

Submission Guidelines

Collaborate with your team on your case study presentation. When it is complete, the team leader is responsible for submitting it in the Assignment Lab, or for making sure that another team member submits it. Please note that all learners should visit the assignment lab and provide feedback on at least 2 other team presentations, before the deadline.

As a reminder, your presentation should:

1. Be limited to no more than 750 words
2. Engage the materials in the case studies, lectures, and text.
3. You are free to import material from outside the course, but this is not necessary and may detract you and teammates from the task. Don't go overboard!

Instructions

Step 1: Read the case study introduction, background information, and the primary sources below.

Step 2: Work with your team to answer the challenge question for this case study.

Step 3: Go to the Assignment Lab to post your response, and to read and comment on other learners' submissions.

Track B, Case Study 1: Demographic collapse in new World: eruptive fevers and contagion in 16th century Americas

STEP 1

Case Study Introduction

Lecture 3, Segment 5 introduces the concept of the Columbian Exchange. If you are using the textbook (Chapter 12, 455-457), you will also be familiar with this concept, which describes how “plants, pathogens, people, and products” passed between the Americas and Africa/Eurasia once they had been connected by regular trade and migration. Disease was a prominent feature of this exchange, and the spread of smallpox and other illnesses such as measles had deadly consequences for unprotected populations. Disease weakened and broke up once strong civilizations and led to rapid demographic collapse in the New World. This in turn facilitated the growth of European colonies and exploitation of the Americas.

Background Information

While different figures have been put forward over the years, recent studies suggest that from the time of European contact with the Americas in 1492 to 1600, an estimated 56 million deaths occurred in the ‘new’ world.¹ Genetic studies suggest that the population of native peoples was rapidly reduced by half following Christopher Columbus’ arrival in 1492.² While some of the deaths are attributable to conquest, enslavement, and war, the vast majority were due to the (mostly inadvertent) introduction of old world diseases to populations which had no immunity to them. The so-called old and new worlds had indeed been worlds apart before 1492, and the isolation of the peoples of the Americas from the rest of the world had prevented exposure to many of its diseases. These included measles, typhus, diphtheria, chicken pox, cholera, and most deadly of all, influenza and smallpox. (Syphilis originated in the ‘new’ world and was transmitted to Europe and on at this time). The rapid spread of contagions and epidemics amongst native peoples brought disorder and decay to formerly highly organized societies, and were often followed by famine, death, or enslavement. When the leaders of civilizations such as the Aztec and the Incan Empire were affected, internal power and succession struggles multiplied, and the societies were further weakened. The European arrivals exploited these vulnerabilities in

order to access the wealth and resources of new world societies and gain control for emerging European colonial empires.

Sources:

1. Koch, Alexander, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis, "Earth system impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492," *Quaternary Science Reviews*, Volume 207, 2019: 13-36, ISSN 0277-3791, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2018.12.004>.
2. O'Fallon, Brendan D., and Lars Fehren-Schmitz. "Native Americans Experienced a Strong Population Bottleneck Coincident with European Contact." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 108, no. 51 (2011): 20444-0448. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23077265>.

Here are the primary sources in this case study:

1. The Plague Named Totomonjztli, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* (1579), from Chapter 29, Book XII.
2. 1524 map of the Gulf of Mexico and Tenochtitlán by Hernán Cortés
3. Nahua suffering from smallpox, image from Book XII of the *Florentine Codex*
4. Depiction of Hernán Cortés, Spanish soldiers and their allies entering Tenochtitlán, center of the Aztec Empire
5. Post-conquest map of Tenochtitlán, from Münster, 1597
6. Excerpt from *The Broken Spears*
7. Excerpt from Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Reporte of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588)

Primary Source One: 'The Plague Named Totomonjztli,' Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex* (1579), from Chapter 29, Book XII.

