

CHAPTER 1

CONTACT AND CONQUEST: THE MEETING OF OLD AND NEW WORLDS

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On "Discovery Day" in 1892, the citizens of the United States were in a festive mood. Along parade routes, at neighborhood picnics, and in town squares, flag-waving Americans celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage by watching soldiers, politicians, and other dignitaries march by, swaying to the music of brass bands, and applauding local leaders who extolled the exploits of the "Admiral of the Ocean Sea."

In large cities, the festivities were more elaborate. In New York, for example, the editors of the *New York Times* used hyperbole to describe the opening of the Columbian Celebration:

"Young America Leads Off—First Of The Great Parades Of Columbus Week—Solid Masses Of Humanity Line The Route—The City Hidden Under Flags And Bunting." The next day, the editors wrote, "Before Two Million Eyes—The Great Parade Of War Ships And River Craft—Spectators Hide The Water Front From Sight." On the third day, the headlines screamed, "The Climax Of The Week—All Past Parade Records Sent To The Rear—Cascades Of Gay Colors Everywhere—The Avenues Packed With Vast Throngs By Sunrise And Filled To Their Utmost Capacity All Day And Night—Model Work By The Police In Handling The Greatest Crowd New-York Ever Held:"

The quadricentennial parties in New York City, as spectacular as they were, could not match the size or duration of the festivities in Chicago. On October 21, 1892, Chicago's World Columbian Exposition—an event destined to attract about 40 percent of the U.S. population!—held its dedication-day ceremonies. Cardinal James Gibbons declared,

Four hundred years ago Columbus discovered this American continent, and therefore, we are primarily indebted to him for the land which we enjoy in peace and security. Columbus united the skill and daring of a navigator with the zeal of an apostle, and in his voyage of exploration he was not only impelled by the desire of enriching his sovereign with the wealth of new dominions, but he was also inspired by the lofty ambition of carrying the light of the Gospel to a people that were buried in the darkness of idolatry. . . . Fervent

should be our gratitude since we possess the fruits of his labors and of his victory. But not for this earthly possession only should we be thankful, more for the precious boon of constitutional liberty which we inherit.¹

Gibbons's words characterized most of the commemorations of Columbus in 1892. For millions of late-nineteenth-century Americans, hailing Columbus was synonymous with celebrating the progress of humanity, the opening of the American frontier, the triumph of Western technology, the advance of Christianity, and the spread of democratic institutions.

One hundred years later, Americans prepared for the five-hundredth anniversary of the Columbus voyage. This time, however, reflections on the era of Old and New World contact evoked different reactions. There were plenty of parades and patriotic speeches. But there were also some discordant notes. In Denver, Colorado, a scheduled Columbus Day parade was called off to prevent a clash between the marchers and Native American protesters. In Berkeley, California, the city council renamed October 12 "Indigenous People's Day" and dedicated the site of a planned Turtle Island Monument, which was to commemorate a Native American story of creation. In Columbus, Ohio (the world's largest city named for Columbus), groups of Native Americans held a memorial service in a park about two blocks from a full-scale model of the *Santa Maria*. In New York City, the National Council of Churches announced that 1992 should be a time not of celebration, but of repentance for an "invasion and colonization with legalized occupation, genocide, economic exploitation, and a deep level of institutional racism and moral decadence."

Americans in 1992 remembered an unpopular war in Vietnam, our long struggles against Jim Crow discrimination and racism, and the ugly stain of numerous "ethnic cleansings" around the world. They looked at the past differently from U.S. citizens of 1892. History itself had not changed, but assessments of its consequences surely had. With a greater sensitivity to a Native American point-of-view and to environmental concerns, more recent interpretations of history often emphasize the negative side of the Columbian exchange. Contact brought not "progress" so much as disease, starvation, and enslavement. It wreaked havoc on the cultures and environment of the western hemisphere, and it resulted in the death of tens of millions of people, most directly by diseases from which indigenous peoples had no immunity. Indeed, according to the interpretation offered by historian David E. Stannard in *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World*, the "European and white American destruction of the native peoples of the Americas was the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world."

This chapter focuses on the era of initial contact between the peoples of Europe and the Americas. It was a period of discovery and disease, of exploration and exploitation, of colonization and conquest. We include excerpts from Columbus's narrative of his first voyage; from the works of Bartolomé de Las Casas, the controversial "Protector of the Indians"; and from Aztec accounts of the coming of the Spanish. The first two sources, although among the most significant texts describing the period of encounter, are both products of European minds, and they tell us as much about Old World perceptions and ambitions as they do about New World realities. Consequently, do not be too quick to accept at face value the assertions stated in the texts. Rather, question the sources

thoroughly, always asking why these words were written and how much of the testimony is trustworthy. While no full narratives exist that reveal how the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean reacted to those early days of contact, other voices give us hints of how they experienced the coming of Europeans. The Aztec chroniclers left moving accounts of the clash between the two peoples.

