

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies Study Guide

**A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies by
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Contents

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1 Hispaniola.....	5
Chapter 2 The Kingdoms of Hispaniola.....	6
Chapter 3 & 4 The Islands of Puerto Rico and Jamaica & Cuba.....	8
Chapter 5 The Mainland.....	9
Chapter 6 The Province of Nicaragua.....	10
Chapter 7 & 8 New Spain & New Spain Continued.....	11
Chapter 9 & 10 The Province and Kingdom of Guatemala & New Spain Panuco and Jalisco... 	13
Chapter 11 The Kingdom of Yucatan.....	15
Chapter 12 & 13 The Province of Santa Marta & The Province of Cartagena.....	17
Chapter 14 The Pearl Coast, Paria, and Trinidad.....	18
Chapter 15 & 16 The River Yuyaparí & The Kingdom of Venezuela.....	20
Chapter 17 & 18 The Mainland in the Region known as Florida & The River Plate.....	21
Chapter 19 The Great Kingdoms and Provinces known as Peru.....	22
The Kingdom of New Granada.....	24
Characters.....	25
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	31
Style.....	33
Quotes.....	35
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies was written with the task of informing the King of Spain about the murder and gold hoarding that was occurring in the New World. The purpose of the expeditions was primarily to convert the natives to Christianity and save them from eternal damnation. However, the Spaniards that were sent did not abide by the rules they were given and killed millions of people for their gold. Only a small percentage of the gold they took was given to the Spanish purse. Christian missionaries such as De Las Casas were also present and did their best to try to bring justice to the lands.

According to De Las Casas and the other friars who were either Dominican Friars or part of the Order of Saint Francis, the natives were the most docile people they had ever met. Every time a Spanish group of men entered their territory they welcomed them with open arms. Most of the time they were too welcoming and were eaten out of their homes. However, this generosity was their custom and the Spaniards could count on it. The soldiers actually used this hospitality as an advantage to pillage the cities and villages since they were faced with less opposition. This allowed them to get the gold, jewels, and slaves that they so desired quicker and with greater ease. The Spaniards massacred millions of natives as a result, raping women and killing innocent children and infants along the way. Those that were not killed were taken as slaves and sold in Peru and Hispaniola where they got the best prices for them. The slaves were used for everything from carrying packs, building large buildings, pearl diving, and even attacking other villages when the Spaniards didn't want to use their own men. Once they were sold they were worked to death within months, sometimes even days because they were overworked and never fed. The majority of the natives died en route to being sold as slaves on the ships and simply thrown overboard.

De Las Casas goes through only a handful of the different accounts of genocide, but sufficient to prove his point. Many letters were sent to the King of Spain describing the horrible things that the Spaniards did in the New World. However, the mere injustice that occurred with the lives of innocent people was not enough to spur the nobles in Spain to action. Even though it was their policy to convert the natives and protect their souls, they had a different agenda. Though they never gave any real reason for the lack of concern for not carrying out their mission of converting the natives, it can be assumed that it was due to money. De Las Casas never makes this assumption because of his devoutness to the Spanish crown but it is quite obvious. Since the Spaniards hoarded most of the gold that they stole from the native villages and gave only a tiny fraction to the Spanish royal treasury, it was a higher priority for the Spanish nobles to recover the stolen gold and to prosecute the soldiers. There was never any action to protect the native people who did all they could to succumb to the Spanish Crown's wishes, even swearing allegiance when given the chance.

The leaders of Hispaniola, who were the most loyal to Spain, were hung or burned alive. Many more innocent natives were thrown and fed to wild dogs, butchered to pieces by Spanish soldiers, or drowned to death while pearl diving. Millions suffered and died

because of the ruthlessness and barbarity of a few Spanish commanders and hundreds of their evil men. De Las Casas' commitment to saving the natives and to uncovering the truth of the conquest of the New World is astounding. He never gives up and struggles throughout his life for a cause that seems impossible to achieve.



Chapter 1 Hispaniola

Chapter 1 Hispaniola Summary and Analysis

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies was written with the intention of informing the King of Spain of the murder and gold hoarding that was taking place in the New World. The purpose of the expeditions was primarily to convert the native people to Christianity and save them from eternal damnation. However, the Spaniards that were sent did not abide by the rules they were given and killed millions of people for their gold. Only a small percentage of the gold they took was given to the Spanish purse. Christian missionaries such as De Las Casas were also present and did their best to try to bring justice to the lands.

The Island of Hispaniola was the first territory on which the Spaniards landed and began their genocide. When the Spaniards landed, they were accepted by the natives with open arms. The Spaniards immediately betrayed their hosts, however, by using their women to satisfy their sexual needs and their children as servants. They also began eating the natives out of house and home since they were accustomed to eating in one day what thirty natives ate in a month. Some people hid food, while others tried to escape to the mountains. One day a Spanish commander raped the a chief's wife. The people became enraged and took up arms, but their tactics were similar to those of children in Europe and were easily defeated. The Spaniards hacked them to pieces showing no mercy, not even for small children or pregnant women. They slaughtered the people like animals throwing infants head-on into trees, rocks, and rivers. Nobles and leaders were tied up to a riddle, which consisted of sticks resting on pitchforks driven into the ground, and were roasted over a slow fire. When one Spanish commander couldn't sleep because of the screams, he asked the executioner to hurry the deaths. However, the executioner simply gagged the men and continued with the slow death, even lowering the fire just a bit. The natives that escaped into the hills and mountains didn't last very long because the Spaniards sent wild dogs to shred them to pieces. When the natives happened to kill a Spaniard, which was very rare, the Spaniards agreed that for every one of their men killed, one hundred natives would die. The Spanish proclaimed they did everything in the name of Christ and the twelve Apostles sending mixed messages to the natives about the goodness of Christ.



Chapter 2 The Kingdoms of Hispaniola

Chapter 2 The Kingdoms of Hispaniola Summary and Analysis

There were five main kingdoms in Hispaniola: Maguá, Marién, Maguana, Xaraguá and Higüey. Maguá extended about eighty leagues from the southern coast to the northern shore of the island. The province of Cibao in Maguá rested near a mountain towards the west and was led by King Guarionex. He had a placid temperament and was very devoted to the King and Queen of Spain. For years he had everyone in his kingdom send a gourd full of gold to the King and Queen, though later they could only send half of this because they were running out of gold. They didn't know how to mine for it so the commanders had an idea to teach them how. The plan fell through, however, when a commander completely dishonored the king and raped his wife. The king went into exile but the Spaniards tracked him down, took him prisoner, and sent him on a ship to Castile, Spain where he died before even arriving there.

Marién, a very fertile region larger geographically than Portugal, had several mountain ranges that were productive with gold and copper mines. The king of Marién was Guacanagari, who died after fleeing to the mountains from the Spaniards. The third kingdom, Maguana, had the best climate and sugar on the island. Its king was Caonabó, the strongest of all the kings. He was captured and put on board a ship headed to Castile as well, though a storm hit and everyone on board died. Caonabó's brothers took up arms in revolt but the Christians slaughtered them as well as about half of the kingdom.

