xicochimalco
Church and Plaque Commemorating the Route of Cortés
En agosto de 1519, pasó por Xico camino a Tenochtitlán Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) con españoles y aliados de la tierra, comienzo del encuentro entre razas y culturas, que da origen al México de hoy.

(In August of 1519, Hernán Cortés, with Spaniards and native allies, passed through Xico on his way to Tenochtitlán, initiating the encounter of races and cultures from which present-day Mexico originated)
Xicochimalco

Cascada de Texolo

(Texolo Waterfall)
Coatepec
Coatepec

One of Several Churches
Coatepec's Largest Church
Central Plaza
Tlaxcala
Tlaxcala

Central Plaza
Statue of Xicohencatl, Famous Tlaxcalan King
Church Walkway
Tlaxcala

Bull Ring
Cholula
Gran Pirámide de Cholula

(Great Pyramid of Cholula)
Cholula

View from the Top of the Pyramid
Staircase to the Top
Puebla
Puebla

Main Cathedral
Downtown Puebla
Paso de Cortés
Pine Trees and Thick Fog
Paso de Cortés

Welcome Center at the Pass
Paso de Cortés

Signage and Snow
Paso de Cortés

Valley of Mexico
Amecameca
Center of the City
Amecameca

Small Market
Tenochtitlán
(Mexico City)
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City)

Ruins of **Templo Mayor** (Main Temple)
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City)

Ruins with Spanish Cathedral in Background
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City)

View of Modern Mexico City from Torre Latinoamericana
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City)

Zócalo (Central Plaza), Government Building, and Cathedral
Tenochtitlán (Mexico City)

Spanish Building Built with Stones from the Ruins
Retracing the Route of Cortés: How the Conquest Has Shaped Mexico’s Past and Present
When one thinks about the history of the Americas, explorers and conquistadors often come to mind. Many people skip ahead, though, and their history of the Americas begins with the colonization of North America. After some investigation, 16th-century Spain was clearly the main driver of American history, and it should receive much more attention than it currently enjoys. During this period, Spain—motivated by gold, spices, and power—sent out explorers, and then conquistadors, to take its “rightful” belongings. Backed by its religious beliefs and the predominant zero-sum economic theory of the time, Spain “discovered” the New World, and acted as it wished, with no reservations. Its objectives were clearly stated on the cover of a 16th-century manual for conquistadors, which read “A la espada y el compas, más y más y más (With the compass and the sword, more and more and more) (Horwitz 115).” Motivated by such strong forces, it is no wonder that Spain successfully claimed most of the New World. Of the forces, greed was likely the most influential, and the Spanish conquistadors acted accordingly.

The long list of men of conquest contains many familiar names, such as Francisco Pizzaro, Juan Ponce de León, and Diego Velázquez, among others. Hernán Cortés, though, is likely the most well-know, and for good reason. Cortés met all of the criteria of a conquistador. He was born in 1485, in Medellín, Extremadura, Spain, to a family of little nobility (“Hernando Cortés”). After studying law at the University of Salamanca, he returned home—deciding it was not for him—and was quickly mesmerized by the stories coming from the New World. After several setbacks, and drifting in and out of desolation, he arrived to the Americas in 1504, at the island of Hispaniola (Abbott 30). He quickly demonstrated his skills as a leader, and, as a result, was given land plots and soon received political power in neighboring Cuba. After living
a few years on the island of Cuba, Cortés made his true intentions clear when he left with a small expedition for Mexico—against the will of his commanding officer, Diego Velázquez. With this act, Cortés set into motion one of the most significant and interesting events in history—an event that would change the Americas forever. Cortés was only one of the many conquistadors, but his journey to Tenochtitlán is among the most significant events in the history of the Western Hemisphere. Its effects were widespread, and they are still felt today, nearly 500 years later.

When examining Cortés and his conquest of Mexico, it quickly becomes clear that many factors outside of the conquistador’s control helped him reach his greed-driven objectives. And, yes, he was driven by greed, as it is said that he told the indigenous peoples of Mexico that, “Los españoles padecemos de una enfermedad del corazón que solo se alivia con oro (We Spaniards suffer from a sickness of the heart that can only be cured with gold) (“Hispanoamérica”).” The first outside factor pertained to communication. Cortés stumbled upon two interpreters—a religious man, who had been living with the natives, and Malinche, an indigenous woman who would play a vital role in the conquest. The ability to communicate with the various indigenous groups made the conquest. Without such communication, Cortés would not have learned of the great Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, nor would he have been able to make crucial alliances with Aztec-conquered groups of natives.

