

**How should the Aztecs be remembered?**

1. Read the documents slowly. Using the document analysis boxes, record the main idea of each document.
2. Categorize the document. The categories could be different aspects of Aztec life.
3. Finally, answer the following question: "How should the Aztecs be remembered?" in an essay using a minimum of **SIX** documents.

**Document 1: Growth of the Aztec Empire**

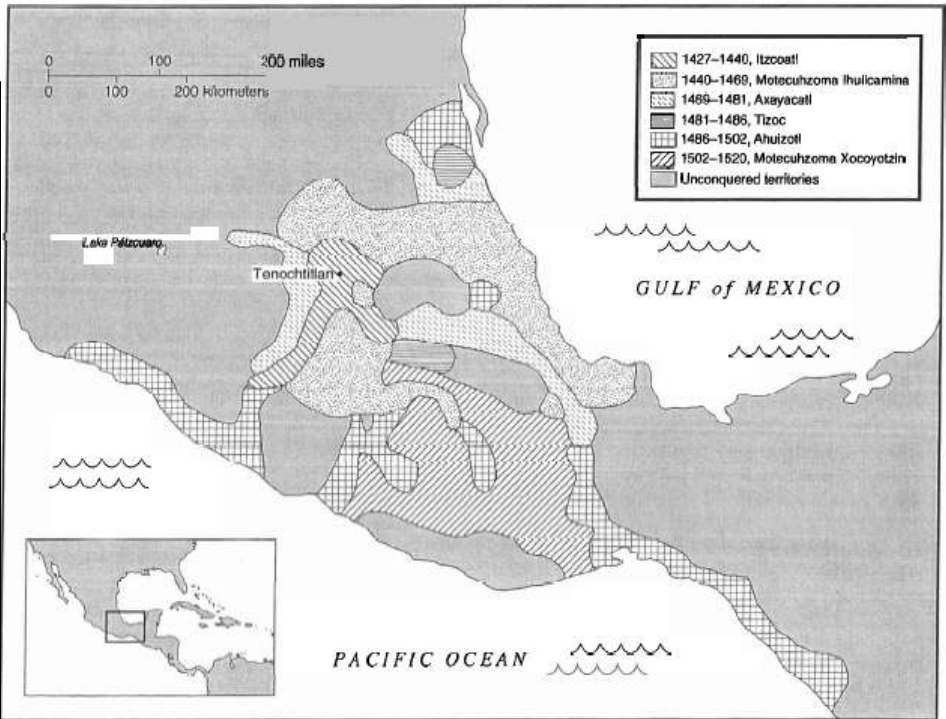
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**Territorial Acquisitions by Aztec Rulers**



**Notes:** • This map illustrates the major Aztec conquests from the reign of Itzcoatl in 1427 to the reign of Motecuhzoma in 1520.

• Aztec warriors had the reputation of being fierce fighters, and most territories shown on the map were acquired by force. Independent territories on the map were sometimes the result of a deliberate policy of leaving unoccupied lands available for future "flower wars." "Flower wars" were waged to provide an ongoing supply of captured sacrifice victims.

**Document 2: Justification for Aztec Reign Over Central Mexico**

**Source:** Friar Diego Duran, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 1581, Doris Heyden, translator, University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

[The priest Cuauhtlequetzqui is speaking] According to the revelation of our god when he appeared to me this night, a prickly pear cactus, standing upon a rock has grown from this heart and has become so tall and luxuriant that a fine eagle has made his nest there. When we discover it we shall be fortunate, for there we shall find our rest, our comfort, and our grandeur. There our name will be praised and our Aztec nation made great ....Our god orders us to call this place Tenochtitlan.

**Document 2**  
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**Document 3: Hernán Cortés on seeing Tenochtitlan**

Note: When he arrived in 1519, the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, described the magnificent Aztec city of Tenochtitlan with these words:

“The city has many squares where markets are held and trading is carried on. There is one square... where there are daily more than 60,000 souls, buying and selling, and where are found all kinds of merchandise produced in these countries, including food products, jewels of gold and silver, lead, brass, copper, zinc, bones, shells, and feathers.”