Background

This primary source is from the *Florentine Codex* by the Spanish friar Bernardino de Sahagún. Sahagún worked with local people and native Nahuatl speakers and recorded elements of local history. Originally entitled, *La Historia Universal de las Cosas de Nueva España* (in English: *The Universal History of the Things of New Spain*) (c. 1579), the *Florentine Codex* contains detailed descriptions and illustrations of the central American regions in which De Sahagún worked as a Franciscan missionary. He arrived in Mexico in 1529. Eight years earlier, Hernan Cortés had been victorious over the Aztec empire with the fall of the city of Tenochtitlán. The *Florentine Codex*, now in the Medicea Laurenziana Library in Florence provides a unique window to the past. As an ethnographic study of the peoples of the Americas in the tumultuous sixteenth century, it is a vital source on the history and culture of the of the Aztec empire, and the Nahua language and people in particular. This primary source is an excerpt from the *Florentine Codex* dealing with the smallpox plague in Mexico.

Twenty-ninth Chapter, in which it is told how there came a plague, of which the natives died. Its name was smallpox. It was at the time that the Spaniards set forth from Mexico.

But before the Spaniards had risen against us, first there came to be prevalent a great sickness, a plague. It was in Tepeilhuitl that it originated, that there spread over the people a great destruction of men. Some it indeed covered [with pustules]; they were spread everywhere, on one's face, on one's head, on one's breast, etc. There was indeed perishing; many indeed died of it. No longer could they walk; they only lay in their abodes, in their beds. No longer could they move, no longer could they bestir themselves, no longer could they raise themselves, no longer could they stretch themselves out face down, no longer could they stretch themselves out on their backs. And when they bestirred themselves, much did they cry out. There was much perishing. Like a covering, covering-like, were the pustules. Indeed many people died of them, and many just died of hunger. There was death from hunger; there was no one to take care of another; there was no one to attend to another.

And on some, each pustule was placed on them only far apart; they did not cause much suffering, neither did many die of them. And many people were harmed by them on their faces; their faces were roughened. Of some, the eyes were injured; they were blinded.

At this time this plague prevailed indeed sixty days — sixty day-signs — when it ended, when it diminished; when it was realized, when there was reviving, the plague was already going toward Chalco. And many were crippled by it; however, they were not entirely crippled. It came to be prevalent in Teotleco, and it went diminishing in Panquetzaliztli. At that time the Mexicans, the brave warriors were able to recover from the pestilence.

And when this had happened, then the Spaniards came. They moved there from Texcoco; they went to set forth by way of Quauhtitlan; they came to settle themselves at Tlacopan. There the responsibilities were then divided; there, there was a division. Pedro de Alvarado's [a lieutenant of Cortés] responsibility became the road coming to Tlatilulco. And the Marquis [Cortés] went to settle himself in Coyoacan, and it became the Marquis's responsibility, as well as the road coming from Acachinanco to Tenochtitlán. The Marquis knew that the man of Tenochtitlán was a great warrior.

And in Nextlatilco, or Ilyacac, there indeed war first began. There [the Spaniards] quickly came to reach Nonoalco. The brave warriors came following after them. None of the Mexicans died. Then the Spaniards turned their backs. The brave warriors waged war in boats; the shield-boatmen shot arrows at them. Their arrows rained upon the Spaniards. They entered [Nonoalco]. And the Marquis thereupon threw [the Spaniards] toward those of Tenochtitlán; he followed along the Acachinanco road. Many times he fought, and the Mexicans contended against him.

COMPASS POINTS

- Note how the narrative voice changes from the first to the second paragraph. It is as if Bernardino de Sahagún is recording the voice of a person from the new world.
- The narrator understands that the disease spreads from place to place: note the mention of Chalco and the Teotleco.
- Pay attention to the order of events in this source: first the arrival of the Spaniards in Mexico, then a great sickness, then the spread of the disease, then a recovery for those less affected by the sickness, then the conquest by the Spaniards through war.

Primary Source Two: Tenochtitlán, Mexico, 1524

This is a 1524 map by Hernán Cortés of the Gulf of Mexico and Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztec empire. It is believed this map is based on an Aztec map of the city and reflects the inhabitants' own view of it. Cortés' early descriptions of Mexico for a European audience were significant in maintaining Spain's interest in the New World. There were numerous battles between the Aztec empire and the Spanish and their local allies but the siege of Tenochtitlán (1519-1521), and the city's fall, was a decisive victory for the Spanish, led by Cortés. The siege's outcome was shaped by the aftermath of a smallpox epidemic that devastated the Aztec population of the Valley of Mexico including Tenochtitlán (where it broke out in October 1520). Estimates suggest that the city's population was about 200,000 before the onset of the disease, making it one of the largest cities in the world. The epidemic brought with it chaos, disorder, famine, and death. Approximately half of the Aztec population succumbed to smallpox and other diseases, while the Spanish, who had immunity, were largely unaffected. The fall of Tenochtitlán was significant to the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire and crumbling of Aztec civilization.