The second factor was his timing. He arrived in August of 1519, a year in which the Aztec calendar predicted the return of Quetzalcoatl—an important god who was supposedly fair-skinned, bearded, and would arrive with the rising sun—basically a brief description of Cortés
and his arrival (Abbott). This monumental coincidence permitted Cortés and his men to enter
Tenochtitlán without resistance—for the natives did not dare attack one of their gods. This
type, however, is under much criticism, and may well be a tall tale, but it does remain
plausible. Spanish horses and advanced weaponry that Cortés brought from Europe paired
seamlessly with his timing, helping him play his role as a god. Natives are thought to have
believed that Cortés and his horses—which were described as “deer as tall as houses”—were
immortal (Meyer and Sherman). Additionally, the natives’ arrows failed to penetrate the
Spanish armor, further supporting their belief that Cortés was superhuman.

The last crucial factor outside of Cortés’s realm of control was brought from Spain, but
by accident. Estimates vary greatly, but smallpox and other European diseases, to which the
natives had no immunity, are thought to have killed anywhere from thousands to millions of
the indigenous population (“Hernando Cortés”). By simply being present, the Spaniards were
spreading diseases, which turned out to be their most effective weapon against the natives.
Tenochtitlán, a metropolis at the time of Cortés’s invasion, was crippled by a severe smallpox
outbreak, allowing a small army of Spaniards to conquer an Aztec population numbering
around 300,000. Cortés’s ability to communicate, timely arrival, and European diseases worked
harmoniously to make the conquest of Mexico possible.

Under such circumstances, it may seem like anyone with Cortés’s luck could have
conquered Mexico, but that is not true. Hernán Cortés possessed traits and skills that were
ideal—and necessary—for his conquest to be successful. He was a skilled soldier and politician,
and, as a result, an effective conquistador. He effectively used rhetoric, while still knowing
when physical force—and other dramatic measures—when necessary. He had no mercy for
potential traitors, or anyone who might keep him from his goals. Leading a group of greed-
driven soldiers was not an easy task, since many were there only in an attempt to make their
own fortunes. Also, many of the soldiers were quick to want to return to Spain when matters—
such as the search for gold—did not match what they had heard in stories back home. Cortés’s
best decision—and likely most dramatic—was to burn all of his ships upon arriving to Mexico.
This left his men with no other option but to continue on in the New World. Great charisma,
guile, and the willingness to punish his men into obedience made Cortés and his conquest
successful. Cortés himself was a key part of the conquest, as most would not have been able to
manage the adversity of such a great task (Benitez).

Through his actions and successful invasion of Tenochtitlán, Hernán Cortés opened the
door for imperial Spain—and all that it entailed. Nueva España (New Spain), now Mexico, bore
the effects of Spanish imperialism, and those effects are still apparent today. Nearly every
aspect of life was changed by the conquest, including the physical, cultural, economic and
social, political, psychological, and ethical makeup. In order to understand these aspects fully,
one must consider their immediate effects, as well as those which are presently felt.

The physical—or concrete—effects of the conquest are some of the most objective, and,
therefore, relatively easy to review. After the fall of Tenochtitlán, the Spanish immediately
established a new capital on top of the former Aztec capital. Temples and other Aztec
structures were destroyed and quickly replaced with European-style architecture. The ruins of
the Aztec edifices were actually used to construct the new Spanish capital. For example, stones
from the main Aztec temple were used to construct an adjacent Spanish-style building. The Spaniards’ decision to build their capital at the Aztec site allowed them to avoid some of the massive infrastructure and construction demands that they would have otherwise faced. The speed with which the new capital was established and functioning helped Spain quickly secure a strong foothold in the New World, and allowed it to successfully expand outward in all directions.

Today, Mexico still shows the distinct marks of Spanish architecture. Throughout the country, many small cities showcase beautiful European-style cathedrals, squares, and government buildings. Cities such as Morelia, Puebla, and Guanajuato are now considered national historical sites, and citizens are not allowed to update buildings without the permission of a commission that serves to maintain the period style. The greatest footprint of Spanish architecture can be found in the country’s capital. Mexico City is home to one of the world’s largest open plazas, El Zócalo (or La Plaza de la Constitución), which looks as though it were taken directly from Europe. It matches famous European plazas in size and scope, and it is accented by a large baroque-style cathedral and the national palace, which also shows European architectural traits. Although parts of Mexico are now becoming crowded with modern architecture, the Spanish left a permanent mark of this physical aspect of the country.