**Document 3**

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**Document 4: Picture of an Aztec Castle**



**Caption:** The central plaza of an Aztec castle included a pyramid temple to the war god, left, temples to other gods, and palaces. This reconstruction was created by Ignacio Marquina.

**Source:** Aztec. Photograph. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online School Edition*. Web. 25 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.school.eb.com/elementary/art-115783>>.

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**Document 5: Young Scribe's Impression of Ritual Sacrifice**

**Title:** A Seventeen-Year Old Aztec Scribe's Impressions of Sacrifice Ritual (as told to Friar Bernardino de Sahagun several years after 1529)

"When I saw this ceremony last year as a member of the priestly school, I was amazed by the physical beauty of the enemy warrior who was killed at the end of the festival. This seasoned warrior, whom we change from a human into the god Tezcatlipoca, can have no blemish upon his body, and he is treated like our most royal family member during the long year leading up to his sacrifice. During that time he is given all the finest luxuries from the nobles' storehouses, including foods, clothes, teachers, women, and instruction...

Many of us become attached to this living god, and a terrible sadness comes over some of the women when, at the end of the year, he is taken to Chalco and dismembered in public view."

**Source:** Friar Bernardino de Sahagun, *Florentine Codex, II*, circa 1555, in Carrasco, *Daily Life of the Aztecs, People of the Sun and Earth*, Greenwood Press, 1998.

**Document 5**

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**Document 6: The Scale of Sacrifice**

**Source:** Friar Diego Duran, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, 1581, Doris Heyden, translator, University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

The prisoners taken at Teuclepec were brought out. Motecuhzoma and Chihuacoatl began to sacrifice them, slicing open their chests and extracting their hearts. First, they raised the hearts to the sun, then they threw them into the shrine before the gods. This sacrifice began at midday and ended at nightfall.

Two thousand three hundred men were killed and their blood bathed the entire temple and stairway. Each time the priest cut out a heart, they rolled the body down the stairs.

**Source:** *Codex Mendoza*, 1542, reprinted by permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, in David Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998.

**Document Note:** The *Codex Mendoza* was commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy of Mexico in 1541 to provide King Charles V a clearer idea of his new subjects. The artwork in the *Codex* was drawn by Aztec artists accompanied by text written by Spanish priests.



**Document 6**

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**Document 7: Understanding Aztec Sacrifice**

How have historians tried to explain or understand Aztec human sacrifice? Some defenders of Aztec culture have seen it as a limited phenomenon, greatly exaggerated by the Spanish for political purposes. Many scholars have seen it as a religious act central to the Aztec's belief that humans must sacrifice that which was most precious to them—life – to receive the sun, the rain, and other blessings of the gods that made life possible.

Others have viewed the Aztec practice as the intentional manipulation and expansion of a widespread phenomenon that had long existed among many American peoples. In other words, the Aztec rulers, priests, and nobility used the cult of war and large-scale human sacrifice for political purposes to terrorize their neighbors and subdue the lower classes. Another possible explanation is demographic. If central Mexico was as densely populated as we believe, then the sacrifices may have been a kind of population control.

Other interpretations have been even more startling. Anthropologist Marvin Harris has suggested that Aztec sacrifice, accompanied by ritual cannibalism, was a response to a lack of protein. He argued that in the Old World, human sacrifice was replaced by animal sacrifice, but in Mesoamerica, which lacked cattle and sheep, that transformation never took place... Other scholars have strongly objected to Harris's interpretation of the evidence, which gave little attention to the ritual aspects of these acts. Still, human sacrifice shades all assessments of Aztec civilization.

**Source:** Peter N. Stearns et al., *World Civilizations: The Global Experience, AP Edition*, New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., Longman, 2003.

**Document 7**

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**CAPTION:** Depiction of the floating gardens, or *chinampas*, of Tenochtitlán. The city of Tenochtitlán was built on an island, and the Aztecs cultivated year-round gardens along the banks of the island.

**SOURCE:** "Aztec gardens (*chinampas*)." Image. Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis. *World History: The Modern Era*. ABC-CLIO, 2011. Web. 5 Apr. 2011.



