

The Conquest of the Aztec Empire (1519-1521):
An Examination of Intercultural Conflict in the New World

Robert C. Ranstadler
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Professor Lisa Beckenbaugh
Norwich University

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Wars are frequently fought for a variety of obvious reasons that correlate directly to armed conflict. Other more elusive concepts, however, also lead to war. Among these are the numerous cultural differences that frequently divide societies. What one civilization considers a barbaric tradition, for instance, may be an important social practice of another. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the establishment of the New World. The Spanish conquest of Mexico may be a familiar story, but one in which cultural conflicts resulted in unprecedented violence and destruction. An examination of this struggle reveals a great deal about the participants but, perhaps even more importantly, tells us something about ourselves. While important evidence may be uncovered through exhaustive academic research, it is ultimately cultural beliefs and perceptions that shape many popular views history.

Spain's triumph over the Aztec Empire was one of the most significant events in the course of Mesoamerican culture and the European colonization of the Americas. Spanning the course of approximately two years, the campaign to conquer Mexico culminated in the fall of the Aztec Empire in the summer of 1521.¹ The key belligerents in the conflict were the Aztecs, set on defending their capital city of Tenochtitlan, and Spain, a wealthy European nation seeking land and riches beyond the Iberian Peninsula.² Hernán Cortés led a coalition of Spanish conquistadors and Mesoamerican forces.³ Groups like the Tlaxcalans, led by Xicotencatl the Younger, previously crossed swords with the Aztecs and willingly provided the Spanish with warriors and supplies.⁴ Other rival Mesoamericans, such as the Tlaxcaltecas and Totonacs, offered the Spanish various payments and resources.⁵ Motecuhzoma II initially led the Aztecs

¹ Stephen Morillo, Jeremy Black, and Paul Lococo, *War in World History: Society, Technology, and War from Ancient Times to the Present*, vol. 2, *Since 1500* (Boston: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2009), 56.

² *Ibid.*, 55-7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Angel Maria Garibay K. and Lysander Kemp, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 154-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-7

but, after imprisonment and death, was succeeded by his brother, Cuitlahuac.⁶ He reigned for only three months, however, succumbing to smallpox.⁷ Cuitlahuac was succeeded by the late Motecuhzoma II's cousin, Cuauhtemoc, who was later captured and executed by Cortés.⁸ Following the destruction of the Aztecs, the conquistador led several smaller ventures, received limited accolades, and begrudgingly returned to Spain.⁹

The Crown's presence in the region was felt prior to Cortés tangling with the Aztecs, however. Hernández de Córdoba landed on the Yucatán Peninsula in 1517 but met defeat at the hands of an angry group of Mayan warriors.¹⁰ Cortés's subsequent expedition was supposed to focus primarily upon trade opportunities, but evolved into a full-scale invasion of Mexico.¹¹ Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, then governor of Cuba, commissioned his trip during the waning months of 1518.¹² Early the following year, Cortés set out for the mainland amid economic and political chaos, as challenges to his charter almost foiled the expedition.¹³ Nevertheless, he quickly made landfall at Cozumel in 1519.¹⁴ After converting several natives to Christianity, and discovering a pair of previously shipwrecked countrymen, Cortés continued across mainland Mexico.¹⁵ It was during this period that he met La Malinche, a native woman who interpreted for and advised the Spaniard during his conquests.¹⁶ Cortés next discovered the village of Cempoala, convinced the local chief to fight the Aztecs, and founded Veracruz.¹⁷ The Aztecs

⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 115.

⁹ Ralph Hammond Innes, "Hernán Cortés, marqués del Valle de Oaxaca," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Hernan-Cortes-marques-del-Valle-de-Oaxaca>.

¹⁰ Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. J. M. Cohen, ed. Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 17-9.

¹¹ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 56.

¹² Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 46.

¹³ Ibid., 56-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52-7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 88-113.

