

[Spanish Reactions to Conquest]

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

Spain forged an empire in the Americas, with armies of poor men, from multiple backgrounds, including thousands of Amerindian warriors, who fought beside the Spanish as allies. Among these forces, a handful of women involved themselves in the fighting - voices and experiences that are too often ignored. But the empire they created was forged with the sword. Atrocities abounded, and the lives of the conquered too terrible to comprehend.

Within Spain's intellectual, religious, and government circles, there were men who spoke out, who used their positions in academics, or personal experience on the ground in the Indies, to press for social reform within Spain's empire. The Indigenous people had to be protected from exploitation, so finally, Spain's government issued sweeping legal reform that was met with great hostility from the Conquistador elites, but which sought to better the lives of the conquered. Spain agonized over its conquest in America; many found it outright abhorrent.

Unit Goal

- Students will acquaint themselves with who the Conquistadors were: their ethnic and social background; the hardships they faced on the ground; their motivations; and come to realize that many of them weren't European at all.
- Students will meet figures like Bartolome de Las Casas and Francisco de Vitoria, and appreciate the means by which they spoke out against Spain's conquest, and the reasons laid down as justifications for it. In examining aspects of their writings, students will analyze the limitations and biases inherent within them, especially Las Casas, and examine how that affected Spain's international image, for centuries to come.
- The Nueva Laws will be examined, illustrating Spain's far reaching attempts at colonial reform, and examine the reasons – time, distance, difficulties in implementation – for its ultimate failure. How do these reforms reshape our view of sixteenth century Spain?
- Finally, students will come to understand the importance of Historiography, across all historical subjects.

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

- Understand Conquistador diversity, their limitations, struggles, and social backgrounds, and why so many Amerindians fought alongside the invaders.
- Appreciate just how far Spain went to reform the major problems in its colonial empire.
- Acquaint themselves with important aspects of Historiography, and begin to implement this knowledge in future studies.