

Spring Term 2017

MEZOAMERICAN CONQUESTS

HISTORY 407/507, CRN 32663/32681

Tuesdays, 3:00-5:50, 471 MCKENZIE HALL

Professor Robert Haskett



The famous Spanish invasion of Mexico that began in 1519 was not the first time an indigenous state faced the onslaught of foreign invaders. From at least the time of Teotihuacan, which flourished in the 7th century C.E., though the rise of the Toltecs several centuries later, to the 15th-century emergence of the Aztec empire, military conquest and colonial control were facts of life, politics, and culture. And the Spanish onslaught was certainly not the last time Mexico was invaded. In “Mesoamerica Conquests” we will explore successive waves of military invasion before, during, and after 1519 and gauge the socio-cultural results for Mexicans. If time permits, we will round off our investigations with a look at the U.S.-Mexican War of the 1840s, in which Mexico lost nearly half of its national territory, and a French Intervention in the 1860s during which an Austrian-born emperor was forced on the Mexican nation.

LEARNING GOALS

Students in HIST 407/507 are expected to:

Learn about the myths and realities of Mesoamerican conquests from those of the pre-contact era through the French Intervention and imposition of a foreign emperor on Mexico in the 1860s;

Distinguish myth from reality, propaganda from fact, and the prejudices and biases that underlay justifications for conquest and subjugation, as well as those connected with the

ways in which these conquests have been treated by scholars and others who have written about them;

Seek and understand often overlooked indigenous or, later, national perspectives, to understand the ways in which peoples caught up in or affected by these conquests sought to resist them, benefit from them, understand them, and to cope with them;

Develop advanced research skills, including the identification of sources that are pertinent to their projects;

Develop an ability to read and assess primary and secondary sources in a critical way;

Develop an ability to synthesize information in a coherent and convincing fashion, and to present accessible analytical discussions of that information.

READING AND RESEARCH

You will be responsible for completing weekly reading assignments prior to the appropriate class meeting (see the Reading Calendar in the Pages section of this Canvas site).

Depending on our final enrollment, I may create reading groups so that students will be able to work collectively on these assignments. During our class meetings we will discuss the information and issues raised in the readings. Those students assigned to particular books are expected to participate in an informed and active way during these discussions. In other words, while I'll present brief background and context remarks at the beginning of each class meeting, this is not a lecture course. We may even do some "dramatic" readings of parts of plays about conquest, and then discuss this, during our May 30 session (reading parts will be entirely voluntary, but obviously I'm hoping everyone will be willing to join in). So for HIST 407 to work at all, you have to be willing to be an active participant and to attend every class meeting. Attendance and active discussion is worth **25%** of your course grade.

As you will have already gathered, everything we do in class is designed with two goals in mind. The first is to challenge you to deepen your understanding of the nature of and issues surrounding the history of the military conquests that have studded the history of Mesoamerica/Mexico. The second is to challenge you to perfect your skills as a research historian in the creation of an investigation related to some aspect of mission history. We'll be talking about possible topics during our first class meeting, but it is a good idea to be thinking about this even before that date. You are welcome to explore topics related to any of the major themes of the course as laid out, below, in the Course Calendar. For instance, someone might want to study the topic of Aztec imperial expansionism in more depth, while someone else might be very interested in the history of a lesser-known Spanish attack (the invasion and occupation of Oaxaca, say, or the Yucatán, or in cultural conflict and bigotry as played out in the United States' approach to the invasion of Mexico in 1846, or in the gender

dynamics of a particular episode of conquest, etc. Whatever topic you decide to develop (and you should certainly select a topic that energizes you), your papers must be serious works of investigative scholarship. More details about the nuts and bolts required of the paper can be found elsewhere in the Canvas site for this course, but you should expect to write a paper that is 20 to 25 pages in length. The final, polished draft of this paper will be worth **50%** of our course grade.

There are several specific stages of development for your paper written into the structure of our course: A prospectus of the paper is due in class on **TUESDAY, APRIL 25**. In the prospectus you will lay out the basic details of your topic, explain why it is an important/significant subject to research, and briefly discuss the kinds of sources you will be using for your paper. Each of you will be asked to give a brief oral summary of your prospectus during our **TUESDAY, MAY 2** class meeting. The prospectus is worth **25%** of your course grade. Rough drafts of your papers are due in class on **TUESDAY, MAY 30**. You need to make two copies of the rough draft, one for me and one for a peer critic, or in other words another member of our class who will read and comment on the draft. Everyone will critique one other student's paper, in other words, so that you will have feedback from two different readers. Our final class meeting on **TUESDAY, JUNE 6**, will be devoted to the rough drafts and to my comments and those of your peer critic. In the past I have made this meeting into a kind of end-of-term party, so we'll probably be discussing this option once the quarter is under way. Whether or not a party aspect is added to this meeting, it is still mainly a serious exercise and will be factored into your participation grade for the course. The final draft of your paper is due by **5:00 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14**. You should turn it into my office (355 McKenzie Hall), rather than the history department office. Please note that there are penalties for late work. If either your prospectus or final draft is turned in late it will receive a deduction of 5 points a day, including weekends. Rough drafts should be turned in on time, too, in order to allow your readers to have adequate time to digest what you say and make constructive comments about your work. Late rough drafts will adversely affect your participation grade.

Grading Summary: Prospectus = 25% Participation = 25% Final Paper = 50%

Grading scale: 100-93 = A; 92-90 = A-; 89-87 = B+; 86-83 = B; 82-80 = B-; 79-77 = C+; 76-73 = C; 72-70 = C-; 69-67 = D+; 66-63 = D; 62-60 = D-; 59 and lower = F.

COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK 1 (April 2) Introduction: What is Mesoamerica? What is “Conquest?”

WEEK 2 (April 11) War and Conquest: Teotihuacan, Tula, and the Maya

WEEK 3 (April 18) Aztec Imperial Expansionism

WEEK 4 (April 25) Aztecs and Conquistadores

PROSPECTUS DUE IN CLASS

WEEK 5 (May 2) Aztecs and Conquistadors, cont.

PROSPECTUS PRESENTATIONS

WEEK 6 (May 9) The Spanish Invasion Spreads

WEEK 7 (May 16) The United States Invades Mexico

WEEK 8 (May 23) The French and Maximilian's Empire in Mexico

WEEK 9 (May 30) Performing Conquest

ROUGH DRAFTS DUE

WEEK 10 (June 6)

PEER CRITIQUES

Week 11

**FINAL PAPERS DUE ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, BY 5:00 P.M. AT 355
MCKENZIE HALL**

