and natives some understanding of what they could expect from the other and how the future of this new world might look.

Hernando Cortés, who led the conquest of New Spain, was not unlike many of the adventurers and businessmen who crossed the Atlantic in the first century after Columbus. In 1504, at the age of nineteen, Cortés traveled to Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), on a convoy of merchant ships. Using his training as a lawyer and family connections, he became the colony notary and received a repartimiento, a Spanish colonial land grant, which included forced native labor. In 1511, he helped conquer Cuba, becoming clerk of the royal treasury, mayor of Havana, and a wealthy owner of land, Indians, and cattle. In 1517 and 1518, two expeditions to the Yucatán brought back rumors of gold and a great inland empire, and Cortés was asked by colonial authorities to command an exploratory expedition to the mainland.

When Cortés and his army of 508 soldiers arrived, they found an Aztec empire in deep crisis. Rapid expansion from the center of power at Tenochtitlán, the world's largest city at the time and now present-day Mexico City, had stretched the empire's rigid political structure and low technological development to the breaking point. Unable to fully integrate the vast agricultural hinterlands into the empire, the Aztecs had resorted to increasingly brutal ritualized terror, human sacrifice, and militarization to keep control. The first natives that Cortés and his men encountered at the margins of the empire fought initially, but often quickly changed sides, preferring to take their chances with the Spanish invaders.

Anthony Pagden, ed. and trans., *Hernando Cortés: Letters from Mexico* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 35–36, 84–85, 88, 105, 106, 132.

With the help of Malinche, a native woman who became Cortés's lover, adviser, and interpreter, Cortés and his men swept through town after town, defeating local armies, abolishing human sacrifice and tax collection, and carrying out mass conversions to Christianity. By the time the Spanish finally arrived in Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his mistress were feared and admired as mythical liberators. The conquest required two more years of political maneuvering and bloody battles before culminating in the siege of Tenochtitlán in 1521. Cortés's army, bolstered by as many as 200,000 natives, toppled the Aztec empire and declared the creation of a Christian New Spain.

As word of the conquest filtered back to Cuba, the Spanish royal bureaucracy feared that the upstart Cortés would take all the wealth of the New World for himself, perhaps even establish himself as a king. Colonial officials used every political weapon they could find to sabotage Cortés, including officially relieving him of command, organizing mutinies, and seizing all his possessions in Cuba — all to no avail. Realizing that he could trust no one in Havana, and now having great status as a conquistador, he wrote directly to King Charles V of Spain about the things he had seen and done in the New World. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in the heat of conquest. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in conquest.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Consider Hernando Cortés's possible motivations for writing. In what ways do you think his audience — the king of Spain — affects Cortés's account of the conquest?
2. Why do you think that Cortés and 508 men were able to conquer an empire of millions?
3. Was Cortés a liberator or an oppressor of the natives?

They [the Aztecs] have a most horrid and abominable custom which truly ought to be punished and which until now we have seen in no other part, and this is that, whenever they wish to ask something of the idols, in order that their plea may find more acceptance, they take many girls and boys and even adults, and in the presence of the idols they open their chests while they are still alive and take out their hearts and entrails and burn them before the idols, offering the smoke as sacrifice. Some of us have seen this, and they say it is the most terrible and frightful thing they have ever witnessed.

This these Indians do so frequently that, as we have been informed, and, in part, have seen from our own experience during the short while we have been here, not one year passes in which they do not kill and sacrifice some fifty persons in each temple; and this is done and held as customary from the island of Cozumel to this land where we now have settled. Your Majesties [the King and Queen of Spain and the Roman Empire] may be most certain that, as this land seems to us to be very large, and to have many temples in it, not one year has passed, as far as we have been able to discover, in which three or four thousand souls have not been sacrificed in this manner. . . .

After we had crossed [a] bridge, Moctezuma came to greet us and with him some two hundred lords, all barefoot and dressed in a different costume, but also very rich in their way and more so than the others. They came in two columns, pressed very close to the walls of the street, which is very wide and beautiful and so straight that you can see from one end to the other. It is two-thirds of a league long and had on both sides very good and big houses, both dwellings and temples.

Moctezuma¹ came down the middle of this street with two chiefs, one on his right hand and the other on his left. One of these was that great chief who had come on a litter to speak with me, and the other was Moctezuma's brother, chief of the city of Yztapalapa, which I had left that day. And they were all dressed alike except that Moctezuma wore sandals whereas the others went barefoot; and they held his arm on either side. When we met I dismounted and stepped forward to embrace him, but the two lords who were with him stopped me with their hands so that I should not touch him; and they likewise all performed the ceremony of kissing the earth. When this was over Moctezuma requested his brother to remain with me and to take me by the arm while he went a little way ahead with the other; and after he had spoken to me all the others in the two columns came and spoke with me, one after another, and then each returned to his column.

When at last I came to speak to Moctezuma himself I took off a necklace of pearls and cut glass that I was wearing and placed it round his neck; after we had walked a little way up the street a servant of his came with two necklaces, wrapped in a cloth, made from red snails' shells, which they hold in great esteem; and from each necklace hung eight shrimps of refined gold almost a span in length. When they had been brought he turned to me and placed them about my neck, and then continued up the street in the manner already described until we reached a very large and beautiful house which had been very well prepared to accommodate us. . . .

Most Invincible Lord, six days having passed since we first entered this great city of Tenochtitlán, during which time I had seen something of it, though little compared with how much there is to see and record, I decided from what I had seen that it would benefit Your Royal service and our safety if Moctezuma were in my power and not in complete liberty, in order that he should not retreat from the willingness he showed to serve Your Majesty; but chiefly because we Spaniards are rather obstinate and persistent, and should we annoy him he might, as he is so powerful, obliterate all memory of us. Furthermore, by having him with me, all those other lands which were subject to him would come more swiftly to the recognition and service of Your Majesty, as later happened. I resolved, therefore, to take him and keep him in the quarters where I was, which were very strong. . . .

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings, and in the important ones there are priests of their sect who live there permanently; and, in addition to the houses

1. **Moctezuma:** Or, Montezuma; ruler of the Aztecs.

The most important of these idols, and the ones in whom they have most faith, I had taken from their places and thrown down the steps; and I had those chapels where they were cleaned, for they were full of the blood of sacrifices; and I had images of Our Lady and of other saints put there, which caused Moctezuma and the other natives some sorrow. . . .

Moctezuma, who together with one of his sons and many other chiefs who had been captured previously [and] was still a prisoner, asked to be taken out onto the roof of the fortress where he might speak to the captains of his people and tell them to end the fighting. I had him taken out, and when he reached a breastwork which ran out beyond the fortress, and was about to speak to them, he received a blow on his head from a stone; and the injury was so serious that he died three days later. I told two of the Indians who were captive to carry him out on their shoulders to the people. What they did with him I do not know; only the war did not stop because of it, but grew more fierce and pitiless each day. . . .