Source: Hernán Cortés and Peter Martyr, *Praeclara Ferdinandi Cortesii de nova Maris Oceani Hispania Narratio*, (Nuremberg, 1524), Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library.

COMPASS POINTS

- Tenochtitlán, like cities throughout central and South America, was a well-organized and densely populated center.
- Observe the sources of natural fertility for the city, and think about how they could have supported a thriving city.
- Look at how Tenochtitlán is surrounded by Lake Texcoco. This gave the city an advantageous position in a war situation but could not protect it from disease.

- Note the city's layout and consider how the close proximity of its people might have facilitated the spread of the smallpox virus and other infectious disease.
- Look at the Habsburg imperial flag dominating the top of the map. By including the flag in the map, Cortés was signaling his allegiance to Holy Roman Emperor King Charles I.

Primary Source Three: Nahua suffering from smallpox, image from Book XII of the 16th-century Florentine Codex (c. 1540–1585)



Source: Nahua people suffering from smallpox, image from Book XII of the 16th-century Florentine Codex, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de nueva España* (c. 1540–1585), Medicea Laurenziana Library in Florence. From Wikimedia Commons.

COMPASS POINTS

- Note how the arrangement of the images suggests the progression of the disease: In the first image the sick person is sitting up, while at the bottom right the sick person is prostrate and uncovered.
- Look at how suffering is portrayed in these images: despite its simplicity the image communicates the pain of the sick.
- The healer is shown as healthy and strong, but her efforts do not seem to alleviate the suffering of the sick. The sick people are shown as smaller, covered in pustules, with only blankets to cover them. This illustrates their vulnerability and hopelessness.

Primary Source Four: Depiction of Hernán Cortés, Spanish soldiers and their allies entering Tenochtitlán, center of the Aztec Empire



Source: 17th or 18th-century oil painting of the fall of Tenochtitlán, Conquest of Mexico series, Library of Congress, Washington D.C..

COMPASS POINTS

- Compare the dress of the attacking Spaniards and the defending Aztecs: Aztec weapons were ineffective against armor.
- See how the horses strengthen the position of the invading force. Horses and new breeds of dog came to the Americas as part of the Columbian Exchange. They were a new and intimidating factor for Aztec soldiers.
- The Spanish are using flags and banners to mark their forces.
- Note the use of ships by the Spaniards. Cortez saw the lake as a key to victory and commissioned the boats to be built for the attack.

Primary Source Five: Post-conquest map of Tenochtitlán, from Münster, 1597



Source: Sebastian Münster, Von den neuen Inseln : der Statt Themistitan in den neuen Inseln gelegen/figurierung. (S.l., 1597), Library of Congress, Washington D.C..

COMPASS POINTS

- Note the changed structure of the central square of the city, now dominated by a Christ-like figure.
- The changed names and the labels show that European settlers claimed the city as their own.

Primary Source Six: Excerpt from the Broken Spears

The *Florentine Codex* was a source of much of the text of *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (*Visión de los vencidos: Relaciones indígenas de la conquista*), a book by Miguel León-Portilla. León-Portilla was committed to working with materials that gave voice to the experiences of native peoples, like those recorded in the work of Bernardino de Sahagún and his associates. These accounts date back to 1528, seven years after the fall of the capital city Tenochtitlan. In this short excerpt León-Portilla's book we get a sense of how disease affected Aztec resistance, especially the last section which shows Nahuatl emotional collapse.

Remember that this is an English translation from the Spanish translation text of interviews and stories in the Nahuatl language.

Broken spears lie in the roads;
we have torn our hair in grief.
The houses are roofless now, and their walls
are reddened with blood.
Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas,
and the walls are splattered with gore.
The water has turned red, as if it were dyed,
and when we drink it,
it has the taste of brine.
We have pounded our hands in despair
against the adobe walls,
for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead.
The shields of our warriors were its defense,
but they could not save it
We have chewed dry twigs and salt grasses;
we have filled our mouths with dust and bits of adobe;
we have eaten lizards, rats and worms....