A second physical aspect imposed by the Spanish was related to size and territorial claims. At its peak, New Spain stretched from Central America to California, and included the American Southwest. Such an expansive territory required an extensive hierarchy, which over time was strained and helped lead to Mexico’s independence from Spain. Through their own
manifest destiny, which far predated that of the United States, the Spanish established numerous cities which still exist today. The vast territorial claims of New Spain, unlike its architecture, did not remain unchanged. Through various wars and treaties, territorial claims were drastically reduced, and modern Mexico represents only about one-third of Spain’s former colonial territory (Meyer and Sherman). Much of the land that was lost now belongs to the United States, and, as a result, some Mexicans hold negative sentiments towards the States. As one can see, the physical effects of the Spanish conquest of Mexico had strong influences, many of which remain visible today.

The next aspect of life affected by the conquest was culture. Spain attempted to convert and eliminate nearly every component of indigenous culture. This was not done in a smooth transition, but in a great cultural clash that led to great abuses of the native peoples. Castellano, or Castilian Spanish, was introduced as the new official language in a country where numerous native languages and dialects thrived. Catholicism was to replace the polytheistic religious systems of the natives, which the Spanish found appalling. Both feats were accomplished successfully—more or less—in a relatively short period of time.

Although a new language and religion were implanted by the Spanish, indigenous cultural aspects made their way into both the language and religion. Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, was the main perpetrator of a linguistic fusion. As the natives and Spaniards interacted, Nahuatl words, which named items for which Castilian had no word, were adopted. Also, as the natives began learning Castilian, slight idiomatic variations occurred, such as intonation that differed from that of Spanish-born speakers. Overtime, what is now known as
Mexican Spanish was formed. The differences between Castilian and Mexican Spanish are now quite pronounced, and the latter has actually overtaken the former in terms of the number of speakers worldwide (CIA World Factbook). Nahuatl-based words that are common in Mexican Spanish—and look familiar even in English—include some of the following: coyote from coyotl, tomate(tomato) from tomatl, chocolate from chocolatl (“Nahuatl Borrowing in Mexican Spanish”). Today, Mexico is the largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, with more than twice the Spanish-speakers of Spain. In fact, in the U.S.—although Castilian still dominates textbooks—Mexican Spanish is far more common in everyday use and in business. Even with the vast numbers of Spanish-speakers in Mexico, the Mexican government currently officially recognizes more than 60 Amerindian languages (El Universal). These languages are spoken by small groups in isolated pockets of the country, and, according to a recent news article, some languages have only recently been discovered (El Universal). So, as one can see, the Spaniards were far more successful in spreading their language—possibly more successful than they may currently prefer—but the indigenous languages of Mexico have also survived.

As for religion, the Spanish vehemently insisted that everyone practice Catholicism. Religion was an integral part of the indigenous societies—as it is in most civilizations—with roots than ran deeply. As a result, the Spanish decided not to destroy the polytheistic system of the natives entirely, but to instead integrate them as best as they could. They matched important catholic figures, such as God and saints, with equally important native gods. The Spanish knew that the natives would continue practicing their own beliefs, but they did not mind too much, as long as they appeared to be practicing Catholicism. This integration process led to Catholicism in Mexico that varied slightly from that of Europe. Some Catholic-based
traditions and festivals adopted pagan characteristics. For example, in some parts of Mexico, *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (Mexico's Virgin Mary), is depicting holding twin babies—which hold significance in indigenous religions—instead of the usual lone baby Jesus. She is also thought to represent Coatlicue, the Aztec mother goddess (Longhena). As with the case of language, forced religious conversion to Catholicism by the Spanish was successful by most standards. Today, Mexico is the second-largest Catholic country by population, and it ranks among the most Catholic by percentage, too (CIA World Factbook). The cultural effects of the conquest are among the strongest of all, and are ever-present in modern Mexico.