We already knew that the Indians in the city [Tenochtitlán] were very scared, and we now learnt from two wretched creatures who had escaped from the city and come to our camp by night that they were dying of hunger and used to come out at night to fish in the canals between the houses, and wandered through the places we had won in search of firewood, and herbs and roots to eat. And because we had already filled in many of the canals, and leveled out many of the dangerous stretches, I resolved to enter the next morning shortly before dawn and do all the harm we could. The brigantines departed before daylight, and I with twelve or fifteen horsemen and some foot soldiers and Indians entered suddenly and stationed several spies who, as soon as it was light, called us from where we lay in ambush, and we fell on a huge number of people. As these were some of the most wretched people and had come in search of food, they were nearly all unarmed, and women and children in the main. We did them so much harm through all the streets in the city that we could reach, that the dead and the prisoners numbered more than eight hundred; the brigantines also took many people and canoes which were out fishing, and the destruction was very great. When the captains and lords of the city saw us attack at such an unaccustomed hour, they were as frightened as they had been by the recent ambush, and none of them dared come out and fight; so we returned with much booty and food for our allies. . . .

On leaving my camp, I had commanded Gonzalo de Sandoval to sail the brigantines in between the houses in the other quarter in which the Indians were resisting, so that we should have them surrounded, but not to attack until he saw that we were engaged. In this way they would be surrounded and so hard pressed that they would have no place to move save over the bodies of their dead or along the roof tops. They no longer had nor could find any arrows, javelins or stones with which to attack us; and our allies fighting with us were armed with swords and bucklers, and slaughtered so many of them on land and in the water that more than forty thousand were killed or taken that day. So loud was the wailing of the women and children that there was not one man amongst us whose heart did not bleed at the sound; and indeed we had more

trouble in preventing our allies from killing with such cruelty than we had in fighting the enemy. For no race, however savage, has ever practiced such fierce and unnatural cruelty as the natives of these parts. Our allies also took many spoils that day, which we were unable to prevent, as they numbered more than 150,000 and we Spaniards were only some nine hundred. Neither our precautions nor our warnings could stop their looting, though we did all we could. One of the reasons why I had avoided entering the city in force during the past days was the fear that if we attempted to storm them they would throw all the possessed into the water, and, even if they did not, our allies would take all they could find. For this reason I was much afraid that Your Majesty would receive only a small part of the great wealth this city once had, in comparison with all that I once held for Your Highness. Because it was now late, we could no longer endure the stench of the dead bodies that had lain in those streets for many days, which was the most loathsome thing in all the world, we returned to our camps. This type is meant to fill out this line. This type is meant to fill out this

2

A Nahuatl Account of the Conquest of Mexico

*"None of the Aztec compositions have survived," asserted historian William H. Prescott in 1843 when he wrote *The Conquest of Mexico*, regarded for over a century as one of the greatest history books ever written. Indeed, Prescott was drawing primarily on firsthand accounts by Spaniards such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *The Conquest of New Spain* as well as close secondary sources written shortly thereafter. For centuries it had been a well-known part of the "Black Legend" of the horrors of the Spanish conquest (see the Las Casas document on page 13) that the first archbishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumarraga, collected thousands of Nahuatl manuscripts and burned them. (Nahuatl is the word for the people and the language of the Aztec empire.)*

However, some Nahuatl documents did survive the archbishop's fires, and others were recreated through oral histories taken shortly after the conquest by sympathetic Spanish priests and Nahuatl natives trained in anthropological and historical skills. These documents, usually known as codices (a codex is a simple form of book), lay unread and unappreciated for centuries in libraries and private collections across Mexico, Europe, and the United States. In the 1960s, a new generation of social and ethnohistorians traveled far and wide compiling and publishing native voices from the conquest. These accounts, translated into English and Spanish and published in dozens of bilingual and trilingual editions, have added greatly to our understanding of what happened when people from

James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 90–104.

editions, have added greatly to our understanding of what happened when people from Europe and the New World first made contact.

What have scholars discovered by looking at the conquest from the American side? As far as the “facts” go, Nahua accounts confirm much of what had been written previously by Europeans such as Cortés, Díaz del Castillo, and even Prescott. However, when two civilizations meet in such a dramatic way, with no prior knowledge of each other, the brute facts of who won which battle and how many people were killed are at best a starting point. Scholars studying these codices have focused on everything from the time it took for Spanish verbs to enter the Nahua language in different parts of Mexico to how the experiences of the natives in the imperial center at Tenochtitlán, who believed the conquest was a terrifying cataclysmic change, differed from those in the hinterlands, who tended to see it as just another part of a long local history of conflict, conquest, and adaptation.

The following document is drawn from the Florentine Codex, named for its home in the Laurentian Library in Florence, Italy. Probably the most famous of the Nahua descriptions of the conquest, it was first transcribed from Nahua hieroglyphs by native scholars trained and educated in Latin and Spanish by Fra Bernardino de Sahagún. A Franciscan priest known for his rigorous and respectful study of native custom and history, Sahagún supervised the production of the original bilingual Spanish/Nahua edition in the mid-sixteenth century. His Nahua assistants who translated the hieroglyphs, compiled the oral histories, and searched other sources to write this history remain unknown, and contemporary historians continue to struggle with conflicting accounts, different versions of the same documents, and complex political motivations behind the many views of the conquest. His Nahua assistants translated the hieroglyphs and compiled histories.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Some scholars argue that Nahua accounts of the conquest are filled with scapegoats and excuses for the defeat. Which ones can you spot in this document?
2. Does this document contradict or confirm the traditional myth that the Nahua believed the Spanish were gods? Why do you think it matters to historians whether the Nahua believed this?
3. How might accounts of the conquest written by Tlascalans living outside of the capital city of Tenochtitlan differ from those by Mexica living at the center of the empire?

Tenth chapter, where it is said how the Spaniards landed uncontested and came on their way in this direction, and how Moteucçoma¹ left the great palace and went to his personal home.

Then Moteucçoma abandoned his patrimonial home, the great palace, and came back to his personal home.

When at last [the Spaniards] came, when they were coming along and moving this way, a certain person from Cempoallan,² whose name was Tlaco-

1. **Moteucçoma:** Moctezuma or Montezuma; ruler of the Aztecs.

2. **Cempoallan:** Aztec province.

chcalcatl, whom they had taken when they first came to see the land and the various altepetl,³ also came interpreting for them, planning their route, conducting them, showing them the way, leading and guiding them.

And when they reached Tecocac, which is in the land of the Tlaxcalans,⁴ where their Otomis⁵ lived, the Otomis met them with hostilities and war. But they annihilated the Otomis of Tecocac, who were destroyed completely. They lanced and stabbed them, they shot them with guns, iron bolts, crossbows. Not just a few but a huge number of them were destroyed.

After the great defeat at Tecocac, when the Tlaxcalans heard it and found out about it and it was reported to them, they became limp with fear, they were made faint; fear took hold of them. Then they assembled, and all of them, including the lords and rulers, took counsel among themselves, considering the reports.

They said, “How is it to be with us? Should we face them? For the Otomis are great and valiant warriors, yet they thought nothing of them, they regarded them as nothing; in a very short time, in the blink of an eyelid, they destroyed the people. Now let us just submit to them, let us make friends with them, let us be friends, for something must be done about the common people.”

Thereupon the Tlaxcalan rulers went to meet them, taking along food: turkey hens, eggs, white tortillas, fine tortillas. They said to them, “Welcome, our lords.”

[The Spaniards] answered them back, “Where is your homeland? Where have you come from?”

