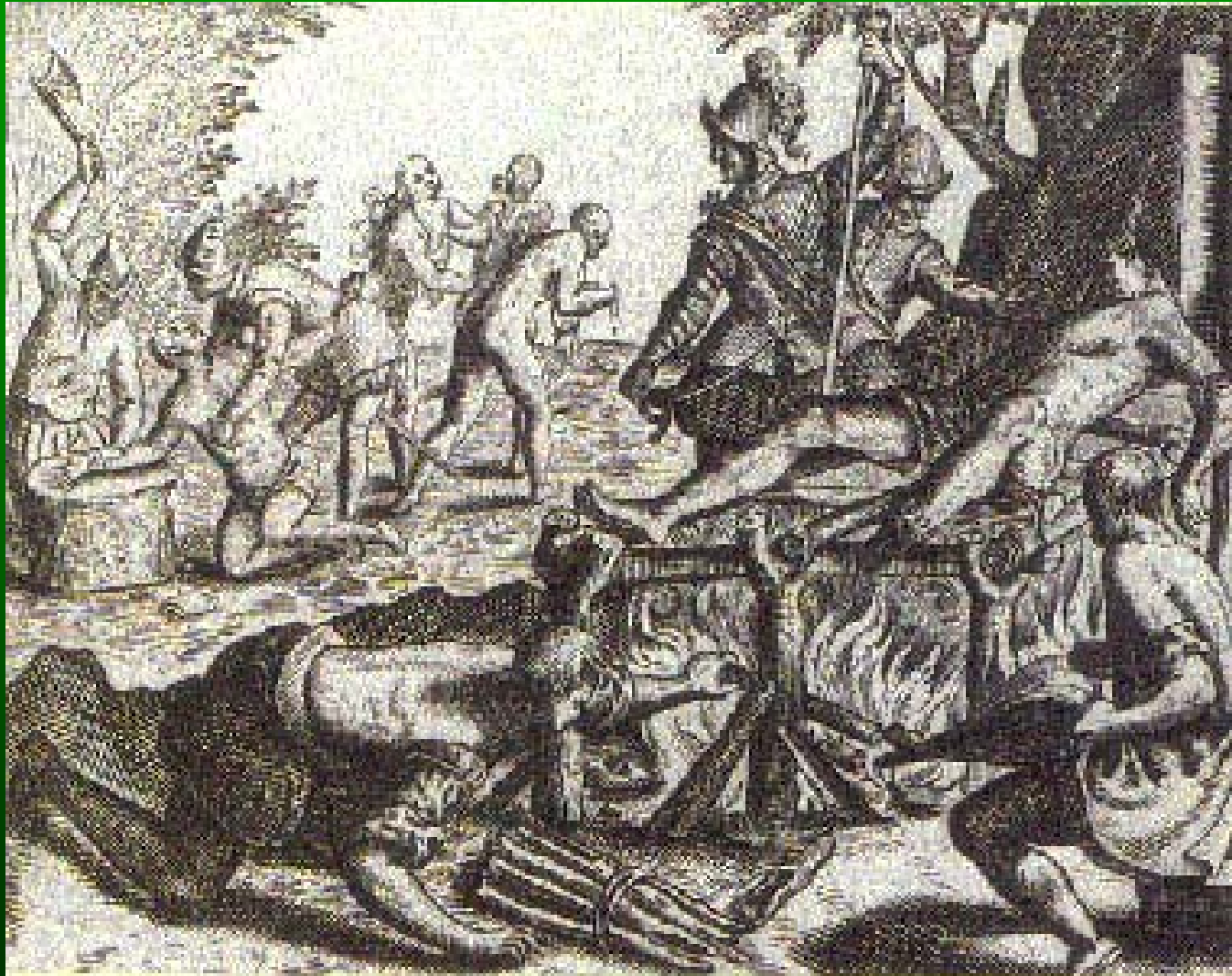


Conquest of Mexico



Background of Spanish Exploration



- Between 1492 and the early 1500s, Spain colonized large parts of the Caribbean and looked to expand into the mainland of South America and Mexico
- Spanish explorers were known as conquistadors
- Conquistadors were lured to the mainland by rumors of vast amounts of gold and silver
- The ambitions of the conquistadors were summed up in the phrase “God, Gold, and Glory”
- In 1519 Hernando Cortes landed in Mexico in search of the “city of gold”

Aztec Empire



- Located in the Valley of Mexico 7,500 feet above sea level, a land of numerous lakes and abundant fertile soil
- Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico around 1200 AD from the north
- They founded the city of Tenochtitlan in lake Texaco in 1325
- It gradually grew into a large empire that stretched from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean in Mexico with an estimated population of 5 – 15 million people
- The Aztecs had a very powerful army that conquered surrounding land and forced tribute from its captives
- The rich soil and irrigation used by the Aztec produced large amounts of maize (corn), beans, and squash
- Nobles and priests ruled Aztec society
- The Aztec religion worshipped the Sun god Huitzilopochtli, who required frequent blood sacrifices of humans
- In 1503 Aztec emperor Montezuma II ruled over a weakened empire

Cortes Defeats the Aztec



- Shortly after landing in Mexico in 1519, Cortes learned of the vast wealth of the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlan
- Montezuma II and other Aztec leaders at first thought Cortes and his men were the return of Quetzalcoatl or the Feathered Serpent God
- On this assumption Montezuma agreed to give Cortes a share of the gold supply
- Cortes was not satisfied and war broke out in 1520 between the Spanish and the Aztec
- Cortes was aided by other native groups who had been mistreated by the Aztecs and by a native translator named Malinche
- The Aztec natives could not stop the invisible invasion of Spanish diseases of measles, mumps, smallpox and typhus that the Spanish had introduced
- Thousands of natives died as Cortes planned a counter-attack of the capital
- Cortes' final conquest was aided by rampant disease and the aid of other native groups seeking revenge against the Aztec

The Lasting Impact of Cortes' Defeat of the Aztec



- Spain conquered the most advanced native population on the mainland
- Spain could now expand its empire into North America from Mexico
- Vast amounts of gold, silver and precious stones were mined by enslaved natives and shipped to Spain
- The conquest of the natives gave Spanish missionaries the opportunity to convert them to Catholicism
- Native culture was eliminated by the Spanish
- Native populations lost millions of their population primarily from the introduction of European diseases
- Spanish intermarriage with the native population produced the large mestizo population of Mexico