The economic and social effects of the conquest were great, widespread, and long-lasting. When the Spanish established themselves in New Spain, they quickly implemented the *encomienda* system, which they had already established in their island territories, such as Hispaniola and Cuba. In this system, in which Cortés had partaken during his time in Cuba, an *encomendero* was given a plot of land and native laborers. He was allowed to use this land and labor in whatever endeavor he deemed profitable—usually sugar cane, or some other labor-intensive crop. Natives were slaves, and the *economenderos* abused them in several ways. In addition to being forced to practice Catholicism, natives were overworked—often to death—and females were sexually assaulted, bearing children who were plugged back into the system as soon as they were strong enough to work (Meyer and Sherman). Since Spaniards were greatly outnumbered by indigenous peoples—and female Spaniards were almost non-existent—a new race of man was quickly created.
Mestizos, or racially-mixed people of Spanish and Amerindian descent, quickly exploded in numbers, complicating the social atmosphere of New Spain. Race was meticulously categorized, and, as in many cases, used as a discriminatory tool in the suppression of all non-European residents in the New World. Names were given to each type of mestizo—determining the percentage above or below half-European that an individual was. This process became even more complex as generations passed and imported African slaves entered the mix. During Spanish control of New Spain, money, power, and education were reserved for the whitest, most-European citizens. Even criollos—individuals born in the New World of European parents—received less status than pensulares—their Spanish-born counterparts (Meyer and Sherman). The treatment of people according to skin color created large social and economic gaps among the groups, and the effects have been ingrained into Mexican society.

Mestizos currently represent around 60 percent of Mexico's 111 million residents, but many of the race-related views of New Spain still exist (CIA World Factbook). In a country where whites are the overwhelming minority, many people still desire to have the lightest skin possible. For example, in the States, skin lotion that slowly tans the skin is a popular item among women. In Mexico, however, lotion that slowly lightens the skin is popular. Partaking in a conversation about driver’s licenses in Mexico confirmed that these sentiments persist. The physical description of a driver may read as follows: güero (white-skinned), trigüeño (wheat-colored), moreno claro (dark-haired, with lighter features), moreno oscuro (dark-haired, with darker features), among many, many others. This is a common trait among former Spanish colonies, not just Mexico. A statement made by a man from the Dominican Republic in Tony Horwitz’s novel, A Journey Long and Strange, “...you can call someone anything but black”,
demonstrates the negative associations made with dark skin colors. Commercials and other types of advertisements also portray the "ideal" Mexican as one with light-colored hair and skin.

The discriminatory uses of color in New Spain have other visible effects in present-day Mexico. The *encomienda* system, over time, was the main culprit for the greatly-lacking middle class in Mexico. As in most Latin American countries, the very rich in Mexico live side-by-side with the very poor, with no substantial group in between. This can be shown by the GINI coefficient, which measures economic disparity (Cheng). Mexico ranks high in terms of GINI, meaning that the rich elite control a significantly larger percentage of wealth than they represent in terms of population, while the large population living in poverty controls very little wealth.

Another negative racial effect of the *encomienda* system relates to the modern societal hierarchy. Since the system favored those of European descent, Caucasians had infinitely more opportunity than non-Whites (Meyer and Sherman). Over time, the racial divisions were reduced, but tendencies within social classes remained relatively intact. As a result, not all rich or educated Mexicans were—or are—light-skinned, but many light-skinned Mexicans found—and find—themselves on the upper half of the social ladder. This has changed greatly, but one must consider the possibility that this racially-determined social link might still exist to a limited degree. Clearly, the economic and social effects of the conquest have molded Mexican society in various ways.
When Cortés successfully defeated the Aztecs, Spain quickly installed a political hierarchy, called the *Virreinato de Nueva España* (Viceroyalty of New Spain). As New Spain grew, the demands that were placed on the system grew exponentially, straining the system. Communication between the King and the Viceroy was slow, and issues emerged that caused disagreements between political interests of New World politicians and those of the King and the *pensulares*. As time passed, tensions grew, and leaders were questioned about their loyalty to Spain and the King. On September 16, 1810, the Mexican War for Independence began, and eleven years later, Mexico had won its independence from Spain. The power vacuum left at the end of the war was the start to Mexico’s tumultuous political history (Meyer and Sherman).