They said, “We are Tlaxcalans. Welcome, you have arrived, you have reached the land of Tlaxcala, which is your home.”

(But in olden times it was called Texcallan and the people Texcalans.)

Eleventh chapter, where it is said how the Spaniards reached Tlaxcala, [also] called Texcallan.

[The Tlaxcalans] guided, accompanied, and led them until they brought them to their palace[s] and placed them there. They showed them great honors, they gave them what they needed and attended to them, and then they gave them their daughters.

Then [the Spaniards] asked them, “Where is Mexico?⁶ What kind of a place is it? Is it still far?”

They answered them, “It’s not far now. Perhaps one can get there in three days. It is a very favored place, and [the Mexica] are very strong, great warriors, conquerors, who go about conquering everywhere.”

Now before this there had been friction between the Tlaxcalans and the Cholulans.⁷ They viewed each other with anger, fury, hate, and disgust; they could come together on nothing. Because of this they put [the Spaniards] up to killing them treacherously.

3. **altepetl:** Nahua word for city or town.

4. **Tlaxcalans:** Or, Tlascalans; a large native group that allied with Cortés against the Mexica.

5. **Otomis:** A native group that lived near Tlaxcala.

6. **Mexico:** The Aztec empire.

7. **Cholulans:** A native group that the Spaniards defeated in battle as part of their alliance

They said to them, “The Cholulans are very evil; they are our enemies. They are as strong as the Mexica, and they are the Mexica’s friends.”

And after the dying in Cholula, [the Spaniards] set off on their way to Mexico, coming gathered and bunched, raising dust. Their iron lances and halberds⁸ seemed to sparkle, and their iron swords were curved like a stream of water. Their cuirasses⁹ and iron helmets seemed to make a clattering sound. Some of them came wearing iron all over, turned into iron beings, gleaming, so that they aroused great fear and were generally seen with fear and dread. Their dogs came in front, coming ahead of them, keeping to the front, panting, with their spittle hanging down.

8. **halberds:** A weapon with an axe and a long spike set on a long pole.

9. **cuirasses:** Type of armor.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Some scholars argue that Nahua accounts of the conquest are filled with scapegoats and excuses for the defeat. Which ones can you spot in this document?
2. Does this document contradict or confirm the traditional myth that the Nahua believed the Spanish were gods? Why do you think it matters to historians whether the Nahua believed this?
3. How might accounts of the conquest written by Tlascalans living outside of the capital city of Tenochtitlan differ from those by Mexica living at the center of the empire?

3

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

Destruction of the Indies

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Spanish colonist and later a Dominican friar, saw Christopher Columbus in 1493 when the explorer passed through Seville on his return to Spain after discovering the Americas the previous year. Las Casas’s father and two uncles sailed that year on Columbus’s second voyage. As news spread throughout Europe about what was believed to be a western route to the East Indies, rumors of an abundance of gold, spices, and other valuables attracted adventurers and others in search of fortune. The Spanish built small colonies on the island of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). In 1502, Las Casas himself traveled to the New World to serve as an

3

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

Destruction of the Indies

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Spanish colonist and later a Dominican friar, saw Christopher Columbus in 1493 when the explorer passed through Seville on his return to Spain after discovering the Americas the previous year. Las Casas’s father and two uncles sailed that year on Columbus’s second voyage. As news spread throughout Europe about what was believed to be a western route to the East Indies, rumors of an abundance of gold, spices, and other valuables attracted adventurers and others in search of fortune. The Spanish built small colonies on the island of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). In 1502, Las Casas himself traveled to the New World to serve as an officer of the king. In exchange for his services, he was given an encomienda, an estate that included native people to labor for him. Several years later, he was moved by a sermon given by a Dominican priest denouncing the treatment of the Indians by the Spanish. Las Casas returned his serfs to the governor and probably was the first priest ordained in the New World.

Las Casas spent the rest of his long life attempting to protect the Native Americans against the massacres, tortures, slavery, and forced labor imposed on them by their Spanish conquerors. In 1515, Las Casas returned to Spain and pleaded before King Ferdinand for more humane treatment of the native people. His passionate defense of the indigenous Americans influenced Pope Paul III to declare the natives of America rational beings with souls. Las Casas traveled throughout Spain’s new colonies and in the 1540s became bishop of Chiapas (now southern Mexico).

His powerful writings created the image of Spanish conquest often called the “Black-Legend,” a vision of destruction and cruelty until that time unparalleled. Most modern scholars accept the accuracy of Las Casas’s shocking portraits of devastation, many of which he personally witnessed, such as the violent and bloody conquest of Cuba. Today, however, many view these horrors not as the outcome of some peculiar Spanish cruelty but as characteristic of the bloody “Columbian encounter” between Europeans and other cultures in the age of exploration and conquest. Las Casas wrote the following treatise in Seville in 1552.

Francis Augustus MacNutt, *Bartholomew de Las Casas: His Life, His Apostolate, and His Writings* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), 314–21.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Was Bartolomé de Las Casas’s view of the Native Americans accurate? Why or why not?
2. Do you judge his criticism of the Spanish empire to have been fair and accurate?

2. Do you judge his criticism of the Spanish empire to have been fair and accurate?
3. Throughout his life Las Casas remained fiercely loyal to both the Spanish monarch and the Catholic Church. How would you reconcile these feelings with his condemnation of the Spanish empire's actions in the New World?

SHORT REPORT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WEST INDIES

The Indies were discovered in the year fourteen hundred and ninety-two. The year following, Spanish Christians went to inhabit them, so that it is since forty-nine years that numbers of Spaniards have gone there: and the first land, that they invaded to inhabit, was the large and most delightful Isle of Hispaniola, which has a circumference of six hundred leagues.

2. There are numberless other islands, and very large ones, all around on every side, that were all—and we have seen it—as inhabited and full of their native Indian peoples as any country in the world.

3. Of the continent, the nearest part of which is more than two hundred and fifty leagues distant from this Island, more than ten thousand leagues of maritime coast have been discovered, and more is discovered every day; all that has been discovered up to the year forty-nine is full of people, like a hive of bees, so that it seems as though God had placed all, or the greater part of the entire human race in these countries.

4. God has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural Lords, and to the Christians, whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful, and calm, without strife nor tumults; not wrangling, nor querulous, as free from uproar, hate and desire of revenge, as any in the world.

5. They are likewise the most delicate people, weak and of feeble constitution, and less than any other can they bear fatigue, and they very easily die of whatsoever infirmity; so much so, that not even the sons of our Princes and of nobles, brought up in royal and gentle life, are more delicate than they; although there are among them such as are of the peasant class. They are also a very poor people, who of worldly goods possess little, nor wish to possess: and they are therefore neither proud, nor ambitious, nor avaricious.

6. Their food is so poor, that it would seem that of the Holy Fathers in the desert was not scantier nor less pleasing. Their way of dressing is usually to go naked, covering the private parts; and at most they cover themselves with a cotton cover, which would be about equal to one and a half or two ells square of cloth. Their beds are of matting, and they mostly sleep in certain things like hanging nets, called in the language of Hispaniola *hamacas*.