Source: Miguel León Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962).

COMPASS POINTS

- Give that this comes to us as an interpretation of Nahuatl, there are sometimes differences in translation. The first line, for instance, has also been translated, "Broken bones lie in the streets." Consider the different connotations in meaning.
- Note how the words and images conjure up feelings of despair, hopelessness, and decay.
- The line, "the water has turned red" indicates how much blood was spilled, enough to turn the freshwater lake salty ("it has the taste of brine").

Primary Source Seven: Excerpt from Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Reporte of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588)

Background

Our last primary source takes us north, away from the central American region. It is included here to give you the sense of how similar patterns of disease and conquest followed European settlement throughout the Americas.

This source is taken from the one of the first books about North America written by an Englishman who had visited the continent (in 1585-86). In his 1588 book, Thomas Hariot describes the region's animals and plants, and most importantly the native people of the area (Roanoke Island) along the central east coast that Hariot saw. Later editions of Hariot's book that included images from engravings by John White were important factors in sustaining English interest in the colonial project in the 'new' world.

Note that the source is written in old English: simply read through it without focusing on the unusual spellings and you should get the meaning.

The Wiroans with whom we dwelt called Wingina, and many of his people would be glad many times to be with vs at our praier, and many times call vpon vs both in his owne towne, as also in others whither he some- times accompanied vs, to pray and sing Psalmes; hoping thereby to bee partaker of the same effectes which wee by that meanes also expected.

Twise this Wiroans was so grievously sicke that he was like to die, and as hee laie languishing, doubting of anie helpe by his owne priestes, and thinking he was in such daunger for offending vs and thereby our god, sent for some of vs to praie and bee a meanes to our God that it would please him either that he might liue or after death dwell with him in blisse, so likewise were the requestes of manie others in the like case.

On a time also when their corne began to wither by reason of a drouth which happened extraordinarily, fearing that it had come to passe by reason that in some thing they had displeased vs, many woulde come to vs & desire vs to praie to our God of England, that he would preserue their corne, promising that when it was ripe we also should be partakers of the fruite.

There could at no time happen any strange sick- nesse, losses, hurtes, or any other crosse vnto them, but that they would impute to vs the cause or meanes therof for offending or not pleasing vs. One other rare and strange accident, leauing others, will I mention before I ende, which mooued the whole countrey that either knew or hearde of vs, to haue vs in wonderfull admiration.

There was no towne where we had any subtile deuise practised against vs, we leauing it vnpunished or not re- uenged (because wee sought by all meanes possible to win them by gentlesse) but that within a few dayes af- ter our departure from euerie such towne, the people began to die very fast, and many in short space; in some townes about twentie, in some fourtie, in some sixtie, & in one sixe score, which in trueth was very manie in re- spect of their numbers. This happened in no place that wee coulde learne but where wee had bene, where they vsed some practise against vs, and after such time; The disease also so strange, that they neither knew what it was, nor how to cure it; the like by report of the oldest men in the countrey neuer happened before, time out of minde. A thing specially obserued by vs as also by the naturall inhabitants themselues.

Insomuch that when some of the inhabitantes which were our friends & especially the Wiroans Wingina had obserued such effects in foure or fiue towns to follow their wicked practises, they were

perswaded that it was the worke of our God through our meanes, and that wee by him might kil and slai whom wee would without weapons and not come neere them.

Source: Hariot, Thomas and Royster, Paul , editor, "A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (1588)" (1588). Electronic Texts in American Studies. 20. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/20>, 40-42. Digital Commons.

COMPASS POINTS

- The key element of this text is the interpretation by the local people that diseases and misfortune accompanying the arrival of foreign visitors are able to be controlled by the visitors.
- While it is true that sickness was caused by outsiders, it was unintentional. Note how Hariot suggests that the locals believed the Europeans were choosing to cause sickness and that this influenced their relationship and actions towards the outsiders.
- Note in the second last paragraph how Hariot mentions that even the oldest members of the local societies had no recollection or experience of the diseases.

Case study challenge question

Please answer the following question (750-word response):

How did disease in the Americas in the sixteenth century affect native resistance to European conquest?