

Module 6, Discussion 2: Spanish Conquest of the New World

Main Topic

When Spanish conquistadors began to colonize the New World, they possessed many weapons, technologies and resources that were entirely superior to the Native American peoples. Steel and horses had never before existed, lending appearances of superiority to the Spaniards while providing tremendous advantages in combat. Comparatively, the bronze and stone weapons used by the Aztec, Maya and Inca civilizations were crude and weak. The llama was the only native domesticated animal and could not be ridden. Horses, however, could be used to travel over great distances and ridden into battle, trampling adversaries and allowing riders to cut their foes down from a protected height.

Jared Diamond attributes geography as the primary reason for why the Europeans came to develop steel, and not the Native Americans (or other peoples in the world). European kingdoms benefited from having the necessary climates and conditions to host and grow many of the domesticated animals and edible plants found throughout the Old World. This allowed the cultivation of many different food sources, which in turn allowed an increasing portion of the population to perform tasks that did not involve growing or collecting food (such as crafting better and stronger weapons). The Europeans also had access to many of the technologies that were being discovered by other civilizations in the Old World. Because everything was connected by land, unique resources were attainable through travel and trade.

Conversely, the New World was completely isolated from the rest of the world. At the arrival of the conquistadors, few of these kinds of resources had ever existed before, which immediately established a number of incredible disadvantages for the native peoples. Even disease aided the conquistadors in their colonizing efforts, as smallpox decimated the much more vulnerable native populations.

Re: Last One!!! =) (by Thomas McCloskey)

When the spanish conquistadors invaded the Inca Empire they were successful for various reasons including there weaponry. The weaponry itself was made up of an early primitive gun called the Jacobus Although it took forever to reload and its aim was fairly horrible, It still had the booming sound of a gun and that can provoke a scare. They also had steel swords that were far superior to the Inca's bronze work swords. Two types of swords that were mentioned are the "toledo" and the "rapier", both are made to run right through the enemy literally.

The advancement of the Spanish weapons comes down to geographic location. Weapons of war take time to evolve into a workable durable piece. Metal work began in the Fertile Crescent many many generations before and being that Europe is located geographically close to the fertile crescent it is something that was inherited over many years. They took this technology and ran with it providing their soldiers with stronger and more functional swords for the battlefield.

Basically I don't think the Inca realized how much larger their army was than that of the Spanish. The Spanish rode in on animals the Inca had never seen this before and were pretty much mesmerized by it. Also they had some serious weapons, the Jacobus mentioned earlier was definitely loud enough to spark fear. These contributing factors helped to intimidate the Inca's Ultimately leading to the Spanish conquistadors being able to conquer them.

Jared Diamond Explains the europeans as accidental conquerers meaning that they pretty much got the luck of the draw when it comes to geographic location. They were the first to acquire guns, germs, and steel. Leaving them more prepared for an expansive world. The development of steel definitely helped civilizations gain power through war. The stronger and better a sword functioned made the soldier better. Also if you're fighting against an army that has swords that are fashioned out of steel and your own army's weaponry isn't up to the same standard it would obviously be intimidating.

Hi there, Thomas.

You said jacobus in your original post. At first I thought you were talking about the English gold coin of the reign of James I, which is worth 25 shillings. Then I reread the parts where you mentioned it being a primitive gun and taking forever to reload and started thinking to myself, "Hey, jacobuses aren't guns and they don't take forever to reload." It was then it occurred to me that you were talking about the *arquebus* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arquebus>).

Re: Last One!!! =) (by Rebecca Resmen)

Just a quick comment. In this original post, the gun Jacobus is mentioned, and if you read the transcript for this documentary, that is exactly what it states. I don't know if it is the same thing as what you have brought up, or if there is some sort of error in the transcript, but I understand why it states this in this original post!

Nice catch there, Rebecca. It does indeed say jacobus. Seems like it might be a typo by the transcriptionist.

Re: Module 6, Discussion 2 (by Madelyn Brockman)

The Europeans also had a secret weapon that they did not even know that they carried; disease. While the Europeans had been immunized to these diseases from prior epidemics, the Incas had no immunity at all. Immunity was also obtained from animal exposure. The only large domesticated animals of the Incas were llamas that were not milked, kept in large herds, or housed in barns near humans and therefore they did not exchange germs with the animals. Many of our diseases come from animals and regular exposure to these large domestic animals in the European world provided a source of immunization.

I would suspect that the diseases came first from the animals and then the viruses adapted gradually and also strengthened over the years. Given that European peoples were more or less constantly exposed to these changes, it didn't have the same potency as it did with Native American peoples. Smallpox has certainly done some tremendous damage over the centuries, even in the places of its origin.

I found this bit of information to be one of the more fascinating facts discussed in the documentary.

Re: Module 6, Discussion 2 (by Madelyn Brockman)

They gun was and is a very powerful weapon. The Inca warriors thought the men holding this "magical" weapons were gods and obtained the power of lightning. The guns made in the 1530's were very crude and not easy to shoot. It took a long time to load and fire. If a soldier actually hit someone was a huge accomplishment of its own.

As you mentioned, the arquebus was a very crude gun, taking a long time to reload and fire with accuracy. I would agree with you in saying that it was a powerful weapon, but only because it was so otherworldly and frightening. Had the Inca and other Native American peoples realized how ineffective it was as a weapon then I imagine it would have hindered the Spaniards more than helped them.