7. They are likewise of a clean, unspoiled, and vivacious intellect, very capable, and receptive to every good doctrine; most prompt to accept our Holy

DECLARATION OF PEDRO NARANJO OF THE QUERES NATION

December 19, 1681

In the said plaza de armas on the said day, month, and year, for the prosecution of the judicial proceedings of this case his lordship caused to appear before him an Indian prisoner named Pedro Naranjo, a native of the pueblo of San Felipe, of the Queres nation, who was captured in the advance and attack upon the pueblo of La Isleta. He makes himself understood very well in the Castilian language and speaks his mother tongue and the Tegua. He took the oath in due legal form in the name of God, our Lord, and a sign of the cross. . . .

Asked whether he knows the reason or motives which the Indians of this kingdom had for rebelling, forsaking the law of God and obedience to his Majesty, and committing such grave and atrocious crimes, and who were the leaders and principal movers, and by whom and how it was ordered; and why they burned the images, temples, crosses, rosaries, and things of divine worship, committing such atrocities as killing priests, Spaniards, women, and children, and the rest that he might know touching the question, he said that since the government of Señor General Hernando Ugarte y la Concha they have planned to rebel on various occasions through conspiracies of the Indian sorcerers, and that although in some pueblos the messages were accepted, in other parts they would not agree to it; and that it is true that during the government of the said señor general seven or eight Indians were hanged for this same cause, whereupon the unrest subsided. Some time thereafter they [the conspirators] sent from the pueblo of Los Taos through the pueblos of the custodia two deerskins with some pictures on them signifying conspiracy after their manner, in order to convoke the people to a new rebellion, and the said deerskins passed to the province of Moqui, where they refused to accept them. The pact which they had been forming ceased for the time being, but they always kept in their hearts the desire to carry it out, so as to live as they are living to-day. Finally, in the past years, at the summons of an Indian named Popé, who is said to have communication with the devil, it happened that in an estufa of the pueblo of Los Taos there appeared to the said Popé three figures of Indians who never came out of the estufa. They gave the said Popé to understand that they were going underground to the lake of Copala. He saw these figures emit fire from all the extremities of their bodies, and that one of them was called Caudi, another Tilini, and the other Tleume; and these three beings spoke to the said Popé, who was in hiding from the secretary, Francisco Xavier, who wished to punish him as a sorcerer. They told him to make a cord of maguey fiber and tie some knots in it which would signify the number of days that they must wait before the rebellion. He said that the cord was passed through all the pueblos of the kingdom so that the ones which agreed to it [the rebellion] might untie one knot in a sign of obedience, and by the other knots they would know the days which were lacking; and this was to be done on pain of death to those who refused to agree to it.

EXCERPT FROM “PARTIES”

In those days of the late 1920's, there were a great many parties, in Harlem and out, to which various members of the New Negro group were invited. These parties, when given by important Harlemites (or Carl Van Vechten) were reported in full in the society pages of the Harlem press, but best in the sparkling Harlemites of Geraldyn Dismond who wrote for the *Interstate Tattler*. On one of Taylor Gordon's fiestas she reports as follows:

What a crowd! All classes and colors met face to face, ultra aristocrats, Bourgeois, Communists, Park Avenuers galore, bookers, publishers, Broadway celebs, and Harlemites giving each other the once over. The social revolution was on. And yes, Lady Nancy Cunard was there all in black (she would) with 12 of her grand bracelets. . . . And was the entertainment on the up and up! Into swell dance music was injected African drums that played havoc with blood pressure. Jimmy Daniels sang his gigolo hits. Gus Simons, the Harlem crooner, made the River Stay Away From His Door and Taylor himself brought out everything from “Hot Dog” to “Bravo” when he made high C.

A'Leia Walker was the then great Harlem party giver, although Mrs. Bernia Austin fell but little behind. And at the Seventh Avenue apartment of Jessie Fauset, literary soirées with much poetry and but little to drink were the order of the day. The same was true of Lillian Alexander's, where the older intellectuals gathered.

A'Leia Walker, however, big-hearted, night-dark, hair-straightening heir-ess, made no pretense at being intellectual or exclusive. At her “at homes” Negro poets and Negro number bankers mingled with downtown poets and seat-on-the-stock-exchange racketeers. Countee Cullen would be there and Witter Bynner, Muriel Draper and Nora Holt, Andy Razaf and Taylor Gordon. And a good time was had by all.

A'Leia Walker had an apartment that held perhaps a hundred people. She would usually issue several hundred invitations to each party. Unless you went early there was no possible way of getting in. Her parties were as crowded as the New York subway at the rush hour—entrance, lobby, steps, hallway, and apartment a milling crush of guests, with everybody seeming to enjoy the crowding. Once, some royal personage arrived, a Scandinavian prince, I believe, but his equerry saw no way of getting him through the crowded entrance hall and into the party, so word was sent in to A'Leia Walker that His Highness, the Prince, was waiting without. A'Leia sent word back that she saw no way of getting His Highness in, either, nor could she herself get out through the crowd to greet him. But she offered to send refreshments downstairs to the Prince's car.

A'Leia Walker was a gorgeous dark Amazon, in a silver turban. She had a town house in New York (also an apartment where she preferred to live) and a country mansion at Irvington-on-the-Hudson, with pipe organ programs each morning to awaken her guests gently. Her mother made a great fortune from the Madame Walker Hair Straightening Process, which had worked wonders on unruly Negro hair in the early nineteen hundreds—and which continues to

Cold war propaganda heightened this fear, but as Americans embarked on what proved to be an era of unprecedented prosperity, social commentators became more concerned about the nation growing soft and complacent, even conformist, like the perfectly planned uniform suburbs of Levittown and their many imitators. There were, of course, many Americans, particularly women and minorities, who were left out of the postwar economic boom. Fanny Christina Hill, for instance, found that after the war it was difficult for her to make a living wage. For her and many others, it was a period of struggle, envy, and disappointment.

POINTS OF VIEW
Building and Using an Atomic Bomb

27

J. ROBERT OPPENHEIMER
To Build an Atomic Bomb

The 1920s were a golden age in theoretical physics. Brilliant and dedicated physicists like J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904–1967) ignored society and politics, living in a separate world of new theories and discoveries in relativity and quantum theory that transformed classic Newtonian physics. Then in the early 1930s, with the rise of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, politics began noticeably to intrude even on sciences as remote as theoretical physics. And, less noticeably, scientific theories and discoveries began ever so slowly to intrude on politics. James Chadwick's discovery of the neutron in 1932 and Albert Einstein's emigration from Germany to the United States in 1933 seemed far less important than the rise of Adolf Hitler or the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Yet by 1938, when scientists in Germany at last figured out that neutrons could “split” certain atoms and release great quantities of energy, the fate of people and nations suddenly hung in the balance.

Scientists in Great Britain and the United States could only speculate on what progress Hitler's scientists might have been making in harnessing nuclear fission. In June 1942, American and British scientists developed plans for a uranium-based atomic bomb.

Jonathan F. Fanton, R. Hae Williams, and Michael B. Stoff, eds., *The Manhattan Project: A Documentary Introduction to the Atomic Age* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 29–32; Alice Kimball Smith and Charles Weiher, eds., *Robert Oppenheimer: Letters and Recollections* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 315–20, 324–25.