Since gaining its independence from Spain, Mexico has endured two emperors, countless revolutions and civil wars, two major invasions— one by France and another by the United States—and over 60 presidents—many of whom served multiple intermittent terms. Although Mexican politics seem to include everything, stability is not on the list. Throughout all of the chaos and power shifts that constitute the political history of Mexico, instability and corruption have established themselves as main traits. For this reason, Mexico has suffered from low confidence in its political system, which has led to various problems, past and present. Such a tradition of instability can only be explained by the dramatic shifts of power from the Aztecs to the Spanish, and then from the Spanish to Mexicans. The political effects that the conquest caused are extremely significant, and are a source of many of Mexico’s modern problems. Although Mexico’s political history is interesting to learn about, it would not be much fun to experience firsthand.
The psychological and ethical effects resulting from the conquest of Mexico are perhaps the most intriguing and difficult to comprehend. National pride, self-identification, and a constant feeling of "what if?" are all relevant topics when examining this topic. With regards to national pride, Mexicans have a lot of it. Anyone who spends much time in Mexico will likely run across signs, merchandise, and other insignia reading, "¡Viva Mexico! (Long live Mexico!)
" or "¡Viva la Raza! (Long live the [Mexican] Race!)
" Such nationalism is appropriate, as Mexico was the cradle to a new mestizo race—something that most countries cannot claim. Mexicans enjoy the ability to associate themselves with the greatness of the vast Spanish empire, the highly-developed Mesoamerican civilizations, or with both. Another Mexican claim to fame—about which much national pride is shared—is the domestication of corn, one of the world’s main food staples. With such notable national components, Mexicans have every reason to swell with pride, but many do not.

The clash of cultures that Hernán Cortés set into motion when he conquered the Aztec pitted to distinct groups of people against each other. Even though much of Mexico’s population shares near-equal parts of indigenous and European blood, it still takes sides. From a foreigner’s perspective, Mexicans seem to prefer to their indigenous roots rather than their Spanish ones. Three clear examples of this feeling can be seen when examining a Mexican flag, history textbook, and map.

The flag of Mexico is divided into three equal parts, which are colored green, white, and red. The middle section of the flag bears the coat of arms, which is an eagle that is eating a snake while perched on a cactus (CIA World Factbook). This scene is a reference to the Aztecs,
who built their capital, Tenochtitlán, where an eagle perched on a cactus, eating a snake. Of any object, a flag—or coat of arms—is used to represent a country. In the case of Mexico, it chose to display an Aztec theme for the rest of the world to see.

In the United States, if a person were to have to name the most famous national hero or leader, two names would top the list: Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. In Mexico, the single greatest—and most famous—man is Benito Juárez, a Zapotec Amerindian who served five presidential terms. Juárez was a great leader—in a country that has not had many—but one must consider the possibility that part of his popularity is due to the fact that he was the first Mexican president of full indigenous heritage (Meyer and Sherman).

The last example of preference towards indigenous heritage can be seen when looking at a map. The word “Mexico” itself is an example of an initiative to showcase indigenous culture—or even to separate Mexico from its Spanish roots. Certain words in Castilian Spanish, containing the letters “i” or “s”, have been changed to incorporate the letter “x”, which was common in the indigenous languages of Mexico. For example, Méjico is now México, Jalapa has changed to Xalapa, and Tlascal is now spelled Tlaxcala. This is a clear example of deference to Mexico’s indigenous roots (Hispanoamérica). The conquest of Mexico by Spain has resulted in some interesting mindsets about cultural heritage in Modern Mexico. Some other psychological and ethical aspects caused by the conquest are the sources of major problems, and will be discussed later.

Even with such rich traditions, both indigenous and Spanish, many Mexicans do not swell with pride, but rather find themselves contemplating a series of “What ifs?” The
aforementioned effects of the Spanish conquest have not boded especially well for modern Mexico. Mexico, considered a third-world country, finds itself on the doorstep of the United States, the world’s great economic and military powerhouse. A non-English-speaking Mexican who views a map of the United States will recognize several states names, as they are derived from Spanish. California and the American Southwest formerly made up part of New Spain—and Mexico—and one must imagine that it is difficult to see U.S. Americans prosper in states such as Nevada, meaning snow-capped, Colorado, from the Río Colorado (or Red River), and Montana, meaning mountain. In addition to currently possessing former Mexican territory, the United States does not facilitate Mexican immigration; in fact, it restricts it as much as possible. It is no wonder, then, why an ad campaign run by Absolut Vodka in Mexico showing a map of Mexico at its territorial peak, which reads “In an absolute world” is extremely popular.

To some degree, even though time has passed and tensions have reduced, Mexicans must feel a mixture of envy, resentment, and distrust towards the United States—or the broader feeling of “What if?” Following this line of thought, one can investigate the link between the effects of the conquest of Mexico, and how it relates to present-day Mexico’s many struggles.