Columbus had a simple but expensive idea: to reach the eastern world by sailing west. While European monarchs coveted the profits that could be made from finding a waterway to the Orient, most gave little consideration to Columbus's plan. They rejected his scheme, not because they believed the earth to be flat, but because their advisers told them that the earth was quite large and that to reach the East by sailing west, one would have to travel some 10,000 miles across dangerous Atlantic waters. Columbus, however, believing the earth to be much smaller than scholars estimated, insisted that Japan was only about 2,400 miles from the Canary Islands. If given the opportunity, Columbus promised not only to prove the calculations of the scholars wrong, but also to find a waterway to the riches of Asia.

Several developments worked to Columbus's advantage. In searching for a southern sea lane to India in 1488, Portuguese mariners sailed 5,000 miles down the African coastline to the tip of that continent. These explorations—while confirming the possibility of reaching the East by sailing south—also demonstrated that such a trip would be longer and costlier than had been anticipated. This discovery made a westward journey to the East appear more attractive. Furthermore, in January 1492, the Spanish Christians defeated the Moorish Muslims in Granada, thereby ending years of warfare in southern Spain. The Spaniards also banished all Jews from the land. Once freed from the expense of this costly civil war, the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, now had the luxury of gambling their fortunes on Columbus's scheme. They supplied Columbus with three ships and a crew, an elaborate title, and a diplomatic passport intended to introduce him to the kings he expected to meet in the Orient. In return for this sponsorship, the Spanish Crown was to receive 90 percent of all income gained from the enterprise.

Although it was not required or even customary for Spanish sea captains at this time to keep a travel log, Columbus decided to document his historic search for the Orient. Writing for his monarchs but with an eye to history, Columbus produced a narrative of the voyage, a document that included a prologue detailing the objectives of the mission as well as daily journal entries describing the preparation of the fleet, the outward voyage, landfall, exploration, and the homeward journey. On returning to Spain, Columbus presented his narrative to Queen Isabella, who copied it, kept the original, and returned the copy to Columbus. The original was subsequently lost, and Columbus's copy passed on his death to his eldest son, and later to Luis, one of his grandsons. Although Luis had permission to publish the journal, he never did, and some scholars have been led to conclude that he sold it to subsidize his legendary debauchery. At any rate, both the original and the only known copy of Columbus's journal disappeared before the historic text could be published.

Fortunately, however, in the 1530s, Bartolomé de Las Casas came into contact with one of the copies of the journal while he was conducting research for his own *History of the Indies*. Las Casas took extensive notes from the journal, summarizing portions of it and copying

other sections word for word. Las Casas's transcription, which itself was not published until 1825, is the closest we are likely to get to Columbus's original 1492–1493 narrative.

In addition to providing us with the only extant version of Columbus's journal, Las Casas also left a passionate description of the consequences of the first half-century of Spanish colonization. Las Casas became interested in the peoples of the New World at an early age. In 1493, while only eight years old, he saw Columbus parade through the streets of Seville during a triumphant tour showcasing the first voyage. Six months later, Las Casas's father and three of his uncles sailed on the second of Columbus's four transatlantic voyages. As a young teenager, Las Casas received from his father an unusual souvenir gift: a Taino boy, a servant who was subsequently freed and returned to the Indies on the order of Queen Isabella. In 1502, Las Casas made the first of what would be ten trips across the Atlantic. Initially as a *doctrinero* (or teacher of Christian doctrine to the Indians) and later as the first Roman Catholic priest ordained in the New World, Las Casas began to see the moral inequities within a colonial system that granted Spanish settlers—in return for promising to instruct the natives in Christian doctrine—the right to the fields, mines, and labor of Native American subjects. Between 1514, when Las Casas first spoke against the horrors of Spanish exploitation, and his death in 1564, he carried on a gallant if frustrating crusade for Native American rights.

While reading the following documents, rethink the meaning of the "Age of Contact and Conquest." Recreate the moment of encounter. In what ways were the Old and New Worlds and their peoples alike and different? What did the word *discovery* mean to Columbus and the subsequent colonists, and what did it mean to the Native Americans who encountered alien peoples invading their lands? Also, reflect on the consequences of the Spanish colonization efforts. How did the Spanish justify colonization, and how valid were these justifications?

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTS 1 AND 2

The following are excerpts from the writings of the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, and Christopher Columbus. The first document, "Privileges and Prerogatives Granted by Their Catholic Majesties," offers insights into what the Spanish monarchs expected Columbus to accomplish on his maiden voyage. The second document is taken from the prologue and journal of Columbus's first voyage, as it comes down to us from Las Casas. Recall that Columbus found land as he had anticipated, when about 2,400 miles out into the Atlantic. The people and environs he encountered, however, were not what he expected. While he anticipated the busy ports and elegantly robed subjects that had been described in the writings of Marco Polo about the Far East, he instead found naked strangers and few signs of commerce. His words suggest a bewildered man struggling to reconcile the known with the unknown. Trying to take in and report all that he sees, Columbus describes the peoples he encounters as innocent and loving, good potential Christians but also remarks how easily they might be enslaved. (Note: *Grand Khan* and *Cathay* refer to Asia.)

