Source: Philip T. Hoffman, *Why did Europe Conquer the World?*, Princeton University Press, 2015.

The trouble, though is that the demographic catastrophe in the Aztec and Inca Empires had multiple causes- and not just smallpox and measles- for otherwise the native population would have recovered even if the epidemics returned repeatedly. That at least is the conclusion of a demographic analysis that takes into account how populations react after being ravaged by new diseases like smallpox. And what kept the Native American population from recovering was the conquest itself, by wreaking havoc with their domestic life. Indians fled from warfare, and survivors were forced to work for the Europeans, often away from home, so that they could not provide their families with food…. In short, it became much harder for the Native Americans to have children, making much of the population decline the result, not of disease, but of brutal conquest itself….

Epidemics and divisions among the natives helped in the Americas, Australia, and the Pacific Islands, but technology gave the Europeans the edge, particularly against the centralized empires of the Aztecs and Incas….

What was the technology? It was, first and foremost, the weapons and defenses spawned by a military revolution that swept through early modern Europe (Europe between 1500 and 1800) as gunpowder transformed warfare: firearms, artillery, [and] ships armed with guns….

Cortes and Pizarro could vanquish much bigger Native American armies. The cutting and piercing weapons- in particular, the swords and lances in the hands of horsemen- were Pizarro’s greatest advantage, along with the discipline and experience of his forces….

That is what this broad gunpowder technology allowed the Europeans to do…. It allowed small numbers of Europeans to seize the rulers of the Aztec and Inca Empires and eventually take their place at the top. From that apex of political power, the Europeans could extract resources from native tribute and forced labor, without ever having many colonists or any sort of an army of occupation.