The fourth kingdom, Xaraguá, was considered the heart and core of the island. The language of the people was the most refined, as was their quality of breeding and physical appearance. Xaraguá was run by king Behechio and his sister Anacaona, both of whom greatly respected the Spanish crown and helped the European settlers as much as they could. Behechio died and Anacaona took his place as leader. Nicolas de Ovando was granted the title of governor in 1501 and visited Xaraguá after Behechio's death. The natives held a festival upon his arrival and Ovando asked that all those celebrating enter a straw hut, where he burned them all alive. Everyone else was massacred and the Queen was hung out of respect.

The fifth kingdom was Higüey and its queen was Huguanama. They hung her as well while they burned and hacked the other inhabitants to death. De Las Casas confesses that there were so many ways that the Spaniards murdered the natives that it was hard to write them all down. He also states that the natives never did anything to merit such injury and injustice. They all behaved honorably and those who weren't killed were subjected to slavery and a lifetime of captivity. Though the natives had every right to wage war on the Europeans, and though they sometimes tried, they weren't strong enough to defeat them because of their swords and their horses.



The captured natives were shared between the victors of the massacres. The Spaniards made both men and women eat wild grasses if they gave them anything at all. They all began dying of malnutrition. Infants who were still nursing died first since their mothers could not produce milk. The men were sent to the mines where they died from exhaustion and starvation.

Things got worse once Queen Isabella of Spain died in 1504. She was the strongest advocate for the rights of the natives and wanted them to be converted to Christianity and saved from eternal damnation. This was the main reason the Spaniards were in the New World in the first place. However, the Spaniards did the opposite of her wishes and with her being dead, had free and guiltless reign to continue to kill as they pleased.



Chapter 3 & 4 The Islands of Puerto Rico and Jamaica & Cuba

Chapter 3 & 4 The Islands of Puerto Rico and Jamaica & Cuba Summary and Analysis

In 1509 the Spaniards landed in Puerto Rico and Jamaica, lands very rich in milk and honey. The natives there were tortured, burned, and massacred as they were on Hispaniola. The population was around six hundred thousand to a million but only two hundred people remained on the two islands when the Spaniards were over.

In 1511 the Spaniards landed in Cuba and were even crueller to these people than the others. Hatuey, a leader who fled from Hispaniola to Cuba with his people, heard the Spaniards arrived in Cuba and quickly gathered his people. He talked to them about the Spaniards arrival as he held up a piece of gold. He called it the God of the Spaniards because he saw how much they worshiped gold. He said "if [they] keep this God about [them] they will kill [them] in order to get their hands on Him," and he threw the gold into the river. The Spaniards managed to track Hatuey down and capture him. A Franciscan friar intervened and told Hatuey that his soul could be saved if he converted to Christianity. He asked if there were Spaniards in Heaven. When the friar confirmed he "chose to go to Hell to ensure that he would never again have to clap eyes on those cruel brutes," then they burned him alive.

The Spaniards were true devils. One day they decided they would go on a killing spree just because they could and murdered about three thousand people in one day. A few days later, the same Franciscan friar that spoke to Hatuey went to the Havana province where he promised the natives they would not be harmed. When the Spanish commander heard that there were twenty one native leaders gathered together to welcome the friar, he seized them and burned them alive the next day. Countless thousands of men and women hung themselves in desperation, and even hung their own children. Those who didn't commit suicide were taken captive. They worked them so hard that few lived for more than a couple of months. One royal official was given three hundred natives and worked them so hard that at the end of three months, only thirty survived. The rest of the natives died in the mines. More than seven thousand children died of hunger while De Las Casas was in Cuba and the entire island was devastated and its population diminished.



Chapter 5 The Mainland

Chapter 5 The Mainland Summary and Analysis

In 1514 governor Pedro Arias de Avila arrived in the mainland which is the land now known as southern Central America and northern South America. De Las Casas states that Avila was the cruelest of tyrants and was completely devoid of any emotion, mercy, or common sense. He wanted to settle the entire area with Spaniards and thus had to get rid of all the natives. Francisco de San Roman, a Franciscan friar, witnessed this governor and his men take out over forty thousand natives.

The main Spanish policy towards the New World was to convert and save the natives' souls. The local people were presented with an ultimatum to either adopt Christianity and swear allegiance to the Spanish crown of Castile or face military action. However, the natives didn't always know about this policy. What the governor did was take his men to the villages at night and once they were about half a league away they would "publicly" announce the policy. In the early hours of the morning they went into the villages setting fire to houses, and massacring all the people that inevitably hadn't complied with the policy. This was Avila's favorite tactic since it was quick and effective and kept him clear of any wrong since he had announced the policy.

On a different occasion, a troop of soldiers took fugitives by surprise and carried off about eighty women and young girls, killing as many men as they could. The survivors of the massacre regrouped and tried to get their wives and daughters back. The soldiers got wind of this and stuck their swords into the stomachs of the women and girls, killing them all. The tear stricken natives shouted that "killing women is a cruel abomination, and clear proof that you are brutes and no better than wild beasts."

Ten or fifteen leagues from Panama lived a lord named Paris who had a great deal of gold. When the Europeans arrived at his territory, Paris welcomed them and gave the captain of the group a gift worth about fifty thousand castilians. They left the village and went back during the night to unfold a surprise attack. They burned the village and stole a loot worth about fifty or sixty thousand castilians. The lord survived and got his men together to set after the Europeans. They killed fifty Spaniards, wounded many others, and made off with their gold. However, a large band of Spaniards mounted an attack on the lord and butchered him along with his people. Not a trace remained of lord Paris' community.

The killing was so severe in the mainland that there is no accurate record of how many people died. Through all the killing, the Spaniards amassed a huge fortune in gold very quickly. De Las Casas estimates that more than a million castilians worth of gold was taken and only about three thousand of that amount made it to the royal bank account. Over eight hundred thousand natives were killed because of this relentless search for gold.



Chapter 6 The Province of Nicaragua

Chapter 6 The Province of Nicaragua Summary and Analysis

Avila set out in 1522 or 1523 to Nicaragua. It was a beautiful fertile area with a healthy climate and prosperous people. The quality and abundance of produce was enough to support a very large population. Once the Spaniards arrived, they redistributed the land amongst themselves. In addition to taking land, they took the people as laborers and for their own personal needs. Even the smallest children, as soon as they could stand, were made to work as well as mothers who had just given birth. The flat terrain and absence of close by mountains made it hard for the natives to run and hide, though the people were reluctant to leave anyways because of the area's beauty.