1. PRIVILEGES AND PREROGATIVES GRANTED BY THEIR CATHOLIC MAJESTIES TO CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (1492)

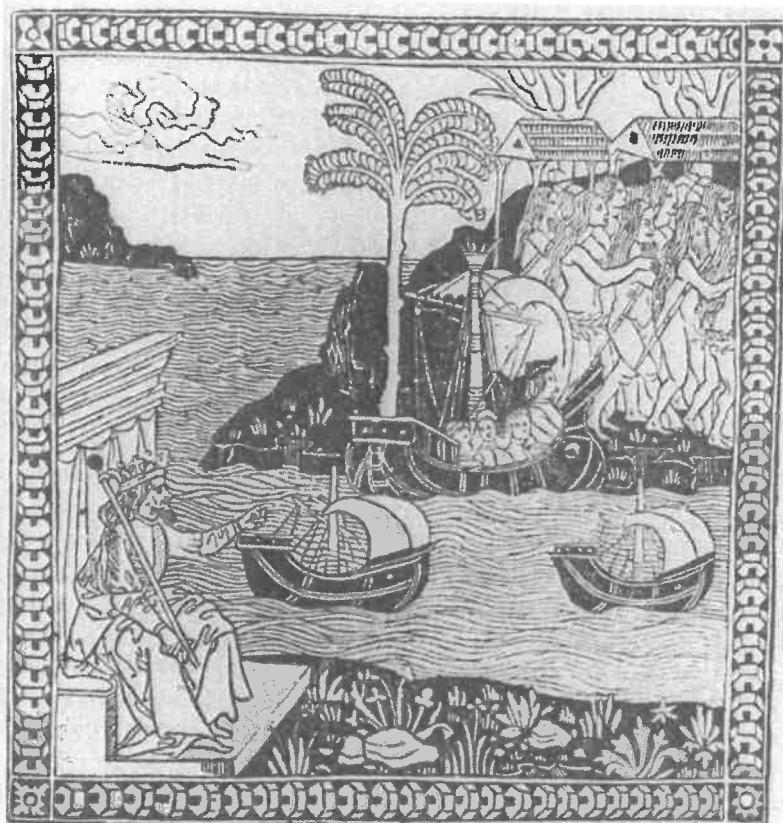


Image 1.1 Woodcut accompanying Christopher Columbus's 1493 letter

This woodcut depicts King Ferdinand at left, and Columbus as the little figure in the boat meeting the much larger inhabitants of Hispaniola. In much medieval and early modern art, the size of the figures in artistic renderings implied something about the relationship of the figure to God and the viewer. Often, saints and other important people were depicted as larger than commoners. What do you think this artist was implying by making the Taino Indians larger than Columbus and approximately the same size as King Ferdinand?

Source: Library of Congress.

FERDINAND and ELIZABETH, by the Grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, of Leon, of Aragon, of Sicily, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Minorca, of Sevil, of Sardinia, of Jaen, of Algarve, of Algezira, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands. . .

For as much of you, Christopher Columbus, are going by our command, with some of our vessels and men, to discover and subdue some Islands and Continent in the ocean, and it is hoped that by God's assistance, some of the said Islands and Continent in the ocean will be discovered and conquered by your means and conduct, therefore

it is but just and reasonable, that since you expose yourself to such danger to serve us, you should be rewarded for it. And we being willing to honor and favor You for the reasons aforesaid: Our will is, That you, Christopher Columbus, after discovering and conquering the said Islands and Continent in the said ocean, or any of them, shall be our Admiral of the said Islands and Continent you shall so discover and conquer; and that you be our Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governor in them, and that for the future, you may call and style yourself, D. Christopher Columbus, and that your sons and

successors in the said employment, may call themselves Dons, Admirals, Vice-Roys, and Governors of them; and that you may exercise the office of Admiral, with the charge of Vice-Roy and Governor of the said Islands and Continent, which you and your Lieutenants shall conquer, and freely decide all causes, civil and criminal, appertaining to the said employment of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governor, as you shall think fit in justice, and as the Admirals of our kingdoms use to do; and that you have power to punish offenders; and you

and your Lieutenants exercise the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governor, in all things belonging to the said offices, or any of them; and that you enjoy the perquisites and salaries belonging to the said employments, and to each of them, in the same manner as the High Admiral of our kingdoms does. . . .

GIVEN at Granada, on the 30th of April, in the year of our Lord, 1492.

