Module 01: Demographic Catastrophe — What Happened to the Native Population After 1492?

Evidence

Pre-Contact Health

1. A Health Paradise?
The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel
2. Drawings: Pre-Contact Health and Medicine
3. Native American Herbal Remedies and Medical Rituals

"Virgin Soil" Epidemics

4. Las Casas Berating the Spaniards
History of the Indies
5. The Ten Plagues
History of the Indians of New Spain
6. Fray Diego Durán
Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain
7. Photos: Smallpox, the Disease
Factsheet and images
8. Aztec Account of the First Smallpox Epidemic
General History of the Things New
9. Smallpox in Mexico: A Spaniard's Account of Political Succession
The True History

The documents below will help you determine the effects of the European diseases on the inhabitants of Meso-America during the first century after Columbus "sailed the ocean blue" in 1492. The first three documents address the pre-contact health of the peoples inhabiting the Western Hemisphere. Additional documents recount virgin soil epidemics from the perspectives of the Spaniards and the native peoples inflicted by diseases unfamiliar to them. Historians researching the health and illnesses of the past often rely on what is known today about particular diseases. One document below details current knowledge about smallpox; medical knowledge of how the disease affects the body can help historians evaluate the descriptions provided by those who lived through the epidemics of the sixteenth century.
Spain of the Conquest of Mexico

10. Mayan Experience With Smallpox
The Annals of the Cakchiquels

11. "Cocoliztli"
Characteristics of epidemics

12. Epidemics in Mexico and Central America, 1520-1595