### Document 9: Diego Rivera Mural

Source: National Palace, Mexico City, courtesy of Scott Sessions. Mural painted by Diego Rivera, c. 1929

The mural shows agriculture and food production in the Basin of Mexico. The men on the right plan and harvest the maize plants, while the women on the left grind and roll the product into tortillas. Behind them is a person dressed as a corn goddess. Rows of chinampas plots stretch across the lake as far as the eye can see. Two great volcanoes can be seen on the top.



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### Document 10: Castillo's View of the Aztec Market

"After having examined and considered all that we had seen we turned to look at the great market place and crowds of people that were in it, some buying and others selling so that the murmur and hum of their voice and words that they used could be heard more than a league {three miles} off. Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy and in Rome, said that so large a market place and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before."

**Note:** Bernal Diaz accompanied Hernán Cortés and the other conquistadors on the 1519 encounter with the Aztecs. He wrote an extensive and informative journal of the experience.

**Source:** Bernal Diaz del Castillo: *History of the Conquest of New*

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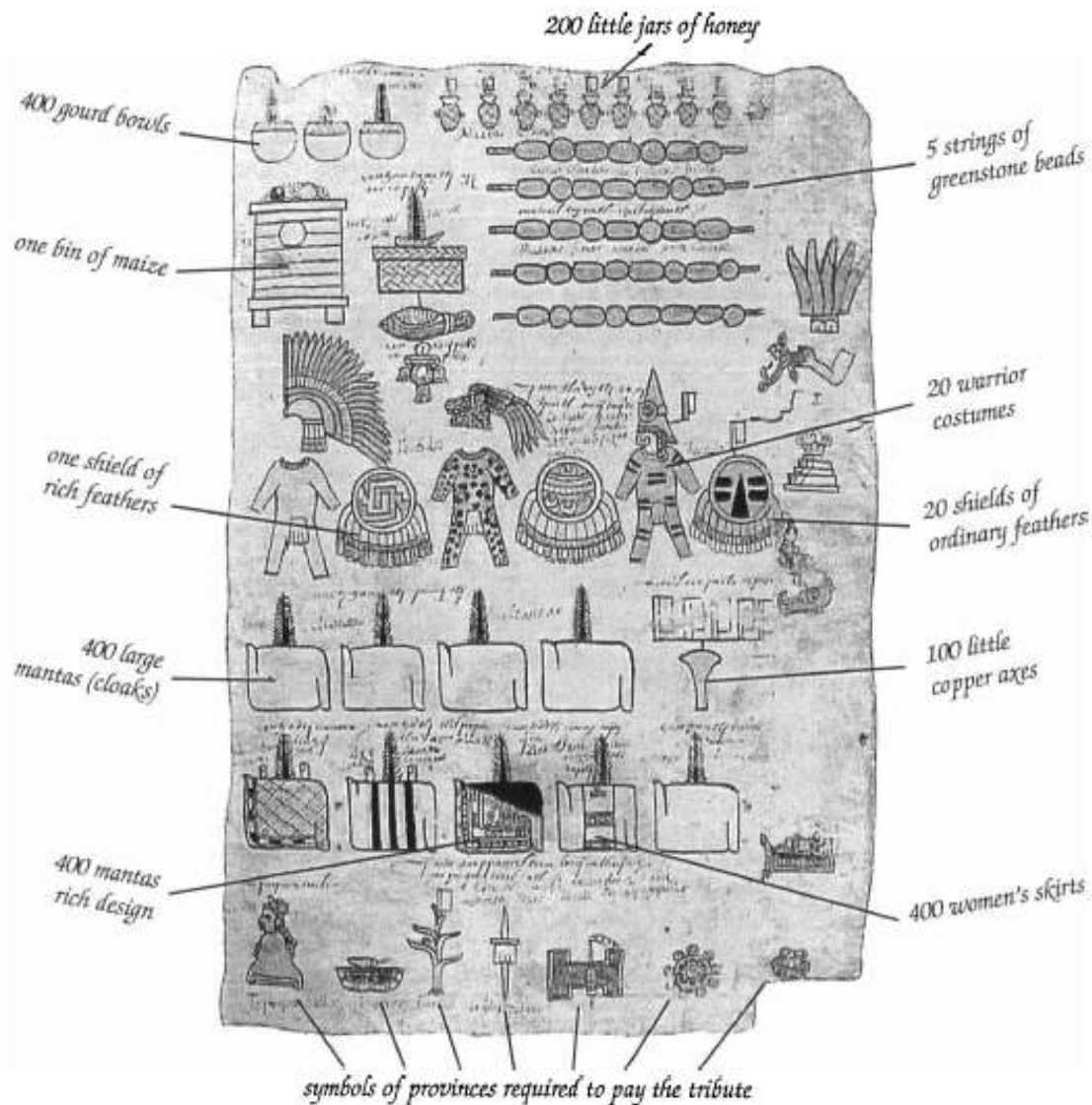
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## Document 11: Tribute Demands