One day, the Avila sent about fifty men on horseback to kill off a region greater than the county of Roussillon because the people weren't giving the Spaniards their food as quickly as they wanted. The governor later sent expeditionary forces to other provinces to take slaves. They were shackled and forced to carry a load of three arrobas, or about seventy five pounds each, though this number varied by region. On one occasion, they had four thousand natives carrying loads and not even six of them made it back. Another day, the governor decided to relocate the slaves just because he wanted to. The natives that were left couldn't sow all the fields by themselves which lead to a shortage of grain. The Christians took all the maize that was left and as a result twenty or thirty thousand natives died of hunger. Some mothers even killed their own children for food.

Avila later established a system of licenses for the Spaniards where they could demand slaves from the native leaders. At first the leaders rounded orphans but were then forced to ask parents to turn over their children if they had more than one. The families were torn because they loved their children with a love that far surpassed that of any other people in the world. This policy in addition to sending slaves for sale in Panama and Peru quickly devastated the population. Once the natives were removed from their region, they died very quickly from overwork, hunger, and sadness.



Chapter 7 & 8 New Spain & New Spain Continued

Chapter 7 & 8 New Spain & New Spain Continued Summary and Analysis

New Spain was founded in 1517. The injustices experienced in the land were so horrendous that the only reason for such violence was a true loss of fear of God in addition to a loss of respect for Spain. Nobody could kill the way the Spaniards did without having lost the love and compassion in their hearts. The Spaniards pillaged through about four hundred and fifty leagues around Mexico City, murdering all inhabitants that got in their way. This area originally consisted of about four or five great kingdoms that were each easily larger than Spain and had boasting populations larger than those of Toledo, Seville, Valladolid, Saragossa, and Barcelona combined, but these populations were decimated by the conquest. The Spaniards butchered and burned four million people without consideration for age or gender. This figure doesn't even include those who were killed after 1542.

In a great city of about thirty thousand inhabitants known as Cholula, all the city dignitaries came out to welcome the Spaniards with great pomp and circumstance. They then escorted them into the city and let them stay in the houses of the lords and leading citizens. According to the Spaniards, this was the perfect time to start organizing their massacre to better inflict fear and terror on the people. They publicly massacred everyone in sight so that everyone would feel the horror. They then requested the local lord to send for all the nobles and prominent citizens in the area and began talks with them, though they were seized as soon as they were all in the building. They used them as pack mules to carry the Spaniards' belongings. They all obeyed and waited for more orders like patient little sheep until the soldiers took out their swords, grasped their lances and slaughtered the innocent natives.

The Spaniards then went to Mexico City where they were showered with thousands of gifts from King Montezuma who also prepared festivities for the Spaniards' arrival. They were greeted by Montezuma's brother and by local dignitaries who all gave them gifts of gold and silver amongst other things. When they got to the city's gates, Montezuma welcomed them all and escorted them to the great house of the city. There the Spanish seized him and put him in irons. They then called on the citizens to hold "mitotes" or traditional dances and parties to entertain the king. The parties were organized with close attention to class and rank with the highest citizens dancing nearest the building where Montezuma was. Without any warning, the Spaniards drew their swords and sliced open the innocent people. Not a dancer was left alive and the same thing happened in the other squares throughout the city. The whole nation fell into mourning and they have not and will not stop telling and re-telling the tragic story of when the entire nobility of the nation was erased from existence.



The survivors took up arms and attacked the soldiers, wounding many. The Spaniards then presented Montezuma at knife point to tell his people to stop revolting. They decided they needed a different king that could lead them in battle; however, there was no time for that. Once the Spanish commander arrived, the natives attacked fiercely. The soldiers tried escaping in the middle of the night but were followed and the natives killed them in great numbers. It wasn't a complete success on their part because the Spanish soldiers regrouped and ended up killing and burning even more natives.

They then made their way through the towns of Panuco, Tuxtepec, Impilcingo, and Colima massacring the people and completely destroying everything in their path. Any survivors were taken as prisoners. Whenever the natives did not immediately obey the irrational claims of the Spaniards they were dubbed as outlaws against the king of Spain. They were told to "obey a foreign king, whom [they had] never seen or ever heard of and if [they didn't they would] be cut to pieces." If the people did obey, they were sentenced to hard labor and other manners of abuse that lead to even slower death than execution.

The commander of the New Spain expedition sent two of his captains to Guatemala and Honduras. It was a seaborne expedition that sacked all the towns along the way. The invaders completely destroyed Honduras. During eleven years, more than two million souls were killed in a small area of a hundred by one hundred leagues. In Guatemala, the captains pillaged, burned, and stole all they could from the city. The reason no one was spared was again because they did not recognize the proclamations of the Spanish soldiers. It didn't matter that they thought they were never given time to fully understand the declaration and because the Spaniards began killing them the minute the public statement was read. The Spaniards were completely devoid of any logic and had the right to eternal damnation and to be charged for crimes against the Spanish crown by ruining every kingdom in New Spain



Chapter 9 & 10 The Province and Kingdom of Guatemala & New Spain Panuco and Jalisco

Chapter 9 & 10 The Province and Kingdom of Guatemala & New Spain Panuco and Jalisco Summary and Analysis

The captain that went to Guatemala was received by the chief of Utatlan, the largest city in the kingdom. He welcomed them with traditional musical fanfare and a grand banquet. The Spaniards camped outside the city that night afraid it would be too dangerous to dwell within the walls. The following morning, the captain requested a given amount of gold. The citizens told him that there was none in Guatemala. He then declared them guilty of hoarding the gold and had them burned alive. The lords of the neighboring cities heard about this and fled their towns toward the mountains. The citizens turned themselves over to the Spaniards, but would not disclose the location of their leaders. The captain said he had no use for them and would kill them unless they told him where the leaders were. They didn't release the information and were all cut to pieces and the entire town was demolished in about two hours. When the natives saw that their deep humility and submissiveness did nothing to quell the rage and sheer ferociousness of the Spaniards, they fought back, though they had no chance of winning. It was the most noble thing they could do. They dug holes in the middle of the roads and hid sharpened and blackened poles inside them. Whenever a Spaniard would fall in, he would die on the stakes. They learned to recognize the traps after one or two of their soldiers fell in and simply went around them knowing what to look for. They then gathered all the natives they had captured into these traps and men, women, and children were all impaled on the spikes. The other people were stabbed or thrown to wild dogs where they were torn to pieces.

In the city of Cuzcatlan, the natives welcomed the captain and were seized immediately by the soldiers who were instructed to take as many slaves as they wanted. The natives told them they had gold to give them, though it was mainly copper with flecks of gold in it. Angered that they were not given real gold, the Spaniards enslaved most of the natives. The others took up arms against the Spanish tormentors which was ineffective. He either sent the slaves to Peru or used them to fight his battles with other natives so that he wouldn't have to use his own men. He never fed the twenty thousand natives he kept, but told them they could eat the prisoners they took. Another thing he used them for was shipbuilding. He made natives carry anchors weighing three to four hundred pounds. The anchors would end up biting deep into their bare backs and shoulders.