¹⁶ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 85-6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 114.

initiated first contact with Cortés and attempted to placate the Spaniard with tributes and gifts but Cortés, knowing that greater riches were beyond the horizon, intimidated the dignitaries through a show of force.¹⁸

Having violated his charter, Cortés was left with no choice but to put down a mutiny, scuttle his fleet, and march inland toward Tenochtitlan.¹⁹ Action in Tlaxcala resulted in the settlement siding with Cortés against their mutual rival, the Aztecs, who the Tlaxcalans had been at war with for many years.²⁰ Cortés and his men arrived at Tenochtitlan, on 8 November 1519, where he was greeted by Motecuhzoma II, who set about placating the Spaniards in order to avoid bloodshed.²¹ This strategy failed, however, with Cortés imprisoning the king for the remainder of his life.²² Reduced to a puppet emperor, Motecuhzoma II eventually became despised by his own people and lost his claim to the throne.²³ During the intervening period, Cortés faced Pánfilo de Narváez, a fellow Spaniard sent from Cuba to arrest the insubordinate conquistador.²⁴ While Cortés fought Narváez, the irate Aztecs at Tenochtitlan rebelled against the remaining garrison of Tlaxcalan warriors and Spanish soldiers.²⁵ Cortés later returned to the city, liberated his men, fought a bloody retreat back to Tlaxcala, established a new coalition of forces, and laid siege to Tenochtitlan.²⁶ The long and bloody campaign concluded with the destruction of the city, the assimilation or death of millions of Mesoamericans, and the propagation of Spanish culture across all of Mexico.²⁷

¹⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126-39.

²⁰ Ibid., 166.

²¹ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 63-5.

²² León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 65-9.

²³ Ibid., 83.

²⁴ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 280-1.

²⁵ Ibid., 278-9.

²⁶ Ibid., 353-413.

²⁷ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 56-8.

Many cultural beliefs and misconceptions, on both sides of the conflict, shaped the struggle for Mexico. Identifying and comparing such differences, however, is a difficult task.

Stephen Morillo cogently summed up this dilemma by cautioning that:

Constructing a typology of transcultural warfare requires first that we have some working notion of what we mean by *culture* and how cultural boundaries can affect the conduct of war. This is of course not an easy first step, given the multiple vectors along which personal identity can be and historically has been constructed... If we are strict enough about what counts as a unitary culture, all wars will count as transcultural, which would make a typology of them pointless.²⁸

Morillo's "General Typology of Transcultural Wars" thus provides some basis from which to evaluate the cultural dynamics of war.²⁹ "Pragmatically," he surmises, "we can probably make a distinction between *Big Cultures* on the one hand and *Subcultures*, component segments of Big Cultures, on the other."³⁰ Certainly, there were several major groups involved in the early colonization of Mexico but, for the sake of brevity, let us oversimplify the matter by identifying the two major antagonist of the struggle as Mesoamerican Indians and Western Europeans.

Partitioning the subcultures involved in this conflict is a slightly more complex affair. Morillo warns that, "the boundaries between subcultures cannot be conceived of as fixed."³¹ And, while it's tempting to categorically divide all of Mesoamerica and Western Europe into lesser subcultures, one runs the risk of implying that the contributions of these diverse people were somehow less significant than those of their parent civilizations. Nevertheless, and again in the interest of brevity and context, we must simply agree that sixteenth-century Mexico was occupied by three influential and indigenous subcultures, consisting of the Aztecs, Tlaxcaltecas, and Totonacs.³² The Europeans, we can likewise summarize, were divided between Castilians

²⁸ Stephen Morillo, "A General Typology of Transcultural Wars: The Early Middle Ages and Beyond," in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 1, accessed May 10, 2016, ProQuest ebrary.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 1-2.