“The combat assault went like clockwork,” commented LTC Frank Barker, New Haven, Conn., the task force commander. “We had two entire companies on the ground in less than an hour.”

A company led by CPT Ernest Medina, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, killed 14 VC minutes after landing. They recovered two M1 rifles, a carbine, a short-wave radio and enemy documents.

**CAPTAIN BRIAN LIVINGSTON'S
LETTER TO HIS WIFE**

19 March 68

Dear Betz,

. . . You remember I told you about the massacre I witnessed, well I read a followup story in the paper. The article said I quote “The American troops were in heavy combat with an unknown number of V. C. Two Americans were killed, seven wounded, and 128 V. C. killed.” That's a bunch of bull. I saw four V. C., that is, those with weapons, and the amazing thing about that, is two of them got away. It made me sick to watch it.

Brian

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANK A. BARKER JR.,
“COMBAT ACTION REPORT” ON MY LAI**

28 March 1968

8. Intelligence: Enemy forces in the area of operation were estimated to be one local force battalion located in the vicinity of My Lai, BS 728795 as shown in Inclosure 1. This information was based upon previous combat operations in this area, visual reconnaissance, and PW and agent reports. During the operation it was estimated that only two local force companies supported by two to three local guerrilla platoons opposed the friendly forces. The area of operation consisted of six hamlets to varying degree of ruin, each separated by rice paddies which were bounded by a series of hedge rows and tree lines. The area was also honeycombed with tunnels and bunkers. . . .

9. Mission: To destroy enemy forces and fortifications in a VC base camp and to capture enemy personnel, weapons and supplies.

10. Concept of Operation: Task Force Barker conducts a helicopter assault on 160730 Mar 68 on a VC base camp vicinity BS 728795 with Company C, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry landing to the west and Company B, 4th Battalion, 3d Infantry landing to the southeast of the VC base camp. Company A, 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry moves by foot to blocking positions north of the base camp prior to the helicopter assault. . . .

VC forces on 16 March 1968. It is further concluded that no civilians were gathered together and shot by US soldiers. The allegation that US Forces shot and killed 450–500 civilians is obviously a Viet Cong propaganda move to discredit the United States in the eyes of the Vietnamese people in general and the ARVN soldier in particular.

5. (C) It is recommended that a counter-propaganda campaign be waged against the VC in eastern Son Tinh District.

TESTIMONY OF HERBERT L. CARTER

Q: Did you ever hear anything about an investigation into the My Lai incident?

A: Yes.

Q: What did you hear?

A: I heard that they said if anybody asks around or any questions about what happened at My Lai, to tell them that we were fired upon and say that a sniper round had come in or something.

Q: Whom did you hear this from?

A: I was in the hospital at this time at Qui Nhon, and a couple of guys from the company came over. I'm not bragging, but most of the guys in that company liked me. I didn't bother nobody. I did my job and they did their job. We drank together.

Q: They came to see you in the hospital?

A: Yes. A lot of guys came over. You know, when they came back through, they would come over.

Q: Captain MEDINA told us that soon after this operation he got the company together and told them that there was an investigation and it would be better if nobody talked about it while the investigation was underway. Did your friends say anything about this?

A: No. The way they ran it down to me was like somebody was trying to cover something up or something, which I knew they were. They had to cover up something like that.

Q: I think you know that it took a long time for the story of My Lai to get out. What is your opinion as to why this wasn't reported right at the time? You did mention about some of your friends coming and telling you to keep quiet. Do you know anything else?

A: Like a lot of people wondered how come I didn't say something. Now, who would believe me. I go up to you with a story like that and you would call me a nut. You would tell me I am a nut and that there was nothing like this going on. You would think that nothing like this goes on in the United States. Just like I was in a bar a couple of weeks ago, and there was a drunk in there. He was standing there reading a paper and he was asking me if I believed that things like that actually went on, and I said, “I wouldn't know, pal.” It was kind of weird. This happened three different times. One time I was sitting up there with a friend of mine, and my partner told me to be quiet about the whole

New World Images

Native Americans did not consider themselves collectively as one group of people or as a single nation before their encounter with Europeans and had no common term for themselves. Upon discovering the need to adopt a common name to differentiate themselves from the new strangers in their midst, Native Americans may have had little choice but to choose one that the whites had applied to them. In the end both sides adopted the term Indian, based on Christopher Columbus's geographical error in supposing he had arrived in Asia rather than in a new world.

The next most common term to describe these people was much less attractive. Medieval legend had depicted wild club-swinging men of the forest as hairy, naked links between humans and animals. Named in Latin *silvaticus*, "men of the woods," they became *sauvage* in French and *salvage* in English, a word that finally turned into *savage*.

These and other names bestowed on Native Americans by whites, such as *wild-men* and *barbarian*, propagated a belief among Europeans that Indians were essentially their opposites. Defined as "the other," Indians were heathens; they performed human sacrifices and were cannibals; they were dirty, warlike, superstitious, sexually promiscuous, and brutal to their captives and to their women. Evils observed anywhere among Indians, as well as evils not observed but known to be practiced such as Aztec human sacrifice, were generalized to all Indians.

At the same time Europeans, troubled by what they regarded as the decadence of their own society, recognized positive traits in the Indians that Europeans lacked. To many, especially those who never migrated to the New World, Indians seemed direct, innocent, hospitable, courteous, handsome, and courageous. Their independence, proud bearing, and stamina suggested a nobility that Europeans seemed to be losing. From this image came a composite ideal called the "Noble Savage."

The first attempt by a European to depict the domestic lives of Native Americans can be seen in Figure 1, an anonymous German woodcut published around 1505 and based on explorer and geographer Amerigo Vespucci's account of his voyages to the New World. The inscription describes natives as: "naked, handsome, brown, well shaped in body; . . . No one has anything, but all things are in common. And the men have as wives those who please them, be they mothers, sisters or friends. . . . They also fight with each other; and they eat each other. . . . They become a hundred and fifty years old and have no government."



Figure 1. Unknown artist, "Old American Wedding," c. 1860

Am dolenim quat iusci tiniam veliquatis nosto do dolum quis eugiatet ut acilla facipsummod ex et dolore vel dolese magna feugiat. Min ulla facing et vent lorper iuscilit la core eum augait praessectet augiat lor senit, sim deliqua mcorem quisl incip eugiamcorem ipit utem dolor ipsum volendit adiat utpat. Uptat. Henim del dolortie dio commolor am ilisi.

Os nonulput dionsequi eummod ming exero consecetum il in utat wisi bla feugiamet, quatum dolorem acil ex ex er sed tie magnim iliquamet irit vel duisiss equat. Odo cor aci blamet la consecet augue vullam, coreet ut atin et, vulla feum quatio conullaorem irit acilis et ing euisi ea consed ea feugait autet wisim dit velenia mcommolum iriusci duisi.