I, THE KING, I, THE QUEEN.²

2. JOURNAL OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS'S FIRST VOYAGE (1492)

... [I]n this present year of 1492, after your Highnesses had given an end to the war with the Moors who reigned in Europe, and had finished it in the very great city of Granada, where in this present year, on the second day of the month of January, by force of arms, I saw the royal banners of your Highnesses placed on the towers of Alhambra, which is the fortress of that city, and I saw the Moorish King come forth from the gates of the city and kiss the royal hands of your Highness, and of the Prince my Lord, and presently in that same month, acting on the information that I had given to your Highnesses touching the lands of India, and respecting a Prince who is called *Grand Can*, which means in our language King of Kings, how he and his ancestors had sent to Rome many times to ask for learned men of our holy faith to teach him, and how the Holy Father had never complied insomuch that many people believing in idolatries were lost by receiving doctrine of perdition: YOUR HIGHNESSES, as Catholic Christians and Princes who love the holy Christian faith, and the propagation of it, and who are enemies to the sect of Mahoma and to all idolatries and heresies, resolved to send me, Cristobal Colon, to the said parts of India to see the said princes, and the cities and lands, and their disposition, with a view that they might be converted to our holy faith; and ordered that I should not go by land to the eastward, as had been customary, but that

I should go by way of the west, whither up to this day, we do not know for certain that any one has gone.

Thus, after having turned out all the Jews from all your kingdoms and lordships, in the same month of January, your Highnesses gave orders to me that with a sufficient fleet I should go to the said parts of India, and for this they made great concessions to me, and ennobled me, so that henceforward I should be called Don, and should be Chief Admiral of the Ocean Sea, perpetual Viceroy and Governor of all the islands and continents that I should discover and gain, and that I might hereafter discover and gain, and that I might hereafter discover and gain in the Ocean Sea, and that my eldest son should succeed, and so on from generation to generation for ever.

I left the city of Granada on the 12th day of May, in the same year of 1492, being Saturday, and came to the town of Palos, which is a seaport; where I equipped three vessels well suited for such service; and departed from that port, well supplied with provisions and with many sailors, on the 3^d day of August of the same year, being Friday, half an hour before sunrise, taking the route to the islands of Canaria, belonging to your Highnesses, which are in the said Ocean Sea, that I might thence take my departure for navigating until I should arrive at the Indies, and give the letters of your Highnesses to those princes, so as to comply with my

orders. As part of my duty I thought it well to write an account of all the voyage very punctually, noting from day to day all that I should do and see, and that should happen, as will be seen further on. . . .*

WEDNESDAY, 10TH OF OCTOBER

The course was W.S.W., and they went at the rate of 10 miles an hour, occasionally 12 miles, and sometimes 7. During the day and night they made 59 leagues, counted as no more than 44. Here the people could endure no longer. They complained of the length of the voyage. But the Admiral cheered them up in the best way he could, giving them good hopes of the advantages they might gain from it. He added that, however much they might complain, he had to go to the Indies, and that he would go on until he found them, with the help of our Lord.

THURSDAY, 11TH OF OCTOBER

The course was W.S.W., and there was more sea than there had been during the whole of the voyage. They saw sandpipers, and a green reed near the ship. Those of the caravel *Pinta* saw a cane and a pole, and they took up another small pole which appeared to have been worked with iron; also another bit of cane, a land-plant, and a small board. The crew of the caravel *Nina* also saw signs of land, and a small branch covered with berries. Everyone breathed afresh and rejoiced at these signs. The run until sunset was 26 leagues.

After sunset the Admiral returned to his original west course, and they went along at the rate of 12 miles an hour. Up to two hours after midnight they had gone 90 miles, equal to 22½ leagues. As the caravel *Pinta* was a better sailer, and went ahead of the Admiral, she found the land, and made the signals ordered by the Admiral. The land was first seen by a sailor named Rodrigo de Triana. But the Admiral, at ten in the previous night, being on the castle of the poop, saw a light, though it was so uncertain that he could not affirm it was land. He called Pero Gutierrez, a gentleman of the King's bedchamber, and said that there seemed to be a light, and that he should look at it. He did so, and saw it. The Admiral said the

same to Rodrigo Sanchez of Segovia, whom the King and Queen had sent with the fleet as inspector, but he could see nothing, because he was not in a place whence anything could be seen. After the Admiral had spoken he saw the light once or twice, and it was like a wax candle rising and falling. It seemed to few to be an indication of land; but the Admiral made certain that land was close. When they said the *Salve*, which all the sailors were accustomed to sing in their way, the Admiral asked and admonished the men to keep a good look-out on the fore-castle, and to watch well for land; and to him who should first cry out that he saw land, he would give a silk doublet, besides the other rewards promised by the Sovereigns, which were 10,000 maravedis to him who should first see it. At two hours after midnight the land was sighted at a distance of two leagues. They shortened sail, and lay by under the mainsail without the bonnets. The vessels were hove to, waiting for daylight; and on Friday they arrived at a small island of the Lucayos, called, in the language of the Indians, *Guanahani*. Presently they saw naked people. The Admiral went on shore in the armed boat, and Martin Alonson Pinzon, and Vicente Yanez, his brother, who was captain of the *Nina*. The Admiral took the royal standard, and the captains went with two banners of the green cross, which the Admiral took in all the ships as a sign, with an F and a Y and a crown over each letter, one on one side of the cross and the other on the other. Having landed, they saw trees very green, and much water, and fruits of diverse kinds. The Admiral called to the two captains, and to the others who leaped on shore, and to Rodrigo Escovedo, secretary of the whole fleet, and to Rodrigo Sanchez of Segovia, and said that they should bear faithful testimony that he, in presence of all, had taken, as he now took, possession of the said island for the King and for the Queen, his Lords making the declarations that are required, as is more largely set forth in the testimonies which were then made in writing.