In 1525 Beltran Nuño de Guzman arrived in the provinces of New Spain and Panuco. He branded free men as slaves and bundled them boat after boat to Hispaniola and



Cuba, since he received better prices for them there. He also bartered one mare for every eighty natives. De Guzman had been appointed governor of Mexico City and of New Spain and presided over the Audiencia, which was a royal court of justice usually headed by a high member of the church and run by lawyers. However, a new Audiencia was appointed and sent to New Spain. When De Guzman heard about this he headed inland to avoid being charged for any of the crimes he had committed. He ended up in Michoacan where he was greeted nicely as usual. The leader of Michoacan was wealthy and was rumored to have lots of gold and silver. To get him to hand over the gold, the Spaniards tied him up and slowly roasted his feet sprinkling oil on them "from time to time to ensure a nice even roasting." On one side of the leader was a man holding a crossbow to his heart, and on the other was a man holding a wild dog. A Franciscan heard what was happening and attempted to stop the torture, though the man died of his injuries anyways. De Guzman then moved on to Jalisco, one of the most wonderful places of the New World and home to a huge undisturbed and peaceful population. However this peace didn't last much longer. The governor burned down towns, seized local lords, and led thousands of people away in chains. He even made women who had just given birth carry his baggage and other large loads. They had to abandon their newborns and children on the road, all of which died very quickly.

The Spaniards completely abandoned all Christian sense of right and wrong. They were all blind to their own wickedness and greed by continuing to wage warfare amongst innocent and friendly people.



Chapter 11 The Kingdom of Yucatan

Chapter 11 The Kingdom of Yucatan Summary and Analysis

In 1526, Francisco de Montejo, a friend of Hernan Cortes, led the conquest in Yucatan. He made false claims at court to secure his position as governor. Yucatan was densely populated with a good climate and very productive. The people were highly civilized and the most virtuous of all their neighbors. When the Spaniards found there was no gold there, they enslaved the people and traded them for wine, oil, vinegar, salt pork, clothes, horses, or whatever else the governor and his men needed or wanted. The son of the chief was sold for cheese, and hundreds of other natives were sold for a single horse. This lasted from 1526 to 1533 and broke down the population. The people were given a break from the Spaniards when they heard that a lot of wealth was discovered in Peru, though they came back soon after and resumed the torture. One woman was so determined to escape from being thrown to the dogs that she hung her daughter to her leg then hung herself from a beam. Luckily a friar arrived and baptized the infant before it died. One Spaniard devoted his time to impregnating women. When they gave birth to the mixed babies, the Spaniards fetched higher prices for them since they had Spanish blood. When there wasn't any food for the dogs, the soldiers would take babies from the arms of their mothers, cut them to pieces and fed them to the animals. These were only some of the horrible things that the Spaniards did on a daily basis. Many more go untold and unwritten. The worst part is that these people considered and proclaimed themselves Christians, making the word synonymous with the word "devil" amongst the natives.

The Friars of the Order of Saint Francis did not want the natives to think that Christians were evil. The Spanish soldiers, after all, were no real Christians. They calmed down the natives once the Spanish soldiers left and preached to them that Christ was the Savior. The natives questioned the Friars' motives and asked them how they were so different from the other "Christians." The Friars convinced them that they were genuinely interested in helping them and were later allowed to come into the community as long as they left the soldiers out. They preached the gospel and explained the good intentions of the King of Spain. The local people were so affected and delighted that the local chiefs handed over the idols they had worshipped and burned them less than forty days later. They also established schools and built churches and houses for the friars so anyone could go to them to hear the word of the Lord.

This peace did not last long. A band of about thirty Spaniards came into the community with stolen idols from other cities and told the leaders to trade each idol for one native threatening to attack them if they didn't cooperate. The threat was so credible that the leaders did as they asked and sadly begging families for their children. One native went to the missionaries asking them why they had lied to them and why they made them burn their idols just to have new ones be brought back. The friars tried their best to



convince them that they had nothing to do with the return of the Spaniards, but the natives did not believe them. They were determined to kill the friars, who escaped in the middle of the night. The natives later learned the truth about the innocence of the friars and begged for them to return. They agreed, but the soldiers showed no sign of leaving, and the friars were forced to abandon their mission. The natives were left to wither like seedlings deprived of water.



Chapter 12 & 13 The Province of Santa Marta & The Province of Cartagena

Chapter 12 & 13 The Province of Santa Marta & The Province of Cartagena Summary and Analysis

The province of Cartagena was located fifty leagues down the coast of Santa Marta to the west. The province was persecuted, ravaged, cleared, and all the people slaughtered in one year from 1498 to 1499.

The Province of Santa Marta, which is now known as Columbia, was rich with gold and people who knew how to extract it. From 1498 to 1542 the region was a major attraction to Spanish plunderers who sailed there, robbed gold, and sailed back to Spain. Until 1523 the Spanish established a permanent settlement in the area and in 1529 one Spanish commander arrived that had no fear of God or any compassion for even his fellow men. In the six or seven years that he was in Santa Marta, he and his men collected a huge fortune and after his death local robbers and murderers wiped out the area of anyone that had survived extending their reign of terror far inland.

A bishop from the province, Fray Juan Fernandez de Angulo, sent a letter to the King of Spain on May 20th 1541 stating the atrocities. He urged the king to remove the commanders currently in power and replace them with people who were compassionate and knew the real goals of the crown. He told the king that if nothing was done, the entire territory would be left as nothing because of the abuse of the Spanish commanders and soldiers, unworthy to be called Christians. He stated that these "Christians" spoke badly about Christ and His laws constantly and every soldier declared that their actions based solely on the wishes of the King.



Chapter 14 The Pearl Coast, Paria, and Trinidad

Chapter 14 The Pearl Coast, Paria, and Trinidad Summary and Analysis

The entire area between Paria and the Gulf of Venezuela was completely destroyed and all the surviving natives had been enslaved. The people who lived on the island of Trinidad were good and virtuous and in 1516, Juan Bono went there with about sixty men announcing he was going to live alongside the natives. They were welcomed, fed, and housed by the generous natives who built them a large wooden house big enough for all the Spaniards to live in. The Spaniards said they wanted the house to be completed even faster and brought in more natives to finish it. With all the natives packed inside working, the Spaniards closed off all the exits while the Spaniards inside tied the naked and defenseless natives and hacked the ones that tried to escape. A few did manage to get away and warned the rest of the community. They decided to go back and attack the Spanish men with bows and arrows. Enraged, the Spaniards set the building on fire burning everyone alive and fled to their ship taking about two hundred natives who were already on board with them as slaves and sailed to Puerto Rico. They sold half of them there and sold the rest in Hispaniola.