Nis augue magnibh er se magnis dit delit alis euis auguero do exerostis elis ex exerostio odigna faccum andiat lumsan eu faccum nonsequi tem ver si eliscinibh eu feumsandre faciduisl iliquat. Lesed exercin henim quiscilisci tio dunt ing er amcon esequissit nos enissit veliqui smoloborper ipit prat. Ut amconse quisit luptatummy nullutet nos dolent wis atiniam ing exer iriure te facil euis ent lore et dolobor percipisit alit wis auguercillan eugue con henis nostio et vercidunt ut nulput nos do consequ amconse niscili scipis dolorti onsectem do con hendrer sustrud estio elit lor sed magnis elit vel iure et la commodiam del

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. What do the images in this section suggest about the role of women in the American Revolution?
2. How is visual propaganda today different or similar? How have political cartoons changed?
3. What images do you find the artists consistently using to represent different aspects of the conflict?

not merely one of violence and enslavement but was also one of politics and persuasion. For centuries following Columbus's voyage, various indigenous nations played independent and sometimes powerful roles in the diplomacy of the Western Hemisphere. Their adaptations and cultural exchanges with one another and with European settlers continued, even while many tribes maintained distinct political and cultural identities into the present. Since the 1960s native peoples have played increasingly important political and social roles in the Americas, leading both indigenous and nonindigenous scholars to seek new ways of understanding the coming together of these two worlds that go beyond Spanish accounts of triumph and the myth that Europeans were taken as gods by the natives of the New World. Recently discovered as well as long forgotten Nahuatl accounts of the conquest, like the selection from the Florentine Codex included in this chapter, suggest that these early relationships between indigenous peoples and Europeans, in what is now Mexico, may have been more open and mutual than those occurring later in North America where segregated and unequal societies on both sides brought much bitterness and many prejudices to the encounter. The visual portfolio "New World Images" (pages 37–41) illustrates the way that Europeans viewed Native Americans and suggests some of these transformations.

POINTS OF VIEW
Contact and Conquest (1502–1521)

I

HERNANDO CORTÉS

Dispatches of the Conquest from the New World

The discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus set off a speculative economic frenzy in Spain and Portugal. Merchants, military men, and adventurers rushed to equip ships and send soldiers in search of the gold, slaves, and spices promised by this vast new world. Twenty-five years after Columbus's discovery, however, the payoff remained elusive. The Spanish colonies in the New World were little more than a few Caribbean islands

Anthony Pagden, ed. and trans., *Hernando Cortés: Letters from Mexico* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 35–36, 84–85, 88, 105, 106, 132.

with sparse populations of settlers, African slaves, and captive Taino natives, who often died of European diseases for which they had no immunity. It was contact with and conquest of the Aztec empire on the mainland and the creation of New Spain (present-day Mexico and Guatemala) in 1521 that finally brought Europeans and natives some understanding of what they could expect from the other and how the future of this new world might look.

Hernando Cortés, who led the conquest of New Spain, was not unlike many of the adventurers and businessmen who crossed the Atlantic in the first century after Columbus. In 1504, at the age of nineteen, Cortés traveled to Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), on a convoy of merchant ships. Using his training as a lawyer and family connections, he became the colony notary and received a repartimiento, a Spanish colonial land grant, which included forced native labor. In 1511, he helped conquer Cuba, becoming clerk of the royal treasury, mayor of Havana, and a wealthy owner of land, Indians, and cattle. In 1517 and 1518, two expeditions to the Yucatán brought back rumors of gold and a great inland empire, and Cortés was asked by colonial authorities to command an exploratory expedition to the mainland.

When Cortés and his army of 508 soldiers arrived, they found an Aztec empire in deep crisis. Rapid expansion from the center of power at Tenochtitlán, the world's largest city at the time and now present-day Mexico City, had stretched the empire's rigid political structure and low technological development to the breaking point. Unable to fully integrate the vast agricultural hinterlands into the empire, the Aztecs had resorted to increasingly brutal ritualized terror, human sacrifice, and militarization to keep control. The first natives that Cortés and his men encountered at the margins of the empire fought initially, but often quickly changed sides, preferring to take their chances with the Spanish invaders.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Consider Hernando Cortés's possible motivations for writing. In what ways do you think his audience — the king of Spain — affects Cortés's account of the conquest?
2. Why do you think that Cortés and 508 men were able to conquer an empire of millions?
3. Was Cortés a liberator or an oppressor of the natives?

They [the Aztecs] have a most horrid and abominable custom which truly ought to be punished and which until now we have seen in no other part, and this is that, whenever they wish to ask something of the idols, in order that their plea may find more acceptance, they take many girls and boys and even adults, and in the presence of the idols they open their chests while they are still alive and take out their hearts and entrails and burn them before the idols, offering the smoke as sacrifice. Some of us have seen this, and they say it is the most terrible and frightful thing they have ever witnessed.

This these Indians do so frequently that, as we have been informed, and, in part, have seen from our own experience during the short while we have been

POINTS OF VIEW
Contact and Conquest (1502–1521)

I

HERNANDO CORTÉS

Dispatches of the Conquest from the New World

The discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus set off a speculative economic frenzy in Spain and Portugal. Merchants, military men, and adventurers rushed to equip ships and send soldiers in search of the gold, slaves, and spices promised by this vast new world. Twenty-five years after Columbus's discovery, however, the payoff remained elusive. The Spanish colonies in the New World were little more than a few Caribbean islands with sparse populations of settlers, African slaves, and captive Taino natives, who often died of European diseases for which they had no immunity. It was contact with and conquest of the Aztec empire on the mainland and the creation of New Spain (present-day Mexico and Guatemala) in 1521 that finally brought Europeans and natives some understanding of what they could expect from the other and how the future of this new world might look.

Hernando Cortés, who led the conquest of New Spain, was not unlike many of the adventurers and businessmen who crossed the Atlantic in the first century after Columbus. In 1504, at the age of nineteen, Cortés traveled to Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), on a convoy of merchant ships. Using his training as a lawyer and family connections, he became the colony notary and received a repartimiento, a Spanish colonial land grant, which included forced native labor. In 1511, he helped conquer Cuba, becoming clerk of the royal treasury, mayor of Havana, and a wealthy owner of land, Indians, and cattle. In 1517 and 1518, two expeditions to the Yucatán brought back rumors of gold and a great inland empire, and Cortés was asked by colonial authorities to command an exploratory expedition to the mainland.

When Cortés and his army of 508 soldiers arrived, they found an Aztec empire in deep crisis. Rapid expansion from the center of power at Tenochtitlán, the world's largest city at the time and now present-day Mexico City, had stretched the empire's rigid political structure and low technological development to the breaking point. Unable to fully integrate the vast agricultural hinterlands into the empire, the Aztecs had resorted to increasingly brutal ritualized terror, human sacrifice, and militarization to keep control. The first natives that Cortés and his men encountered at the margins of the empire fought initially, but often quickly changed sides, preferring to take their chances with the Spanish invaders.

Anthony Pagden, ed. and trans., *Hernando Cortés: Letters from Mexico* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 35–36, 84–85, 88, 105, 106, 132.

With the help of Malinche, a native woman who became Cortés's lover, adviser, and interpreter, Cortés and his men swept through town after town, defeating local armies, abolishing human sacrifice and tax collection, and carrying out mass conversions to Christianity. By the time the Spanish finally arrived in Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his mistress were feared and admired as mythical liberators. The conquest required two more years of political maneuvering and bloody battles before culminating in the siege of Tenochtitlán in 1521. Cortés's army, bolstered by as many as 200,000 natives, toppled the Aztec empire and declared the creation of a Christian New Spain.