Presently many inhabitants of the island assembled. What follows is in the actual words of the Admiral in his book of the first navigation and discovery of the Indies. "I," he says, "that we might form great friendship, for I knew that they were a people

* Columbus at times refers to himself in the third person.

who could be more easily freed and converted to our holy faith by love than by force, gave to some of them red caps, and glass beads to put round their necks, and many other things of little value, which gave them great pleasure, and made them so much our friends that it was a marvel to see. They afterwards came to the ship's boats where we were, swimming and bringing us parrots, cotton threads in skeins, darts, and many other things; and we exchanged them for other things that we gave them, such as glass beads and small bells. In fine, they took all, and gave what they had with good will. It appeared to me to be a race of people very poor in everything. They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, none more than thirty years of age. They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse, almost like the hairs of a horse's tail. They wear the hairs brought down to the eyebrows, except a few locks behind, which they wear long and never cut. They paint themselves black, and they are the colour of the Canarians, neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and others of what colour they find. Some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only on the nose. They neither carry nor know anything of arms, for I showed them swords, and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their darts being wands without iron, some of them having a fish's tooth at the end, and others being pointed in various ways. They are all of fair stature and size, with good faces, and well made. I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to ask what it was, and they gave me to understand that people from other adjacent islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they defended themselves. I believed, and still believe, that they come from the mainland to take them prisoners. They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion. I, our Lord being pleased, will take hence, at the time of my departure, six natives for your Highnesses, that they may learn to speak. I saw no beast of any kind excepts parrots, on this island.

SATURDAY, 13TH OF OCTOBER

... They came to the ship in small canoes, made out of the trunk of a tree like a long boat, and all of one piece, and wonderfully worked, considering the country. They are large, some of them holding 40 to 45 men, others smaller, and some only large enough to hold one man. They are propelled with a paddle like a baker's shovel, and go at a marvelous rate. If the canoe capsizes they all promptly begin to swim, and to bale it out with calabashes that they take with them. They brought skeins of cotton thread, parrots, darts, and other small things which it would be tedious to recount, and they give all in exchange for anything that may be given to them. I was attentive, and took trouble to ascertain if there was gold. ... This island is rather large and very flat, with bright green trees, much water, and a very large lake in the centre, without any mountain, and the whole land so green that it is a pleasure to look on it. The people are very docile, and for the longing to possess our things, and not having anything to give in return, they take what they can get, and presently swim away.

SUNDAY, 14TH OF OCTOBER

At dawn I ordered the ship's boat and the boats of the caravels to be got ready, and I went along the coast of the island to the N.N.E., to see the other side, which was on the other side to the east, and also to see the villages. Presently I saw two or three, and the people all came to the shore, calling out and giving thanks to God. Some of them brought us water, others came with food, and when they saw that I did not want to land, they got into the sea, and came swimming to us. We understood that they asked us if we had come from heaven. One old man came into the boat, and others cried out, in loud voices, to all the men and women, to come and see the men who had come from heaven, and to bring them to eat at drink. Many came, including women, each bringing something, giving thanks to God, throwing themselves on the ground and shouting to us to come on shore. But I was afraid to land, seeing an extensive reef of rocks which surrounded the island, with deep water between it and the shore forming a port large enough for as many ships as there are in Christendom, but with a very narrow entrance. ... I saw a piece of land which appeared like an island, although it is not one, and on it there were six houses. It might be converted into an island in two days, though I do not see that it would be

necessary, for these people are very simple as regards the use of arms, as your Highnesses will see from the seven that I caused to be taken, to bring home and learn our language and return; unless your Highnesses should order them all to be brought to Castille, or to be kept as captives on the same island; for with fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them. Close to the above peninsula there are gardens of the most beautiful trees I ever saw, and with leaves as green as those of Castille in the month of April and May, and much water. I examined all that port, and afterwards I returned to the ship and made sail. I saw so many islands that I hardly knew how to determine to which I should go first. Those natives I had with me said, by signs, that there were so many that they could not be numbered, and they gave the names of more than a hundred. At last I looked out for the largest, and resolved to shape a course for it, and so I did. It will be distant five leagues from this of *San Salvador*, and the others some more, some less. All are very flat, and all are inhabited. The natives make war on each other, although these are very simple-minded and handsomely formed people.