De Las Casas had the opportunity to confront Juan Bono about his unruly behavior of betraying the people of Trinidad. When confronted, Bono simply said, "Come off it, Sir. The orders I had from my superiors were quite specific: If I could not capture them in battle, I was to promise them peace as a way of tricking them into giving themselves up and enslave them." He then said that he did feel ashamed for having betrayed them because they were very nice and sincerely welcome him as if he were part of their family. He said that he felt as if he were at home since they did everything they could for him.

On a different occasion, the Dominicans decided to send a monk out to preach about Life Everlasting. What the Dominicans did not know was that the Spaniards had recently taken a chief and about a hundred of his men on board a vessel for a party. Chief Alonso trusted the soldiers only because he thought they were nice and virtuous like the Dominicans, and because there were Dominicans amongst them that were ignorant to the plan the Spaniards had. Once the ship left and was far enough out to sea, the chief and his wife were taken hostage and sold as slaves in front of their own people. Some natives were released on return and told by the Spaniards to kill the Dominican missionaries because it they who had betrayed them. The missionaries tried to calm the natives and promised to get their king and queen back, assuring them that they had no part in kidnapping their leaders. They wrote several letters to Hispaniola begging to get the leaders back, but the magistrates wrote back saying they received hundreds of slaves a day and it would be impossible to find them amongst the other slaves. Plus,



once they became slaves they were all the same and they couldn't start making exceptions just because they were the king and queen of some ravaged province. If they made an exception for them, they would have to do it for everyone.

The natives became anxious and began to lose faith in the Dominicans. Out of sheer frustration and feelings of betrayal, the natives murdered two innocent missionaries. Their actions were completely justified because of their desperation, agony, and abuse. The Dominicans, being the good Christians that they were, did not hold it against them especially since the natives couldn't distinguish between the monks, soldiers, and thieves.

In the town of Higueroto, known as the European hostel and every man's home, one Spanish adventurer decided to wreak his own havoc since the people were incredibly kind and hospitable. He sailed in and invited the natives aboard his ship which was something they were used to doing without any danger. He set sail to Puerto Rico and sold everyone to slavery. He then destroyed the entire town and upset even the Spaniards in the area because it had been a safe haven for them as well.

De Las Casas makes note of the fact that whenever any of these vessels set sail, at least one third of the natives died before reaching land. The bodies were thrown overboard. The reason the death toll was so high was because the ships were loaded only with the minimum amount of supplies for the crew. The natives were never given food or water. Obviously it was more cost effective to load the ship with extra natives than with extra food for since their lives were so poorly valued.

One of the deadliest jobs that the slaves were forced to do was pearl fish. The natives were in the water from dawn to dusk diving between four and five fathoms. They were barely allowed to surface for air for more than a few seconds before they are beaten back down into the water. They were kept hungry all the time and their only sustenance was a little fish and an occasional piece of cassava bread. They developed large sores on their backs from the sea water and their hair became tinged. They only lasted a few days pearl diving before they died. This was because the water was cold and their lungs hemorrhaged from being down for so long. They would also frequently develop dysentery from the harsh conditions. Sometimes men dove down and never resurfaced either because they had drowned or because they were eaten alive by sharks.



Chapter 15 & 16 The River Yuyaparí & The Kingdom of Venezuela

Chapter 15 & 16 The River Yuyaparí & The Kingdom of Venezuela Summary and Analysis

The river Yuyaparí runs through the province of Paria and extends upstream for more than two hundred leagues. It was discovered in 1529 where a commander and four hundred of his men sailed up the river quickly and quietly ransacking and demolishing towns along the way.

During this time it had become customary to write false reports about the New World to Spain. In 1526, a series of misleading reports led the Spanish Crown to give power of Venezuela to German merchants to control the slave trade there. The Germans were even more savage than the Spaniards and were labeled "devils in human form" both by natives and the missionaries. They devastated more than four hundred leagues of fertile land and drove out over four or five million people from Venezuela. The German governor took prisoners and would only release them for ransom. He set a price and if the natives could match that price he would release the prisoner, then have his men recapture the newly freed man and setting a new and even higher ransom. He played this game until the family members could no longer pay being forced to let their relative die of hunger. The German governor would also use natives as pack animals and chain them up when they went on voyages. If one native collapsed from hunger or fatigue a soldier would simply approach him and cut off his head where the iron collar bound him to his chains. They did this so that they didn't have to waste any time unshackling the tired man. Sometimes the heads wouldn't detach completely and they would fall to one side while the body fell to the other, so that the other natives and friends of the victim would have to carry his load.

Missionaries who were witnesses to these barbaric acts got together and sent enough evidence to the Council of the Indies to call for action. However, not one single person was ever been tried or burned at the stake, which was the punishment for murder back in Spain. The justices have simply turned away from the treacherous acts turning a deaf ear to the murders of the natives. Instead of focusing on the lives of the natives, they paid their attention to the amount of money that had been stolen from the crown. It was estimated that over three million gold Castilians were stolen by German villains. In sixteen years the Germans sent shipload after shipload of native slaves to Santa Marta, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. The royal Audiencia of Hispaniola which could put a stop to the unjust murders decided that it was to their benefit to continue the slave trade and carry on with the perverse and stubborn willingness to keep amassing huge amounts of immoral money.



Chapter 17 & 18 The Mainland in the Region known as Florida & The River Plate

Chapter 17 & 18 The Mainland in the Region known as Florida & The River Plate Summary and Analysis

In 1538 Hernando de Soto arrived in the area known as Florida with a large force and a planned campaign set to tyrannize the people and rob them of their wealth and lives. He had already dirtied his hands in other parts of the New World. De Las Casas states that the longer these men are in the New World the more atrocities they engage in and the worse their crimes are. It is as if they know they are already damned to hell, so they go all out. In Florida they found intelligent, good looking people who lived in structured societies. They murdered most of them to strike terror in the survivors in order to control them better. Word got out to other neighboring communities and when De Soto approached one town that knew about them, the members were very cautious. Since they were not as open and welcoming as other natives had been, De Soto and his men started killing them, not even sparing the lives of any children. He ordered that they all survivors be gathered to have their "noses, lips, and chins sliced from their faces" and sent away in agony. De Soto died a harsh death without confessing his sins and was surely damned to hell.

In 1522 or 1523 there were about four expeditions to the river Plate where there were great kingdoms and provinces with intelligent and handsome people. The region is very remote from the rest of the New World and there isn't much known about it except that the Spanish set out their usual brutal campaigns and amassed private fortunes at the expense of innocent natives. It was reported to the Council of the Indies that one commander sent soldiers to these provinces telling them that if the natives did not accept and welcome them happily, they were free to kill the entire communities. On another occasion, a group of natives turned themselves over to the Spanish, acknowledging their dominion. They were terrorized regardless because when summoned did not answer quickly enough. They were hacked to pieces as they begged for mercy and questioned why they were being killed after they committed themselves to the Spaniards.