Source: Drawing from the *Matricula de Tributos*, circa 1542, Museo Antropologia in Mexico City, Warwick Bray, *Everyday Life of the Ancient Aztecs*, London: B.T. Batsford, 1968, in David Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs: People of the Sun and Earth*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998.

**Document Note:** The Aztecs, like many civilizations, demanded tribute from conquered territories. Tribute was payment in goods and/ or services rather than in currency. This document from the *Matricula de Tributos* is a bill that was presented to different provinces that Tenochtitlan controlled. The inscriptions along the bottom all represent the signs for the different provinces that were required to submit all the things on the bill. The symbols represent different items that people in the provinces needed to deliver or they could expect military repercussions.



### Document 11

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**Document 12:** Photograph of a Zapotec ball court



**Caption:** Ball-playing court at Monte Albán, a Zapotec civilization in present-day Mexico. It is thought the ritual game originated with the Olmec culture (1200–400 BC), which was the first complex society in the area. Playing courts have been found at the ruins of many Mesoamerican cultures including the Aztec and the Maya.

**Source:** "Aztec Athletes." *World History: Ancient and Medieval Eras*. ABC-CLIO, 2010. Web. 25 Mar. 2010.  
<<http://www.ancienthistory.abc-clio.com>>.

**Document 12**

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**Document 13: Aztec Family Life**

“Home life for the Aztec family was both well disciplined and warm. Parents had a close relationship with children and brought them up according to a strict regime. At the age of three a child was given life-like toys such as a small loom or grinding stone and was assigned certain household tasks; at six he took on broader domestic responsibilities, and at 15 began regular schooling...

As their children grew up, the parents were expected to counsel and guide them into honorable careers...

The rigid order that governed an Aztec child’s upbringing continued into his adult years. Marriage was expected when a young man reached 20 and a girl 16. Matches were arranged by the two families- presumably with some occasional sub rosa guidance from the young people. Once agreement was reached, the youth’s relatives sent two old women to negotiate the marriage with the bride’s parents.”

**Source:** Jonathan Norton Leonard, *Ancient America*, Time-Life Books, 1967.

**Part IV: 3 Column Chart Outline**

**Directions:** Now, determine which categories are the strongest in proving “How the Aztecs should be remembered?” You will choose 3 of your previous groupings to fill in the following outline.

1. **Keep in mind:** You should use six documents (minimum) in total: 2 different documents for each body paragraph.
2. You may use the following outline as a tool for tomorrow’s in-class written essay. You **MAY NOT** use anything aside from what you have created below (i.e.: no other planners or notes---besides the ones you have taken on the document packet itself and the previous side of this sheet).
3. **Keep the outline brief and do not write in full sentences. (The thesis may be in a full sentence, though).**

Introduction with Historical Background Information (1-2 sentences):  
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**Thesis** (Remember to clearly answer the question here...Take a stance about how the Aztecs should be remembered by addressing the topics of each of your body paragraphs).  
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Topic of Body Paragraph #1:  
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How should the Aztecs be remembered and why?  
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Topic of Body Paragraph #2:  
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Topic of Body Paragraph #3:  
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How should the Aztecs be remembered and why?  
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How should the Aztecs be remembered and why?  
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POV: \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion (Restate Thesis):  
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Leave the reader with something to ponder: \_\_\_\_\_