As word of the conquest filtered back to Cuba, the Spanish royal bureaucracy feared that the upstart Cortés would take all the wealth of the New World for himself, perhaps even establish himself as a king. Colonial officials used every political weapon they could find to sabotage Cortés, including officially relieving him of command, organizing mutinies, and seizing all his possessions in Cuba — all to no avail. Realizing that he could trust no one in Havana, and now having great status as a conquistador, he wrote directly to King Charles V of Spain about the things he had seen and done in the New World. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in the heat of conquest. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in conquest.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Consider Hernando Cortés's possible motivations for writing. In what ways do you think his audience — the king of Spain — affects Cortés's account of the conquest?
2. Why do you think that Cortés and 508 men were able to conquer an empire of millions?
3. Was Cortés a liberator or an oppressor of the natives?

They [the Aztecs] have a most horrid and abominable custom which truly ought to be punished and which until now we have seen in no other part, and this is that, whenever they wish to ask something of the idols, in order that their plea may find more acceptance, they take many girls and boys and even adults, and in the presence of the idols they open their chests while they are still alive and take out their hearts and entrails and burn them before the idols, offering the smoke as sacrifice. Some of us have seen this, and they say it is the most terrible and frightful thing they have ever witnessed.

This these Indians do so frequently that, as we have been informed, and, in part, have seen from our own experience during the short while we have been here, not one year passes in which they do not kill and sacrifice some fifty persons in each temple; and this is done and held as customary from the island of Cozumel to this land where we now have settled. Your Majesties [the King and Queen of Spain and the Roman Empire] may be most certain that, as this land seems to us to be very large, and to have many temples in it, not one year has passed, as far as we have been able to discover, in which three or four thousand souls have not been sacrificed in this manner. . . .

After we had crossed [a] bridge, Moctezuma came to greet us and with him some two hundred lords, all barefoot and dressed in a different costume, but also very rich in their way and more so than the others. They came in two columns, pressed very close to the walls of the street, which is very wide and beautiful and so straight that you can see from one end to the other. It is two-thirds of a league long and had on both sides very good and big houses, both dwellings and temples.

Moctezuma¹ came down the middle of this street with two chiefs, one on his right hand and the other on his left. One of these was that great chief who had come on a litter to speak with me, and the other was Moctezuma's brother, chief of the city of Yztapalapa, which I had left that day. And they were all dressed alike except that Moctezuma wore sandals whereas the others went barefoot; and they held his arm on either side. When we met I dismounted and stepped forward to embrace him, but the two lords who were with him stopped me with their hands so that I should not touch him; and they likewise all performed the ceremony of kissing the earth. When this was over Moctezuma requested his brother to remain with me and to take me by the arm while he went a little way ahead with the other; and after he had spoken to me all the others in the two columns came and spoke with me, one after another, and then each returned to his column.

When at last I came to speak to Moctezuma himself I took off a necklace of pearls and cut glass that I was wearing and placed it round his neck; after we had walked a little way up the street a servant of his came with two necklaces, wrapped in a cloth, made from red snails' shells, which they hold in great esteem; and from each necklace hung eight shrimps of refined gold almost a span in length. When they had been brought he turned to me and placed them about my neck, and then continued up the street in the manner already described until we reached a very large and beautiful house which had been very well prepared to accommodate us. . . .

Most Invincible Lord, six days having passed since we first entered this great city of Tenochtitlán, during which time I had seen something of it, though little compared with how much there is to see and record, I decided from what I had seen that it would benefit Your Royal service and our safety if Moctezuma were in my power and not in complete liberty, in order that he should not retreat from the willingness he showed to serve Your Majesty; but chiefly because we Spaniards are rather obstinate and persistent, and should we annoy him he might, as he is so powerful, obliterate all memory of us. Furthermore, by having him with me, all those other lands which were subject to him would come more swiftly to the recognition and service of Your Majesty, as later happened. I resolved, therefore, to take him and keep him in the quarters where I was, which were very strong. . . .

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings, and in the important ones there are priests of their sect who live there permanently; and, in addition to the houses

1. **Moctezuma:** Or, Montezuma; ruler of the Aztecs.

They said to them, "The Cholulans are very evil; they are our enemies. They are as strong as the Mexica, and they are the Mexica's friends."

And after the dying in Cholula, [the Spaniards] set off on their way to Mexico, coming gathered and bunched, raising dust. Their iron lances and halberds⁸ seemed to sparkle, and their iron swords were curved like a stream of water. Their cuirasses⁹ and iron helmets seemed to make a clattering sound. Some of them came wearing iron all over, turned into iron beings, gleaming, so that they aroused great fear and were generally seen with fear and dread. Their dogs came in front, coming ahead of them, keeping to the front, panting, with their spittle hanging down.

8. **halberds:** A weapon with an axe and a long spike set on a long pole.

9. **cuirasses:** Type of armor.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Some scholars argue that Nahuatl accounts of the conquest are filled with scapegoats and excuses for the defeat. Which ones can you spot in this document?
2. Does this document contradict or confirm the traditional myth that the Nahuatl believed the Spanish were gods? Why do you think it matters to historians whether the Nahuatl believed this?
3. How might accounts of the conquest written by Tlascalans living outside of the capital city of Tenochtitlan differ from those by Mexica living at the center of the empire?

3

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

Destruction of the Indies

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Spanish colonist and later a Dominican friar, saw Christopher Columbus in 1493 when the explorer passed through Seville on his return to Spain after discovering the Americas the previous year. Las Casas's father and two uncles sailed that year on Columbus's second voyage. As news spread throughout Europe about what was believed to be a western route to the East Indies, rumors of an abundance of gold, spices, and other valuables attracted adventurers and others in search of fortune. The Spanish built small colonies on the island of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). In 1502, Las Casas himself traveled to the New World to serve as an

POINTS OF VIEW
Contact and Conquest (1502–1521)

I

HERNANDO CORTÉS

Dispatches of the Conquest from the New World

The discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus set off a speculative economic frenzy in Spain and Portugal. Merchants, military men, and adventurers rushed to equip ships and send soldiers in search of the gold, slaves, and spices promised by this vast new world. Twenty-five years after Columbus's discovery, however, the payoff remained elusive. The Spanish colonies in the New World were little more than a few Caribbean islands with sparse populations of settlers, African slaves, and captive Taino natives, who often died of European diseases for which they had no immunity. It was contact with and conquest of the Aztec empire on the mainland and the creation of New Spain (present-day Mexico and Guatemala) in 1521 that finally brought Europeans and natives some understanding of what they could expect from the other and how the future of this new world might look.

Hernando Cortés, who led the conquest of New Spain, was not unlike many of the adventurers and businessmen who crossed the Atlantic in the first century after Columbus. In 1504, at the age of nineteen, Cortés traveled to Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), on a convoy of merchant ships. Using his training as a lawyer and family connections, he became the colony notary and received a repartimiento, a Spanish colonial land grant, which included forced native labor. In 1511, he helped conquer Cuba, becoming clerk of the royal treasury, mayor of Havana, and a wealthy owner of land, Indians, and cattle. In 1517 and 1518, two expeditions to the Yucatán brought back rumors of gold and a great inland empire, and Cortés was asked by colonial authorities to command an exploratory expedition to the mainland.