Chapter 19 The Great Kingdoms and Provinces known as Peru

Chapter 19 The Great Kingdoms and Provinces known as Peru Summary and Analysis

In 1531 Francisco Pizarro journeyed to Peru. He set out with his men with his own campaign in mind for the area, similar to the campaigns of his predecessors in other parts of the New World. His first act was to turn a few towns upside down in search of gold. When they made it to the coast, they sailed to the island of Puna where they were welcomed by the natives. In less than six months Pizarro and his men ate all of the food, forcing the natives to reach into their reserve food supply that they kept in case of drought or famine. With tears in their eyes they offered their food. Afterwards they were enslaved or killed, leaving the island completely depopulated.

The Spaniards then moved on to Tumba where they did the same thing. Pizarro made the natives give them all their gold and silver and when there was none left and when no more could be provided Pizarro announced that he was going to make them members of the Spanish Crown which entitled them to protection under the Spanish laws. He then concluded that they had stolen all the gold from each other and stealing was a punishable act under their laws. A few days later he met with King Atahualpa and his men, who were ignorant of the true nature of the Spaniards. They seized him, made him pay a ransom of fifteen million Castilians, though they agreed to four million, then wrongly accused him of assembling his men against them. They throttled him and burned him alive.

A witness, Brother Marcos de Niza of the Order of Saint Francis, wrote a testimony to the Council and the King of Spain. He stated that the Peruvians were the best disposed people of all the other inhabitants of the New World and were always the nicest they could be to the Europeans. The people never attacked the Spanish and always treated them with respect, peace, and friendship until the Spaniards began to treat them with cruelty. He bore witness to the injustice against Atahualpa as well having seen other just leaders being burned and killed in other areas such as in Quito. He stated that the Spanish never treated the natives fairly, never honored them, and only destroyed their territories, stole their gold, and finally killed them. The people eventually started to fight back but were no match for the Spaniards. He ends by writing to the King that the way the Spanish behaved in the Peru province and the New World in general was an "offence to God and a disservice to the Crown" and that it would be very hard if not impossible to reestablish relations and gain any unspoiled territory that would have greatly benefited the Spanish Kingdom.

The area that Brother Marcos was writing about was only a small area of about fifty hundred leagues. Nine or ten years later so many other injustices were created that the

death toll rose to over four million people. No action was ever taken after Brother Marcos sent his letter.



The Kingdom of New Granada

The Kingdom of New Granada Summary and Analysis

In 1539 some settlers who were already in Peru traveled inland from Santa Marta and Cartagena finding a beautiful country teeming with docile people that were rich with gold and emeralds. The land was given the name of New Granada because Jimenez de Quesada, who was the first adventurer to lay eyes on the land, was from Granada in Spain. He engaged in the typical ransacking and torturing of the area and King Bacata was so terrified that he willingly did whatever Quesada said, including filling his entire house with gold and handing it over to him. The only problem was that he didn't have enough gold to fill the house. The Spaniards filed suit against him. When he inevitably lost they tortured him with the strappado, burned his stomach with tallow pinned his legs and neck to poles with iron hoops, and burned the soles of his feet. A local lord named Daitama heard about this torture and fled to the mountains with some of his people. When Quesada found out he tracked them down hacking hundreds of people to pieces.

Quesada brought terror throughout the region. He even went along cutting the hands and noses off men and women and leaving them to die. When traveling through the province of Bogotá, he commanded the natives to tell him who their heir was. However, they did not disclose their leader's name and he killed most of the population.

For forty-two years these matters have been constantly going on and the account in this book is only a fraction of what happened. De Las Casas states that "recognition of the truth will make the reader more compassionate towards the sufferings and the predicament of these poor innocent people." He also states that no Christian, or person for that matter, should doubt the kindness and generosity of the natives. The Spaniards never took any steps to preach the Christian faith to the natives, as their main priority should have been according to their mission goals. The people of the New World were left as ignorant of God as they were a hundred years before. "The local people have died and still die in the blackest ignorance of the faith and without the benefit of the Sacraments."



Characters

Bartolome De Las Casas

Bartolome De Las Casas is the main character and writer of *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. He was born in Spain and became a Franciscan Friar when he became of age. He doesn't give extensive information about his life before he was a friar, or even afterwards, because he believed only in talking about what was important to the conversion of the New World. His main purpose in life was to shed light on the hostility toward the natives. His personal life was thus irrelevant to the cause. He was very devoted to the Spanish crown, especially to the wishes of Queen Isabelle who wanted to save the souls of the natives by converting them to Christianity. He traveled throughout the regions of the New World from the north of South America to modern day Florida. He tried very hard to bring justice to the natives by writing the King of Spain about the injustices they were experiencing by the Spanish soldiers. However, the lives of the natives weren't as important as the money that was being stolen by the soldiers. They didn't even send a small fraction of the gold that they stole from the natives back to Spain. He was a very strong, fair, and compassionate person and was not scared to speak badly about the Spaniards that killed millions of natives. Even when the Spaniards started turning the natives against the missionaries and even killed a few of them, De Las Casas kept with his goal of helping them. He knew that Spanish soldiers were wrong and that they would be rightly judged when they died.

Marcos de Niza

Brother Marcos was a Franciscan Friar that wrote a letter to bishop of Mexico and later to the local authorities back in Spain about the horrible conditions in Peru and the atrocities that the Spaniards there were committing with no legal right. He experienced everything first-hand and was on the side of the natives because they were so generous and always treated the Europeans with kindness and generosity. He told the Spanish authorities that Pizarro had unjustly killed Atahualpa and other leaders of the Peruvian provinces. His reason for writing the letter was to get the King to take action in order to stop all of the atrocities and to be able to have good relations with the people of the region. The Spaniards were doing much harm to the Spanish crown and he wanted it to stop.

Hernan Cortes

Cortes was the Spanish commander who was responsible for the conquest of New Spain, the region now known as Mexico. Conquering New Spain was his most spectacular massacre and he claimed the death toll was three thousand, though another witness says it was ten times higher than that. He met Montezuma outside of the city gates of Mexico City, or Tenochtitlan, after being showered with gifts by his men.



Cortes had him seized and later killed. The natives took up arms on what is known as the Black Night or "noche triste" and forced Cortes' men to retreat, though they later the Spaniards regrouped and wreaked more havoc on the natives killing most of them as well as their leaders.

Guarionex

A dutiful man with a good placid temperament, Guarionex was very devoted to the King and Queen of Spain. For years everyone in his kingdom would send a gourd full of gold to the King and Queen of Spain, though later they sent half gourds because they were running out of gold since they didn't really know how to mine for it. The commanders had an idea to teach the natives to cultivate gold, but one commander completely dishonored the king by raping his wife. The king went into exile but he was tracked down, taken as a prisoner, and died on a ship that was going to Castile.

Pedro Arias de Avila

Avila was one of the most notorious Spanish commanders. A friend of Cortes, he led a multitude of expeditionary forces through the New World. This began his reign of terror in the Mainland and through Nicaragua.