³² J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Foreword to *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, xi-xxiv, trans. Angel Maria Garibay K. and Lysander Kemp, ed. Miguel León-Portilla, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press,

and Cubans (with the term *Cuban*, in this instance, referring to imperial Spaniards that settled in the Caribbean, not the indigenous people of that locality).³³ Important divisions within each of these subcultures—marked by intracultural struggles, such as the conflicting groups of Aztecs politically divided over their imprisoned emperor’s claim to throne—are significant but beyond both the size and scope of this analysis.³⁴

With the key players of the conflict identified, we’re then led to question what cultural beliefs and socioeconomic forces shaped the struggle for Mexico. The major cultural divisions between Mesoamerican Indians and Western Europeans, while powerful and varied, can be distilled down to their views concerning religion and wealth.³⁵ The terms *religion* and *wealth*, however, are problematically ambiguous and require further explanation.

Each society followed at least one organized religion and was driven by significant spiritual beliefs.³⁶ These views sometimes opposed one another and did more to instigate bloodshed rather than alleviate conflict.³⁷ Some anthropologists even believe that “Mesoamerica was unified by a commonly held, if not unified, system of religious practice.”³⁸ This often involved ceremonial combat and ritual sacrifice performed to appease a pantheon of gods,

1992), xiv-xxi. Klor de Alva agrees that, although a significant number of Mesoamerican Indian tribes have been marginalized and lost to the pages of history, Aztecs, Tlaxcaltecas, and Totonacs were some of the most influential indigenous groups of sixteenth-century Mexico.

³³ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 15-8. Díaz never made a categorical distinction between his countrymen as is implied here. The Spaniard, however, did observe many unfavorable differences about the “three fruitless years” he spent in Cuba. These stood in stark contrast to the great pride he took in to his “ancestors having always been servants of the Crown.” It should also be noted that Díaz did make a specific cultural comparison between mainland Mesoamerican Indians and indigenous Cubans. This observation, however is tertiary to the above discussion.

³⁴ For more on the typology of intracultural warfare see, Morillo, “A General Typology of Transcultural Wars,” 3. For more on Motecuhzoma II’s reputation see, León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 32-3.

³⁵ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 55-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ F. Kent Reilly III, “Mesoamerican Religious Beliefs: The Practices and Practitioners,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, ed. Deborah L. Nichols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), accessed May 12, 2016, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195390933.013.0057.

spiritual ancestors, and supernatural creatures; all of which were believed capable of directly affecting the living.³⁹ Mesoamerican political structure and organization was influenced by the emergence and evolution of religion, with considerable power eventually resting in the hands of priests and emperors.⁴⁰ The Spanish, on the other hand, were devote Catholics, who saw the conversion of the pagan Mesoamericans as a divine obligation and spiritual right.⁴¹ Such zeal motivated many Europeans to sail abroad but also served as a pretext for the systematic murder and subjugation of millions of Mesoamericans.⁴² The great differences between these two theological traditions simply proved too divisive in both scope and practice. Bernal Díaz, in his *Conquest of New Spain*, horrifically recounted that “they [the Aztec priests] kicked the bodies [of the Spaniards] down the steps... and flayed their faces... kept for their drunken festivals. They sacrificed all our men this way... offering their hearts and blood to their idols...”⁴³ A Nahuatl account reveals that, during a sacred *fiesta*, Spaniards “attacked all of the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords... Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads or split their heads to pieces.”⁴⁴ Religious intolerance thus led to atrocities on both sides of the conflict.

The acquisition of riches and resources also prompted both civilizations to visit brutalities upon one another. From a cultural standpoint, however, each viewed wealth from a different perspective. The Spanish considered the acquisition of precious metals, land, and titles vital to their financial success. In his *Cartas de Relación* (Letters of Relation), Cortés revealed that

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Hernán Cortés, John Huxtable Elliott, and Anthony Pagden, *Letters from Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5-8, accessed May 12, 2016, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost.

⁴² John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture: From Ancient Greece to Modern America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 77.

⁴³ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 387.