TUESDAY, 30TH OF OCTOBER

He left the Rio de Mares and steered N.W., seeing a cape covered with palm trees to which he gave the name of *Cabo de Palmas*, after having made good 15 leagues. The Indians on board the caravel *Pinta* said that beyond that cape there was a river, and that from the river to *Cuba* it was four days' journey. The captain of the *Pinta* reported that he understood from that, that this *Cuba* was a city, and that the land was a great continent trending far to the north. The king of that country, he gathered, was at war with the Gran Can. . . . The Admiral resolved to reach the Grand Can, who he thought was here or at the city of Cathay, which belongs to him, and is very grand, as he was informed before leaving Spain.

SUNDAY, 4TH OF NOVEMBER

. . . The Admiral showed the Indians some specimens of cinnamon and pepper he had brought from Castille, and they knew it, and said, by signs, that there was plenty in the vicinity, pointing to the S.E. He also showed them gold and pearls, on which certain old men said that there was an infinite quantity

in a place called *Bohio*, and that the people wore it on their necks, ears, arms, and legs, as well as pearls. He further understood them to say that there were great ships and much merchandise, all to the S.E. He also understood that, far away, there were men with one eye, and others with dogs' noses who were cannibals, and that when they captured an enemy they beheaded him and drank his blood.

The Admiral then determined to return to the ship and wait for the return of the two men he had sent, intending to depart and seek for those lands, if his envoys brought some good news touching what he desired.

TUESDAY, 6TH OF NOVEMBER

They saw many kinds of trees, herbs, and sweet-smelling flowers; and birds of many different kinds, unlike those of Spain, except the partridges, geese, of which there are many, and singing nightingales. They saw no quadrupeds except the dogs that do not bark. The land is very fertile, and is cultivated with yams and several kinds of beans different from ours, as well as corn. There were great quantities of cotton gathered, spun, and worked up. In a single house they saw more than 500 *arrobas*, and as much as 4,000 *quintals* could be yielded every year. The Admiral said that "it did not appear to be cultivated, and that it bore all the year round. It is very fine, and has a large boll. All that was possessed by these people they gave at a very low price, and a great bundle of cotton was exchanged for the point of a needle or other trifle. They are a people, says the Admiral, guileless and unwarlike. Men and women go as naked as when their mothers bore them. It is true that the women wear a very small rag of cotton-cloth, and they are of a very good appearance, not very dark, less so than the Canarians. I hold, most serene Princes, that if devout religious persons were here, knowing the language, they would all turn Christians. I trust in our Lord that your Highnesses will resolve upon this with much diligence, to bring so many great nations within the Church, and to convert them; as you have destroyed those who would not confess the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And after your days, all of us being mortal, may your kingdoms and lordships, with the will and disposition to increase the holy Christian religion as you have done hitherto. Amen!"

"To day I got the ship afloat, and prepared to depart on Thursday, in the name of God, and to steer S.E. in search of gold and spices, and to discover land."

These are the words of the Admiral, who intended to depart on Thursday, but, the wind being contrary, he could not go until the 12th of November.³

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENTS 3 AND 4

The third document comes from a Catholic priest who dared to challenge the justice of Spanish conduct in the New World. Bartolomé de Las Casas wrote his *Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies* in 1542 to be read aloud in a court called by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to consider Spanish colonial reforms. Las Casas's objective was to shock his audience with gruesome details of Spanish cruelty. His account was later translated into six European languages and was circulated widely by the enemies of Spain. The passages reprinted here were translated into English in 1589, and discussed the island of Hispaniola (modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which Columbus had earlier described in his journal. Document 4 is a map printed in Europe just at the time that Las Casas made his observations. It captures contemporary perceptions of the North American continent, and the ambitious hope of finding a passage to Asia.

3. THE CRUELITIES OF THE SPANIARDS COMMITTED IN AMERICA (1589)

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS

AMERICA was discover'd and found out An. Dom. 1492 and the Year insuing inhabited by the Spaniards, and afterward a multitude of them travelled thither from Spain for the space of Nine and Forty Years. Their first attempt was on the Spanish Island, which indeed is a most fertile Soil, and at present in greatest Reputation for its Spaciousness and Length, containing in Circumference Six Hundred Miles: Nay, it is on all sides surrounded with an almost innumerable number of Islands, which we found so well peopled with Natives and Foreigners, that there is scarce any Region in the Universe fortified with so many Inhabitants: But the main Land or Continent, distant from this Island Two Hundred and Fifty Miles and upwards, extends itself above Ten Thousand Miles in Length near the Sea-shoar, which Lands are some of them already discover'd, and more may be found out in process of time. . . .

Now this infinite multitude of Men are by the Creation of God innocently simple, altogether void of and averse to all manner of Craft, Subtlety and Malice, and most Obedient and Loyal Subjects to their Native Sovereigns; and behave themselves very patiently, submissively and quietly toward the Spaniards, to whom they are subservient and subject; so that finally they live without the least thirst after revenge, laying aside all litigiousness, Commotion and hatred.