As a third-world country, Mexico faces many problems common to the third world, but its geographic proximity to the United States has complicated the situation in many ways. Among a list of its most serious problems, one finds overpopulation, illegal drugs and arms trade, economic fragility, immigration, social disparity, poverty, and corruption. All of these problems—in one way or another—can be linked back to the conquest.
Problems strongly related to the United States include immigration, economic fragility, and illegal drugs and arms trade. These three problems—although they may not otherwise seem related—occur because of the long U.S.-Mexico border, the only border in the world dividing a first-world and third-world country (Cheng). The dramatic differences in prosperity between the two countries are the source of this difficult set of problems. South-to-North immigration plagues Mexico, as it has to deal with many of its own citizens leaving for the States. Equally serious, though, is the strain caused by South and Central American immigrants, who come to Mexico in order to reach the States. The influx of immigrant laborers in Mexico, leads to a surplus of labor, which further compounds the problem, giving Mexicans more of an incentive to enter the United States illegally.

The large numbers of Mexican who leave their country have a negative effect on the country's economy, but the implementation of the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) in 1994, has perhaps had an even more negative effect on the economy. Instead of helping promote international trade and economic prosperity, NAFTA has turned Mexico into a sweatshop for the United States. Foreign companies from all over the world have built factories on the Mexican side of the border, which has allowed them to avoid high tariffs, while operating in an environment that offers very low pollution restrictions, as well as low labor costs. In addition to this sweatshop outcome of NAFTA, the United States has been able to flood the Mexican market with goods, such as corn, effectively destroying several of Mexico's domestic markets (Cheng).
Mexico's geographic location has also made it the ideal channel for the illegal trade of drugs and firearms. Drugs—similar to immigrants—flow from South and Central America to Mexico, and later the United States, which is the single largest drug-consuming market in the world. For this reason, Mexico has become a country blighted by violent drug cartels. The flow of guns from the States, which is a large weapon producer, is only natural when numerous cartels lie just south of the border. This frightening example of supply in demand, as well as the immigration and economic problems of Mexico, may not seem to be related at all to the conquest of Mexico by Spain, but they actually are. It all has to do with the social, economic, and ethical effects of the conquest.

Due to the Spanish *encomienda* system, present-day Mexico—as was already mentioned—currently finds itself with great economic disparity. As a result, Mexico's almost non-existent middle class signifies that a large percentage of the country is living in poverty. This, combined with the fact that corruption and other unfavorable economic and social factors rooted in New Spain reign supreme, has led to a Machiavellian mindset. The poor, lacking opportunities to better themselves in a legitimate manner, act accordingly. Any means necessary, in this case, results in citizens who are willing to partake in harmful, but financially-lucrative activities, such as the arms and drugs trade, or political corruption (Roy and Platt). Due to the remnants of an *encomienda*-based society, many Mexicans will do whatever they deem necessary to make gains economically, and to maintain those gains at all costs, even if it is harmful to their country.
Another aspect of this problem, which shows the complexity of the issue, is the fact that such harmful activities are not only accepted, but actually encourage—in a sense—by some. The Machiavellian mindset has paired up with Catholicism—in a fatalistic twist. Two figures, Jesús Malverde—a saint associated with the drug trade—and Santa Muerte, which literally means “Saint Death”, have become quite popular in Mexico (Creechan and Herran). The Robin Hood-like Malverde supposedly watches over narcotics traffickers, while Santa Muerte demonstrates the fatalistic aspects of modern Mexican society. Neither of these “saints” is recognized by the Catholic Church, but that does not seem to hinder their popularity. The psychological and ethical effects of the conquest are some of the most difficult to interpret, but also some of the most intriguing.

As the Mexican bicentennial quickly approaches, it is easy to see that Mexico has been molded by the conquest, which was set into full effect by Hernán Cortés journey from Veracruz to Tenochtitlán. Nearly every aspect of Mexico’s past and present—as well as many of its modern problems—reflect, to varying degrees, the Spanish conquest of Mexico. With such a wide range of issues, it may not seem plausible that a single event could be the cause, but in this case, it is. When Hernán Cortés, the most famous of the Spanish conquistadors, successfully invaded and conquered the Aztec empire, he opened up the New World to Spain. This single event set into motion one of the most significant and interesting chain reactions in history, fusing religions and languages, creating a new race of man, and changing the Americas forever. Nearly 500 years later, the effects are still felt, and they continue to grow exponentially.
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