⁴⁴ León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 74-6.

previous explorers “discovered a land rich in gold; for he [Córdoba] had seen that all the natives wore gold rings... and likewise that there were buildings of stone and mortar.”⁴⁵ Cortés, often at the expense of native populations, moved quickly to secure these treasures but also received such luxuries in the form of tributes.⁴⁶ Díaz recalled that Motecuhzoma II delivered upon the Spanish, “gold and cloaks between Cortes and the four captains, and for each of us soldiers two gold necklaces... worth in all more than a thousand pesos.”⁴⁷ Following the destruction of Tenochtitlan, Charles V appointed Cortés governor of New Spain and granted the Spaniard a royal coat of arms.⁴⁸

Mesoamericans, while laden with an abundance of land and gold, held a different view of wealth and prosperity. Their empires were “hegemonic rather than territorial in structure,” and were, “held together not by armies of occupation... but by the perception of... power.”⁴⁹ Cultural dominance and the acquisition of tradable commodities thus represented wealth in Mexico. Obsidian and bronze were used to construct weapons, while geographically dispersed items, such as cocoa, cotton, and salt were traded with veracity.⁵⁰ Items related to religious worship, such as ceramic incense burners and lavish pottery, were highly sought-after valuables.⁵¹ Goods initially exchanged with the Spanish also held some limited value in sixteenth-century Mesoamerican society.⁵² Cortés, for instance, compensated an Aztec envoy by offering them “food, wine, and some blue beads.”⁵³

⁴⁵ Cortés, Elliott, and Pagden, *Letters from Mexico*, 5.

⁴⁶ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 88-92.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*-

⁴⁹ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 55.

⁵⁰ Michael E. Smith, “Long-Distance Trade Under the Aztec Empire: The Archaeological Evidence,” *Ancient Mesoamerica* 1 (1990), 157-161, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/1-CompleteSet/MES-90-L-D-Trade.pdf>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 153-5.

⁵² Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Returning to Morillo's typological framework, it's important to note that significant and opposing cultural views also existed on a more acute, subcultural scale.⁵⁴ Big cultures did not hold a monopoly on cultural conflicts in Mesoamerica. The aforementioned major subcultures of Mexico were at war centuries before the arrival of Córdoba, when the Aztec Empire featured the three polities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan.⁵⁵ This fifteenth-century "Triple Alliance" held tributary and military control of the Mexico Valley for approximately nine decades, until succumbing to Spanish rule.⁵⁶ Subsequently, some Mesoamerican Indians sided with Cortés, who gained several important allies while traveling across the Yucatán.⁵⁷ According to Díaz, a Totonac chief "broke into bitter complaints against the great Montezuma and his governors, saying that the Mexican prince had recently brought him into subjugation... and so grievously oppressed him and his people..."⁵⁸ This partnership led to the joint founding of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, a fortification which Cortés later used as a staging point for offensive raids into Aztec territory.⁵⁹

Spaniards struggled with subcultural issues concerning wealth and power as well. The governor of Cuba, who previously commissioned Cortés's venture, later revoked the charter fearing that potential success on the Mexican mainland would overshadow earlier strides made in Cuba.⁶⁰ Thus, actions that Cortés claimed to take on behalf of the Castilian Crown conflicted with the goals of the colonial Cuban aristocracy. Although Cortés managed to escape Velázquez, the governor still sought his revenge. As previously noted, Cortés was forced to face a contingent of soldiers, who Governor Velázquez sent to arrest the Spaniard under charges of

⁵⁴ Morillo, "A General Typology of Transcultural Wars," 8-9.

⁵⁵ León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 154-5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 107-18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

mutiny and treason.⁶¹ Cortés was victorious in the ensuing battle but the distraction only strengthened the resolve of the Aztecs, who rebelled against the Spanish garrison left behind in Tenochtitlan.⁶² This ultimately led to the bloody withdraw of Spanish troops from Aztec territory; an ominous affair in which Díaz remarked that “we stared death in the face.”⁶³ Thus, subcultural clashes sometimes proved more potent than big culture conflicts.

