

# Mesoamerica - Spanish Influence

## Mesoamerica – Interactions with the Spanish

When the Spanish arrived in Mesoamerica during the 16th century, they had a significant impact on the region's people, culture, and environment. While there were some positive outcomes, many of the changes brought by the Spanish were destructive to the indigenous cultures of the area.

## The Conquest and its Effects

As the Spanish, led by explorers like Hernán Cortés, began to conquer Mesoamerican civilizations like the Aztecs and the Maya, they brought with them new technologies, animals, and diseases. The Spanish introduced horses, cows, and pigs, which changed the way people farmed and traveled. However, the diseases they brought, such as smallpox, had devastating effects on the indigenous population, causing the deaths of millions of people.



## Forced Labor and Enslavement

The Spanish forced many indigenous people into slavery or systems of forced labor, like the encomienda system. The encomienda system was a way for Spanish settlers to gain control over the native people and their lands. Spanish conquistadors and settlers were given a specific number of indigenous people who were required to work for them on farms, in mines, and on other projects. In return, the Spanish were supposed to protect the indigenous people and teach them about the Catholic religion. However, the system was often abused, and many indigenous people were treated harshly, leading to their communities being destroyed as a result of the Spanish conquest.

## Religion and Cultural Changes

The Spanish introduced the Catholic religion to Mesoamerica and worked to convert the indigenous people. They built churches and missions, often on top of the ruins of indigenous temples. The Spanish tried to eliminate native religious practices, which led to the loss of many cultural traditions. However, some indigenous people managed to keep their beliefs alive by blending them with Catholic practices.

## Language and Education

As the Spanish took control of Mesoamerica, they introduced the Spanish language, which became the official language in many areas. This led to the decline of indigenous languages, although some have survived and are still spoken today. The Spanish also introduced European-style education, teaching the indigenous people to read and write in Spanish.

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## Questions

Use information from the text to support your answer

1) What region is Mesoamerica?

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2) How were the people of Mesoamerica treated by the Spanish?

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3) What is the encomienda system? How did it work?

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## True or False

Circle whether the statement is true or false

1) The Spanish arrived in Mesoamerica during the 17th century.	True	False
2) Hernán Cortés led the Spanish conquest of the Maya civilization.	True	False
3) The Spanish introduced horses, cows, and pigs to Mesoamerica.	True	False
4) Smallpox had no significant impact on the indigenous population.	True	False
5) Spanish settlers built churches on top of existing indigenous temples.	True	False

## Questioning

What questions do you have after reading the information?

1)	
2)	