

[Spanish Reactions to Conquest]

SUBJECT [American History]	TEACHER [?]	GRADE [High School]	DATE [November 13, 2020]
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OVERVIEW

- Spain agonized over its conquest in the Americas, like no other Imperial power would thereafter. The original intent was to evangelize the people who were already there; this, the Spanish believed, to be a civilizing mission. Instead, many within Spain's religious and intellectual circles became horrified at the reports of atrocities committed by their countrymen. Some strode manfully to expose Spanish crimes among the Indigenous peoples, and bring about legal reform, as it pertained to their treatment; others fought a battle within the universities, questioning Spain's mission among some of its most impressionable citizens: its students. These efforts brought about seminal law reform in the Nueva Laws of 1542, which safeguarded the lives and property of Spain's indigenous subjects. It was met with open hostility by the conquistador elites, the often-poor men, who'd gone out and conquered vast empires, and formed realms all their own. Spain agonized over its conquest; certain among them joyed in the creation of an empire, while others stood firmly against it.

Unit Goal

- By unit's end, students will realize that not every Spaniard favored their country's conquest in the Americas, and many sought to alleviate the burden placed upon the Indigenous people.
- Likewise, students will have a better understanding of who the conquistadors were. Students will understand that men – and some women - of varied ethnic background and nationality, and many Amerindians, were counted among the Conquistadors.
- They will know who Bartolome de las Casas was; comprehend that, in his zeal to help Indigenous people, he sometimes went overboard in his accounts, inflating atrocities to the point that Spain's European enemies used them as ammunition to defame Spain, for centuries to come.
- Students will come to know Francisco de Vitoria and his astute arguments, that effectively blow the reasons for conquest out of the water; and will take into account the legal and moral implications of his lecture, as it pertained to the Indigenous Americans.
- Students will appreciate that, though Spaniards committed atrocities during their various conquests, no other European nation strove to reform the brutal tendencies of their countrymen, through laws enacted to safeguard those they had conquered. The Nueva Laws of 1542 will be discussed, as will the reasons for their ultimate failure.
- Introduce historiography. How do we know what we know about the indigenous peoples of the Americas, if most of them did not have written records? How do the writings of historians shape our understanding of our history? Why is it important to know where our information comes from, and the motives of its writers in writing them down?

Schedule

- **Monday: The Conquistadors** - European and Mesoamerican conquistadors. Their status in life, and origins. Motivations for coming out to the Americas; thoughts on the lands and peoples they encounter. Why did so many Mesoamericans fight with the Spanish, against other Mesoamericans? What was the role of the few women who involved themselves in these

conflicts? The Conquistadors were often poor men and commoners, what does this social status reveal about their actions and attitudes, if anything?

- **Tuesday: Bartolome de Las Casas** – Early life and epiphany. What made him the champion of Indigenous rights? Who were the Dominicans, and why did he join them? Las Casas’s writings; the Devastation of the Indies – discuss major problems with this work, especially Las Casas’s bias. Why is this work his most famous? Las Casas legacy.
- **Wednesday: Francisco de Vitoria** – Who was de Vitoria, and what was his occupation? Lay out his argument against Spain’s conquests in the Americas. Discuss. Why are these important – consider the audience he is addressing: Spanish college students in one of their most prestigious universities. How does de Vitoria reflect divided opinion on the nature of Spain’s activities in the Americas?
- **Thursday: The Nueva Laws of 1542** – Map out the original intent of Queen Isabel, regarding her indigenous subjects; why did the Spanish government have such a hard time enforcing its wishes in the Americas? Emphasize time and the distances involved, as well as Conquistador unwillingness to give up their conquests. What were the Nueva Laws? Discuss their consequences. Why did they ultimately fail? Define the Laws’ legacy. What do these reforms tell us about sixteenth century Spain?
- **Friday: Historiography of the Spanish Conquest** – What is historiography? Describe its importance. How does it inform our understanding of the history of the Spanish conquest, the Indigenous nations affected by it, and how they’re remembered? How do native accounts emerge; what are some of the issues surrounding them? What are some of the issues surrounding Spanish accounts? Discuss and reflect.

Resources

- Unit summaries on www.huntthepast.com. These units to be utilized at teacher’s discretion: The Conquistadors, Bartolome de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria, The Nueva Laws of 1542, Historiography of the Spanish Conquest.
- Books, particularly primary sources, provided in footnotes.
- Videos, books, images, activities, and maps provided by www.huntthepast.com, as well as any the instructor may deem appropriate, are to be utilized as teaching aids.

Essential Skills

- Students will come to understand the enormous role played by native peoples in the establishment of the Spanish Empire in the Americas, particularly as allies to the Spanish, and their motivation for joining with the foreigners, against their neighbors. They will comprehend the ethnic, and occasional sexual, diversity of the conquistadors, and understand most of them were poor men, hailing from Spain’s lower social orders.
- Students will appreciate attempts by certain Spaniards to disavow their country’s conquest and bring about social and legal reform, to alleviate the burdens of the conquered.
- They will gain insight into the problems plaguing the Spanish government’s attempts to enact reform in the Americas, namely distance, time, and the obstinate resistance of the Conquistador elites.
- Finally, students will begin to acquaint themselves with historiography, the study of how history is written; how history can be morphed and molded over succeeding generations, to fit academic and personal agenda, and will learn the necessity of going back to the original source material, as a means to spur independent thinking.