This is a most tender and effeminate people, and of so imbecile and unequal-balanced temper, that they are altogether incapable of hard labour. . . . This Nation is very Necessitous and Indigent, Masters of very slender Possessions, and consequently, neither Haughty, nor Ambitious. . . . They go naked, having no other Covering but what conceals their Pudends from publick sight. An hairy Plad, or loose Coat . . . or a

coarse woven Cloth . . . serves them for the warmest Winter Garment. They lye on a coarse Rug or Matt, and those that have the most plentiful Estate or Fortunes, the better sort, use Net-work, knotted at the four corners in lieu of Beds, which the Inhabitants of the Island of Hispaniola, in their own proper Idiom term Hammacks. . . . The Natives [are] tractable, and capable of Morality or Goodness, very apt to receive the instill'd Principles of the Catholick Religion; nor are they averse to Civility and good Manners, being not so much discompos'd by variety of Obstructions, as the rest of Mankind. . . . I myself have heard the Spaniards themselves (who dare not assume the Confidence to deny the good Nature predominant in them) declare, that there was nothing wanting in them for the acquisition of Eternal Beatitude, but the sole Knowledge and Understanding of the Deity.

The Spaniards first assaulted these innocent Sheep, so qualified by the Almighty, as is premention'd, like most cruel Tygers, Wolves and Lions hunger-starv'd, studying nothing, for the space of Forty Years, after their first Landing, but the Massacre of these Wretches, whom they have so inhumanely and barbarously butcher'd and harass'd with several kinds of Torments, never before known, or heard (of which you shall have some account in the following Discourse) that of Three Millions of Persons, which lived in Hispaniola itself, there is at present but the inconsiderable Remnant of scarce Three Hundred.

Nay the Isle of Cuba, which extends as far, as Valledolid in Spain is distant from Rome, lies now incultivated, like a Desert, and intomb'd in its own Ruins. You may also find the Isles of St. John [Puerto Rico], and Jamaica, both large and fruitful places, unpeopled and desolate. The Lucayan Islands on the North-side, adjacent to Hispaniola and Cuba, which are Sixty in number, or thereabout, together with those, vulgarly known by the name of the Gigantic Isles, and others, the most infertile whereof, exceeds the Royal Garden of Sevil in fruitfulness, a most healthful and pleasant Climat, is now laid waste and uninhabited; and whereas, when the Spaniards first arriv'd here, above Five Hundred Thousand Men dwelt in it, they are now cut off, some by slaughter, and others ravished away by Force and Violence, to work in the Mines of Hispaniola, which was destitute of Native Inhabitants. . . .

As to the firm Land, we are certainly satisfied, and assur'd, that the Spaniards by their barbarous and execrable Actions have absolutely depopulated Ten Kingdoms, of greater extent than all Spain, together with the Kingdoms of Arragon and Portugal, that is to say, above One Thousand Miles, which now lye wast and desolate, and are absolutely ruined, when as formerly no other Country whatsoever was more populous. Nay we dare boldly affirm, that during the Forty years space, wherein they exercised their sanguinary and detestable Tyranny in these Regions, above Twelve Millions (computing Men, Women, and Children) have undeservedly perished; nor do I conceive that I should deviate from the Truth by saying that above Fifty Millions in all paid their last Debt due to Nature.

Those that arriv'd at these Islands from the remotest parts of Spain, and who pride themselves in the Name of Christians, steer'd Two courses principally, in order to the Extirpation, and Exterminating of this People from the face of the Earth. The first whereof was by raising an unjust, bloody, cruel War. The other, by putting all them to death, who hitherto, thirsted after their Liberty, or design'd (which the most Potent, Strenuous and Magnanimous Spirits intended) to recover their pristin Freedom, and shake off the Shackles of so injurious a Captivity. . . .

Now the ultimate end and scope that incited the Spaniards to endeavour the Extirpation and Desolation of this People, was Gold only; that thereby growing opulent in a short time, they might arrive at once at such Degrees and Dignities, as were no wayes consistent with their Persons.

Finally, in one word, their Ambition and Avarice, than which the heart of Man never entertained greater, and the vast Wealth of these Regions; the Humility and Patience of the Inhabitants (which made their approach to these Lands more facile and easie) did much promote the business: Whom they so despicably contemned, that they treated them (I speak of things which I was an Eye-Witness of, without the least fallacy) not as Beasts, which I cordially wished they would, but as the most abject dung and filth of the Earth; and so sollicitous they were of their Life and Soul, that the above-mentioned number of People died without understanding the true Faith or Sacraments . . . the Spaniards never received any injury from the Indians,

but that they rather revered them as Persons descended from Heaven, until that they were compelled to take up Arms, provoked thereunto by repeated Injuries, violent Torments, and unjust Butcheries.

