

HIST221

Subunit 2.1.2

Study Questions for Hernán Cortés' "Second Letter to Charles V, 1520" and "An Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico"

Please write out your answers to the questions that follow and/or take notes on the relevant areas in the texts: Hernán Cortés' "Second Letter to Charles V, 1520" and "An Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico." It is best to get into the habit of doing this while reading. You should complete this exercise after you have read and highlighted, or noted, areas of the texts that you think are important. The purpose of this exercise is to help you follow the authors' intent and to think critically about their assertions. Following are a list of questions that, once answered, will ensure that you have a good outline of the texts' purpose and an in-depth understanding of their historical importance.

Context:

The first reading, Hernán Cortés' "Second Letter to Charles V, 1520," is a detailed report describing the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. This letter contains a number of interesting observations regarding the geography of the region; the city of Tenochtitlan's layout, its architecture; and the religious customs and daily lives of its inhabitants. The second reading, "An Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico," is a selection of Nahuatl-language accounts of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire translated and published by eminent Mexican anthropologist and historian, Miguel León-Portilla. These readings chronicle Hernán Cortés's 1520 campaign in Mexico from both points of view, that of the Spanish conquerors and that of the Aztecs. By reading these two accounts, you will learn about what has been called by historians "the most astonishing encounter (of cultures) in our history."

Questions:

1. Why do you think Hernán Cortés begins his relation of Mexico by describing its geography?
2. Why does the conquistador compare the great city of Tenochtitlan to several Spanish cities?
3. In his letter, Cortés dedicates five full paragraphs to talk about religion. Why do you think he emphasizes this point so much?
4. How does Cortés describe Aztec monarch Montezuma?
5. According to the text, "Speeches of Motecuhzoma and Cortés," was the first meeting between Hernán Cortés and Montezuma an amicable one?
6. Who was "La Malinche"?



7. Why do you think “The Sun commanded that Montecuhzoma and Itzcohuatzin . . . be made prisoners”?
8. How did king Montezuma react to the “Massacre of the Main Temple”?

