

THE MAYAS AND THE SPANISH

After the fall of the great Mayan cities, the Mayan people continued to live in both the highlands and lowlands of their ancestors. However, they never again achieved the greatness of the earlier Mayan civilization. Mayapan became the new capital in the 13th century. It was the only walled city built by the Mayas. Mayapan lasted only until about 1441, when it was destroyed.

The Mayas settled in several other small villages. They no longer had a central government. Many independent tribes formed separate city states. The Mayas continued to fight amongst themselves. These civil wars, as well as epidemics, droughts, and hurricanes, continued to weaken the Mayan tribes.

The first meeting of Mayas and Europeans occurred in 1502. During his fourth voyage, Columbus wrote of seeing native trading canoes. Other white men came through the Mayan lands during the next few years, searching for gold and slaves.

The white men brought with them diseases that were new to the Indians. Smallpox was the worst of these. The Indians had no resistance built up against the deadly disease. The vaccine against smallpox was not developed until centuries later, and hundreds of thousands of Indians soon died of the disease.

The death of so many Indians and fighting between the tribes helped the Spanish conquer the land. Hernando Cortés led several conquest groups through the Mayan lands between 1519 and 1525. Other Spanish expeditions followed. By 1542 the Spanish had built their own capital city, Mérida. Mérida is now the capital of the state of Yucatan, Mexico.

The conquest of the Mayas lasted for many years. It was a bloody and brutal defeat. The Mayas could not compete against the superior arms and cavalry of the enemy. Often, some Mayan tribes joined the Spanish against other tribes. The Mayan armies lost many soldiers to disease.

After a short battle, the Spanish conquered the last Mayan kingdom, Tayasal, in 1697. With the fall of Tayasal, the Spanish destroyed the last remnants of the once great Mayan civilization.



In addition to meeting natives of the Caribbean as shown here, Columbus also reported seeing natives in trading canoes that we now know were from the Mayan civilization.

Name _____ Date _____

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the name of the new Mayan capital?

2. When was the new capital destroyed?

3. What four things continued to weaken the Mayan civilization?

4. What did white men come in search of?

5. What did white men bring with them to the Indians?

6. How many Indians died of smallpox?

7. Who was one leader of the Spanish conquest of the Mayas?

8. What was the Spanish capital city named?

9. When did the Spanish conquer the last Mayan kingdom?

10. What was that kingdom's name?