Francisco Pizarro

Pizarro was a seasoned adventurer and commander and was the main leader in the fall of the Peruvian regions and of king Atahualpa, the most known Peruvian king. He assisted in the destruction of the provinces of Nicaragua and was known for his peculiar cruelty.

Hatuey

Hatuey was a native leader that fled from Hispaniola to Cuba with his people. He was trying to escape from the Spaniards who were killing or enslaving all the natives they came across. Unfortunately he was tracked down and tortured and refused to be baptized before his death to ensure he would never see another Spaniard again.

Montezuma

Montezuma was the king of Mexico City or Tenochtitlan. When Cortez arrived to the city gates, he sent men to greet him and his men and later welcomed him himself. He was taken hostage by the Spaniards, then tortured and killed.



Anacoana

She was the sister of Behechio and the Queen of Xaraguá. She took power after her brother died, though her kingdom was ravaged by the Spaniards and she was hung out of respect.

Beltran Nuño de Guzman

De Guzman was the man responsible for the destruction of the Panuco province.



Objects/Places

Hispaniola appears in non-fiction

This is the first place to be conquered and is a land rich with rivers, mountains and plains in addition to very high quality gold.

Puerto Rico and Jamaica appears in non-fiction

These two lands are rich with milk and honey. After the Spanish arrived, fewer than two hundred original natives were left between the two islands.

The Mainland appears in non-fiction

This area consisted of the land between southern Central America and northern South America.

Nicaragua appears in non-fiction

Nicaragua was known as a beautiful and fertile region with a healthy climate and prosperous people. The size of the towns were very large and were supported by the local produce which was always in abundance. The terrain is flat with no mountains and when the Spaniards arrived the people were very reluctant to leave and tried their best to stay in their land.

New Spain appears in non-fiction

New Spain is the area known as Mexico. The area had four of five great kingdoms that were each larger than Spain with better climates. The entire area teemed with humanity.

Guatemala appears in non-fiction

This region, located below Yucatan, was completely destroyed by the Spaniards.

Yucatan appears in non-fiction

This area was very densely populated with a healthy climate and fertile land. The kingdom is about three hundred leagues in and the land produces a multitude of fruit, honey, and wax. The people are highly civilized and nicer than their neighbors.



Santa Marta appears in non-fiction

This is the region known as Colombia. The land was rich with gold and the people knew well how to extract it. The people were very kind and unjustly killed and forced into slave labor. The Spaniards never tried settling here; instead they just sailed to the land, forced the natives to mine gold to death, and then sailed back to Spain.

Cartagena appears in non-fiction

Cartagena is fifty leagues west from Santa Marta along the coast. It has a coastline of about one hundred leagues. De Las Casas does not go into more detail about the land or the conquest, but states the people were persecuted, ravaged, and cleared of all its inhabitants.

Pearl Coast appears in non-fiction

This is part of northeast Venezuela and is where the Spaniards used the natives to pearl fish.

Yuyaparí River appears in non-fiction

This river runs through Paria and extends more than two hundred leagues. It was used in 1529 by the Spaniards to conquer towns that rested by it.

Venezuela appears in non-fiction

Given to German merchants by the Spanish Crown for the control of the slave trade, this land was very fertile with immense valleys, wonderful people, and beautiful regions that were all rich in gold.

Peru appears in non-fiction

The land that Pizarro conquered. Its people were generous and docile and Brother De Niza personally wrote his testimony on the slaughter of the Spaniards.

New Granada appears in non-fiction

This land was three hundred leagues inland from Santa Marta and Cartagena.



Spain appears in non-fiction

This is the homeland of all the adventurers and conquerors, of De Las Casas, and of the King and Queen that authorized the conquests, but not the iniquities.



Themes

Human Worth

Throughout the book the natives are dehumanized and compared with animals. Even De Las Casas referred to them as herd animals by the way they listened to the Spaniards. The only way that the Spaniards could kill them with such horror was to dehumanize them and treat them as lesser beings. Whenever the Spaniards had to choose between feeding their dogs and feeding the natives, they chose to feed the natives to the dogs, let the natives eat each other if they were willing, or let them starve. It is interesting to think about the type of people that the Spaniards of this day and age were because they were all raised in Christian homes in a Christian kingdom. Whether it was the doctrine in Spain that failed to move them or the desperation of being away from home for so long that led them to kill so harshly will never be known. Perhaps they went a little crazy seeing so much death and knowing, as their doctrine stated, that they would go to hell for engaging in the murders that led them to kill more harshly. This, in addition to the huge fortunes that they were acquiring, is what made the conquest so bloody. When there were chances to do the right thing, such as when a king and queen could have been released back to their people instead of being sold in the slave trade, the Spanish slave traders said it wasn't worth the effort to save them. Even the Spanish nobles back in Spain did nothing to stop the bloodshed, probably because the crimes were not in their hands and therefore they were not guilty of anything. When they were written and told about the atrocities, they focused only on those cases where the Spanish purse was being robbed by the commanders.

Salvation

The main reason the Spaniards went to the New World was to convert the natives to Christianity and save them from damnation. Queen Isabelle of Spain was very interested in the welfare of their souls and sent the conquerors with Catholic missionaries to serve this purpose. They were very successful at times leading people to throw away the idols that they had been worshiping their entire lives, and possibly their entire existences. Some villages put up houses for the friars and established schools to teach the Christian doctrine. Yet many were murdered without being baptized and though De Las Casas and the other friars state that the natives were the gentlest, kindest people they had ever met and were clearly free of all sin, they still believed that they went to hell because they were never converted. The friars tried their best to ensure the safety of the natives to make certain they would be saved. However, there aren't any accounts of converted natives being exempted from the torture. In fact, in the town where the natives turned over their previous idols, they were still attacked by the Spaniards and taken as slaves. It seems as though killing them and enslaving them was more acceptable once they were converted since at least their souls would be saved. How the missionaries got any of the people to convert after they saw that even the baptized weren't saved from being tortured in their present lives is amazing.



Faith

An amazing thing to take note of is the faith of the Catholic missionaries. They lived amongst all the massacre and bloodshed, witnessing thousands of innocent people die. Yet throughout the conquest the missionaries remained at their posts. They defended the natives daily despite the fact that the Spaniards were turning the natives against the missionaries. De Las Casas barely escaped one native revolt that led to the death of a few friars. There were other friars besides De Las Casas who wrote to the King of Spain, believing that if they sent accounts and evidence of the unjust massacres to the King that he would put a stop to all the killings. They believed that he would remove the evil commanders and replace them with people who actually cared about saving the people in the New World from eternal damnation. This shows tremendous faith in the King and in the Christian religion. To believe so firmly that the unveiling of justice would lead the King to stop the lucrative slave trade was one thing, but to risk their lives to remain in the New World attempting to convert and baptize all of the natives they could, whether they were killed or not, was something else that was greater than all of them. They had a true belief in God and in Jesus Christ. That is an amazing faith to have amidst the terror that the New World encountered.