Combined, all of these cultural differences played out in a series of violent encounters across Mexico. This amalgamation was shaped by two very different world views; misconceptions founded upon fundamental differences in the way each culture waged war.⁶⁴ Morillo suggests that such a “transcultural war” is one “in which perceptions of cultural difference influenced the conduct of war...”⁶⁵ This particular type of struggle is what he typologically classified as “intercultural warfare,” defined by the belligerents sharing a “mutual incomprehension” of one another, the war being primarily waged between two Big Cultures, and a lack of “pragmatic limitations on conflict and treatment of non-combatants.”⁶⁶

Primary sources associated with the campaign reveal that neither side comprehended the other. First contact with the Spaniards was a mysterious encounter for Mesoamericans.⁶⁷ A Nahua text, for example, reported the “appearance of ‘towers of small mountains floating on the waves of the sea.’”⁶⁸ Bernal Díaz, likewise, discovered “some very strange buildings... the walls of which were painted with figures of great serpents and evil looking gods,” where he “stood astonished, never having seen or heard of such things before.”⁶⁹ Clearly, a mutual

⁶¹ Ibid., 280-1.

⁶² Ibid., 280-4.

⁶³ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 296.

⁶⁴ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 55-6.

⁶⁵ Morillo, “A General Typology of Transcultural Wars,” 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁷ León-Portilla, ed., *Broken Spears*, 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 20-1.

incomprehension of one another's cultures exacerbated an already tense relationship between the two belligerents.

Each society also met Morillo's typological classification of what he referred to as "Big Cultures." He defined such entities as possessing "broad areas sharing major cultural features ranging from basic ecological and subsistence patterns and material culture to broadly shared aspects of world view and... even cultures of war."⁷⁰ The bulk of this discussion has already spoken to many of the former attributes, such as ecology, religion, and philosophy. The latter aspect of this argument, however, merits closer examination, as these differing views played key roles in the outcome of the contest for Mexico.

Many Mesoamerican tribes observed a ritualistic form of combat that was predicated upon ceremonial skirmishes and the sacrifice or ransom of captured combatants.⁷¹ Western Europeans, on the other hand, favored a decimating mode of conflict that emphasized the complete annihilation of their opponents.⁷² Europeans experienced centuries of devastating war prior to discovering the New World.⁷³ This affinity for violence reached near-apocalyptic levels when infused with powerful technological and tactical innovations, such as gunpowder, steel weapons, and mounted combat.⁷⁴

A final factor to consider, when comparing the differences in the way each culture perceived and waged war, was the conduct and treatment of non-combatants; another characteristic Morillo used to define such intercultural conflicts.⁷⁵ In this regard, there were many instances in which blood-drunk Spaniards slaughtered innocent Mesoamerican Indians.

⁷⁰ Morillo, "A General Typology of Transcultural Wars," 1.

⁷¹ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 55-6.

⁷² Lynn, *Battle*, 13-4.

⁷³ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 52-3.

⁷⁴ See note 72 above.

⁷⁵ Morillo, "A General Typology of Transcultural Wars," 8-9.

One such encounter occurred in the town of Cholula, where a “sudden slaughter began: knife strokes, and sword strokes, and death. The people of Cholula had not foreseen it... They faced the Spaniards without weapons, without their swords or their shields.”⁷⁶ In the same account, however, Mesoamericans visited similar atrocities upon one another.⁷⁷ The narrator laments that “They died blindly, without knowing why, because of the lies of the Tlaxcaltecs.”⁷⁸

On a more historiographical note, the differences between the world views of sixteenth-century Mesoamerican Indians and Western Europeans, on one hand, and our own world views and cultural assumptions, on the other, affect how we assess the behavior of the participants. There are discussions on either side of the conflict that initially appear irrational from our perspective, but later make a bit more sense when viewed from within the cultural context of each participant’s respective views and Morillo’s framework of transcultural war.