When Cortés and his army of 508 soldiers arrived, they found an Aztec empire in deep crisis. Rapid expansion from the center of power at Tenochtitlán, the world's largest city at the time and now present-day Mexico City, had stretched the empire's rigid political structure and low technological development to the breaking point. Unable to fully integrate the vast agricultural hinterlands into the empire, the Aztecs had resorted to increasingly brutal ritualized terror, human sacrifice, and militarization to keep control. The first natives that Cortés and his men encountered at the margins of the empire fought initially, but often quickly changed sides, preferring to take their chances with the Spanish invaders.

Anthony Pagden, ed. and trans., *Hernando Cortés: Letters from Mexico* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 35–36, 84–85, 88, 105, 106, 132.

With the help of Malinche, a native woman who became Cortés's lover, adviser, and interpreter, Cortés and his men swept through town after town, defeating local armies, abolishing human sacrifice and tax collection, and carrying out mass conversions to Christianity. By the time the Spanish finally arrived in Tenochtitlán, Cortés and his mistress were feared and admired as mythical liberators. The conquest required two more years of political maneuvering and bloody battles before culminating in the siege of Tenochtitlán in 1521. Cortés's army, bolstered by as many as 200,000 natives, toppled the Aztec empire and declared the creation of a Christian New Spain.

As word of the conquest filtered back to Cuba, the Spanish royal bureaucracy feared that the upstart Cortés would take all the wealth of the New World for himself, perhaps even establish himself as a king. Colonial officials used every political weapon they could find to sabotage Cortés, including officially relieving him of command, organizing mutinies, and seizing all his possessions in Cuba — all to no avail. Realizing that he could trust no one in Havana, and now having great status as a conquistador, he wrote directly to King Charles V of Spain about the things he had seen and done in the New World. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in the heat of conquest. These passages are from the dispatches that Cortés wrote to his king, in conquest.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Consider Hernando Cortés's possible motivations for writing. In what ways do you think his audience — the king of Spain — affects Cortés's account of the conquest?
2. Why do you think that Cortés and 508 men were able to conquer an empire of millions?
3. Was Cortés a liberator or an oppressor of the natives?

They [the Aztecs] have a most horrid and abominable custom which truly ought to be punished and which until now we have seen in no other part, and this is that, whenever they wish to ask something of the idols, in order that their plea may find more acceptance, they take many girls and boys and even adults, and in the presence of the idols they open their chests while they are still alive and take out their hearts and entrails and burn them before the idols, offering the smoke as sacrifice. Some of us have seen this, and they say it is the most terrible and frightful thing they have ever witnessed.

This these Indians do so frequently that, as we have been informed, and, in part, have seen from our own experience during the short while we have been here, not one year passes in which they do not kill and sacrifice some fifty persons in each temple; and this is done and held as customary from the island of Cozumel to this land where we now have settled. Your Majesties [the King and Queen of Spain and the Roman Empire] may be most certain that, as this land seems to us to be very large, and to have many temples in it, not one year has passed, as far as we have been able to discover, in which three or four thousand souls have not been sacrificed in this manner. . . .

After we had crossed [a] bridge, Moctezuma came to greet us and with him some two hundred lords, all barefoot and dressed in a different costume, but also very rich in their way and more so than the others. They came in two columns, pressed very close to the walls of the street, which is very wide and beautiful and so straight that you can see from one end to the other. It is two-thirds of a league long and had on both sides very good and big houses, both dwellings and temples.

Moctezuma¹ came down the middle of this street with two chiefs, one on his right hand and the other on his left. One of these was that great chief who had come on a litter to speak with me, and the other was Moctezuma's brother, chief of the city of Yztapalapa, which I had left that day. And they were all dressed alike except that Moctezuma wore sandals whereas the others went barefoot; and they held his arm on either side. When we met I dismounted and stepped forward to embrace him, but the two lords who were with him stopped me with their hands so that I should not touch him; and they likewise all performed the ceremony of kissing the earth. When this was over Moctezuma requested his brother to remain with me and to take me by the arm while he went a little way ahead with the other; and after he had spoken to me all the others in the two columns came and spoke with me, one after another, and then each returned to his column.

When at last I came to speak to Moctezuma himself I took off a necklace of pearls and cut glass that I was wearing and placed it round his neck; after we had walked a little way up the street a servant of his came with two necklaces, wrapped in a cloth, made from red snails' shells, which they hold in great esteem; and from each necklace hung eight shrimps of refined gold almost a span in length. When they had been brought he turned to me and placed them about my neck, and then continued up the street in the manner already described until we reached a very large and beautiful house which had been very well prepared to accommodate us. . . .

Most Invincible Lord, six days having passed since we first entered this great city of Tenochtitlán, during which time I had seen something of it, though little compared with how much there is to see and record, I decided from what I had seen that it would benefit Your Royal service and our safety if Moctezuma were in my power and not in complete liberty, in order that he should not retreat from the willingness he showed to serve Your Majesty; but chiefly because we Spaniards are rather obstinate and persistent, and should we annoy him he might, as he is so powerful, obliterate all memory of us. Furthermore, by having him with me, all those other lands which were subject to him would come more swiftly to the recognition and service of Your Majesty, as later happened. I resolved, therefore, to take him and keep him in the quarters where I was, which were very strong. . . .

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings, and in the important ones there are priests of their sect who live there permanently; and, in addition to the houses

1. **Moctezuma:** Or, Montezuma; ruler of the Aztecs.

They said to them, "The Cholulans are very evil; they are our enemies. They are as strong as the Mexica, and they are the Mexica's friends."

And after the dying in Cholula, [the Spaniards] set off on their way to Mexico, coming gathered and bunched, raising dust. Their iron lances and halberds⁸ seemed to sparkle, and their iron swords were curved like a stream of water. Their cuirasses⁹ and iron helmets seemed to make a clattering sound. Some of them came wearing iron all over, turned into iron beings, gleaming, so that they aroused great fear and were generally seen with fear and dread. Their dogs came in front, coming ahead of them, keeping to the front, panting, with their spittle hanging down.

8. **halberds:** A weapon with an axe and a long spike set on a long pole.

9. **cuirasses:** Type of armor.

FOR CRITICAL THINKING

1. Some scholars argue that Nahuatl accounts of the conquest are filled with scapegoats and excuses for the defeat. Which ones can you spot in this document?
2. Does this document contradict or confirm the traditional myth that the Nahuatl believed the Spanish were gods? Why do you think it matters to historians whether the Nahuatl believed this?
3. How might accounts of the conquest written by Tlascalans living outside of the capital city of Tenochtitlan differ from those by Mexica living at the center of the empire?

3

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

Destruction of the Indies

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474–1566), a Spanish colonist and later a Dominican friar, saw Christopher Columbus in 1493 when the explorer passed through Seville on his return to Spain after discovering the Americas the previous year. Las Casas's father and two uncles sailed that year on Columbus's second voyage. As news spread throughout Europe about what was believed to be a western route to the East Indies, rumors of an abundance of gold, spices, and other valuables attracted adventurers and others in search of fortune. The Spanish built small colonies on the island of Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti). In 1502, Las Casas himself traveled to the New World to serve as an