Style

Perspective

The book was written by De Las Casas as a personal account of the numerous abuses that occurred in the New World toward the natives by the Spaniards. He was a friar who was sent to the New World to help with the conversion of the natives to Christianity. His main goal was to save as many of the people as possible from eternal damnation and to get them to proclaim allegiance to the Spanish Crown. This would spread the word of the Lord and establish it in the New World, something that was both backed by the Spanish Crown and part of Divine Law. He is compassionate and is a strong advocate for the rights of the natives. He is strongly against the Spanish commanders announcing several times that all the Spanish commanders and soldiers will be damned to hell for their actions against the innocent people of the lands that have been demolished and depopulated. His main audience was the King of Spain. He wanted him to intervene against the Spanish soldiers that were not only ravaging great land and wonderful people, but were giving the Spanish and Christians a bad name. Most natives thought of the word Christian to be synonymous with their word for devil. This was very damaging to the Crown. Not only were many people killed but the Spanish kingdom lost a lot of money in the process. The money was the least of De Las Casas' worries, though it was of greater importance to the crown. This outcome was obviously because the Spanish Kingdom was not as impacted by the deaths in the New World and De Las Casas' writings were otherwise unsuccessful to their original goal.

Tone

The language is compassionate and gives a sense of urgency for action. This is because the book was written with the intention to get the King of Spain to take action against the injustice that was happening in the New World. The chapters generally start out with an introduction of the province, its people, and their quality of life before the Spaniards destroyed them. Then De Las Casas gives a few accounts of the soldiers' evil, and ends by stating that the accounts he mentioned were short just to prove the point that intervention was needed. He states that there was not enough time to write down every single malady that occurred and usually chooses the worst of the violence. The tone definitely makes the reader hate the Spaniards because of their lack of compassion for human life and because the reader never senses any guilt or remorse by their actions. There is however one single account of guilt, but it is followed by a greater desire to be wealthy than to be a good person. The book also makes the reader pity the natives and wonder why they were so passive most of the time, especially since the more passive they were, the more they were taken advantage of.



Structure

The book is divided into various chapters to correspond with the different provinces that were destroyed by the Spaniards. Each chapter describes the region's physical aspects and the demeanor of the natives that lived there. De Las Casas then begins recounting some of the horrible things that happened in each region naming a few occasions but usually no more than three or four. This is mainly because the Spaniards actions were becoming more uniformed and there was no need to continue to explain each killing method that they used. Each chapter appears to be in chronological order, though some of the dates are out of place. Several of the same adventurers appear in multiple chapters because once commencing in their destruction were called to conquer other lands based on their experience. He also seems to write the book in an escalating degree of savagery, where the commanders keep getting more evil and each commander is far more severe than the last one. When he speaks about the natives, they are always docile, friendly, innocent, and severely generous. When the natives do attack, he always excuses their actions because it is only natural they should protect themselves and their families against the Spaniards. Toward the end of the book the reader is left a little exhausted because the tragedies are all equally horrendous and they never let up.



Quotes

"War in the Americas is no more deadly than our jousting, or than many European children's games." Chapter 1, pg. 14

"Here is the God of the Christians...in honor of this God...we shall please Him and He will order the Christians to leave us unharmed...so be it, so be it." Chapter 4, pg. 28

"He chose to go to hell to ensure that he would never again have to clap eyes on those cruel brutes." Chapter 4, pg. 28

"These are the roads we have traveled to go and offer to work for the Christians, and, however hard the work, we thought to return in time to our homes and to our wives and children. That expectation is now a thing of the past, and we know that this trip will be our last." Chapter 5, pg. 38

"The Christians seized all the maize the local had grown for themselves and their own families...some twenty or thirty thousand natives died of hunger, some mother even killing their own children and eating them."

"Oh, wicked men! What harm had we done to you? Why do you kill us? Wait till you get to Mexico City, for there our great king, Montezuma, will avenge our deaths." Chapter 7, pg.46

"Nero watched from Tarpey's height the flames engulf Rome's awesome might; children and ancients shout in pain, he all regards with cold disdain." Chapter 7, pg. 46

"Come off it, Sir. The orders I had from my superiors were quite specific: If I could not capture them in battle, I was to promise them peace as a way of tricking them into giving themselves up and enslave them." Chapter 14, pg. 88

"We came in peace to serve you and you kill us; may our blood on these walls serve as testimony to your cruelty and the injustice of our deaths." Chapter 17, pg.106

"Where are these Spaniards? Let them come out at once, for I shall not leave without satisfaction for the murder of my subjects, the destruction of my towns and cities, and the wealth they have stolen from me." Chapter 19, pg. 109

"Why do you want to burn me? What harm have I done you? Did you not give your word that you would let me go if I gave you gold? Did I not give you all I promised and more? If you do not wish to free me, then send me to your King of Spain." Chapter 19, pg. 109



"No pen can give justice to the boundless cruelty of this enemy of God." Chapter 20, pg. 122

"Unless His Majesty puts a stop to these hellhounds as quickly as may be there will be not a soul left alive throughout the territory." Chapter 20, pg. 123

"Recognition of the truth will make the reader more compassionate towards the sufferings and the predicament of these poor innocent people." Chapter 20, pg. 126

"The local people have died and still die in the blackest ignorance of the faith and without the benefit of the Sacraments." Chapter 20, pg. 126



Topics for Discussion

De Las Casas has a deep compassion for the native people, though he refers to them as resembling innocent sheep and docile creatures throughout the book. Do you think this is due to feelings of superiority for being a Christian himself and that the unconverted natives are level with animals?

The natives always did what the Spaniards asked them to do, including handing over their own people when asked to do so without a fight. Why wouldn't the Spaniards just take the gold and slaves without killing the rest of the natives?

News traveled to a few of the neighboring native towns about the atrocities of the Spaniards, yet they continued to welcome them. Why do you think the natives kept trusting the Spaniards?

Conquering land and groups of people has happened throughout history and throughout the world. What is the typical scenario of modern day conquerors? What are the strategies countries use apart from war to conquer another nation?

Justice is a term used in advanced western thought. Why was it so easy to throw away the meaning of justice when it came to applying it to the New World? Can justice exist without enforcement mechanisms like laws and punishments to keep it in place?

The politics in Latin America today are still racially charged between the natives, or Indians, and the mestizos, or mixed bloods, regardless of laws and punishments against racism. Is this a sign that the conquest is still continuing? What would be a good sign to show that the conquest is officially over if it is not so already?

Some of the natives were baptized and established churches to spread the word of God. However, they were still taken as slaves and killed. Was it more important that their souls were saved rather than their lives? What was the point of converting them if they all died anyways, and how do you think the missionaries managed to continue baptizing the natives during this reign of terror.

Was the Spanish Kingdom less inclined to help the natives because they knew that it would probably cost them monetarily? Or was it because they thought that the natives being killed were the ones that refused to convert and pay allegiance to the Spanish Crown?