One of the most alarming and disturbing aspects of early Mesoamerican culture was the practice of ritual human sacrifice. The brutality of this tradition was captured in grisly detail through the eyes of Bernal Díaz. Passages in which his comrades had their chests cut open and their still “palpitating hearts... offered to the idols before them... [and then] their flesh [ate] with a sauce of peppers and tomatoes” inspire dread nearly five hundred years after they were written.⁷⁹ Many Mesoamerican cultures, however, viewed such practices as a necessary part of their social existence; one in which supernatural forces required tribute.⁸⁰ Some recent studies even suggest that there was a more practical side to sacrifice and cannibalism.⁸¹ In his 1998 paper, “Aztec Human Sacrifice,” Dr. Michael Winkelman evaluates several theories which

⁷⁶ Ibid., 40-1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Díaz, *Conquest of New Spain*, 387.

⁸⁰ Reilly III, “Mesoamerican Religious Beliefs: The Practices and Practitioners.”

⁸¹ Michael Winkelman, “Aztec Human Sacrifice: Cross-Cultural Assessments of the Ecological Hypothesis,” *Ethnology* 37/3 (Summer, 1998), 285-8, accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3774017>.

suggest that subpar food production, hampered by evolving ecological challenges and war, failed to meet the dietary demands of densely populated cities.⁸²

Sixteenth-century European culture, while more conventionally documented than Mesoamerican society, is still difficult to comprehend. The most incomprehensible aspects of the conquest of the Aztecs was the manner in which Spanish forces invaded Mexico, stripped the region of its resources, and decimated local populations. Millions of Mesoamerican Indians fell to Spanish swords or epidemic disease.⁸³ Modern scholars are thus left wondering what could have motivated and justified the slaughter of nearly an entire civilization? Understanding how the Spanish perceived Mesoamerican Indians and how they viewed themselves sheds some light on the matter. Several accounts reveal three key aspects of this cultural panorama. First, the Spanish viewed many Mesoamericans as subhuman pagans requiring conversion or complete annihilation.⁸⁴ Religious zeal was a powerful aspect of European culture and fueled centuries of conflict across the Continent.⁸⁵ Second, King Charles V faced growing competition across both the Iberian Peninsula and the North Atlantic Ocean.⁸⁶ His kingdom was geographically, technologically, and economically predisposed to search for new trade routes and resources across the sea.⁸⁷ Lastly, the individual character of many conquistadors was fickle.⁸⁸ Cutthroats and brigands routinely disobeyed their orders, were motivated more by the acquisition of loot than honor, committed mutiny, and placed little relative value on the lives of those they

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 52-6.

⁸⁴ Cortés, Elliott, and Pagden, *Letters from Mexico*, 5-8.

⁸⁵ Lynn, *Battle*, 13-4.

⁸⁶ Morillo, Black, and Lococo, *War in World History*, 52-3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ R. C. Green, "The Conquest of the Conquistadors," *World Archaeology* 5/1 (June, 1973), 14-6. accessed May 13, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/124150>.

conquered.⁸⁹ While none of this justifies the actions of the conquistadors, it helps in at least comprehending the motivations behind their actions.

Transcultural wars and intercultural struggles are complicated affairs that transcend many preconceived notions of conflict. The Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, while both significant and tragic, serves as a stark example of what can occur when two mutually incomprehensible cultures clash with one another. Nevertheless, when studying such encounters, it's important to place big cultural issues, such as religion, wealth, and philosophy, within relative context. Failing to do so may overshadow, or even obscure, important subcultural concerns and issues faced by everyday people struggling against the cultural tides of their parent civilizations. Infusing these two elements frequently reveals complex world views that have routinely dictated the course and outcome of many armed conflicts. Historiographically, this benefits military history, a discipline in which scholars strive to objectively understand the puzzling relationship between culture, technology, and war.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

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