OF THE ISLAND HISPANIOLA

In this Isle, which, as we have said, the Spaniards first attempted, the bloody slaughter and destruction of Men first began: for they violently forced away Women and Children to make them Slaves, and ill-treated them, consuming and wasting their Food . . . one individual Spaniard consumed more Victuals in one day, than would serve to maintain Three Families a Month, every one consisting of Ten Persons. Now being oppressed by such evil usage, and afflicted with such great Torments and violent Entertainment they began to understand, that such Men as these had not their Mission from Heaven; and therefore some of them conceal'd their Provisions and others their Wives and Children in lurking holes; but some, to avoid the obdurate and dreadful temper of such a Nation, sought their Refuge on the craggy tops of Mountains; for the Spaniards did not only entertain them with Cuffs, Blows, and wicked Cudgelling, but laid violent hands also on the Governours of Cities. . . . From which time they began to consider by what wayes and means they might expel the Spaniards out of their Countrey, and immediately took up Arms. But, good God, what Arms, do you imagine? Namely such, both Offensive and Defensive, as resemble Reeds wherewith Boys sport with one another, more than Manly Arms and Weapons.

Which the Spaniards no sooner perceived, but they, mounted on generous Steeds, well weapon'd with Lances and Swords, began to exercise their bloody Butcheries and Stratagems, and overrunning their Cities and Towns, spared no Age, or Sex, nay not so much as Women with Child, but ripping up their Bellies, tore them alive in pieces. They laid Wagers among themselves, who should with a Sword at one blow cut, or divide a Man in two; or which of them should decollate or behead a Man, with the greatest dexterity; nay farther, which should sheath his Sword in the Bowels of a Man with the quickest dispatch and expedition. They snatcht young Babes from the Mothers Breasts, and then dasht out the Brains of those Innocents against the Rocks; others they cast

into Rivers scoffing and jeering them, and call'd upon the Bodies when falling with derision, the true testimony of their Cruelty, to come to them, and inhumanely exposing others to their Merciless Swords, together with the Mothers that gave them Life.

. . . I really believe, and am satisfied by certain undeniable conjectures, that at the very juncture of time, when all these outrages were committed in this Isle, the Indians were not so much as guilty of one single mortal sin of Commission against the Spaniards, that might deserve from any Man revenge or require satisfaction. And as for those sins, the punishment whereof God hath reserved to himself, as the immoderate desire of Revenge, Hatred, Envy or inward rancor of Spirit, to which they might be transported against such Capital Enemies as the Spaniards were, I judge that very few of them can be justly accused of them; . . . and this I can assure you, that the Indians had ever a just cause of raising War against the Spaniards, and the Spaniards on the contrary never waged a just War against them, but what was more injurious and groundless then any undertaken by the worst of Tyrants. . . .

The Warlike Engagements being over, and the Inhabitants all swept away, they divided among themselves the Young Men, Women and Children promiscuously reserved for that purpose, one obtained thirty, another forty, to this Man one hundred were disposed, to the other two hundred, and the more any one was in favor with the domineering Tyrant (whom they styled Governor) the more he became Master of, upon this pretence, and with this Proviso, that he should see them instructed in the Catholick Religion, when as they themselves to whom they were committed to be taught, and the care of their Souls intrusted to them were, for the major part Idiots, Cruel, Avaritious, infected and stained with all sorts of Vices. And this was the great care they had of them, they sent the Males to the Mines to dig and bring away the Gold, which is an intollerable Labor; but the Women they made use of to Manure and Till the ground, which is a toil most difficult even to Men of the strongest and most robust constitutions; allowing them no other food but Herbage, and such kind of unsubstantial nutriment, so that the Nursing Womens Milk was exsiccated and so dried up, that the young Infants lately brought forth, all perished, and Females being separated from and debarred cohabitation with Men, there was no procreation. The Men died

in Mines, hunger starved and oppressed with labor, and the Women perished in the Fields, harassed and broken with the like Evils and Calamities: Thus an

infinite number of Inhabitants that formerly peopled this Island were exterminated and dwindled away to nothing by such Consumptions.⁴

4. SEBASTIAN MUNSTER, MAP OF THE NEW WORLD (1542)



Image 1.2 An early view of the Western Hemisphere

This is among the earliest maps of the New World, drawn by Sebastian Munster in 1542, the same year that Las Casas wrote his withering critique of Spanish treatment of the indigenous peoples. The map reflects contemporary assumptions about New World geography, particularly the belief that a large "Sea of Verrazano" cut into North America so deeply that it created a narrow isthmus that could easily be crossed on the way to Asia. Mexico City—or Tenoxtitlan as described in the Codex of Document 5—is here named "Temistitan," and mistakenly connected to the Gulf of Mexico. Munster's was perhaps the most widely known map of the New World in the early sixteenth century.

Source: Sebastian Munster, *Novae Insulae XVII Nova Tabula*. Courtesy Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps; www.raremaps.com.

INTRODUCTION TO DOCUMENT 5

There is no way to tell the story of the coming of Europeans in the words of Caribbean peoples, or those who lived in the present-day United States. Their impressions are lost to history. But written records have survived from the most powerful native group, the Aztecs. On November 8, 1519, Hernán Cortés, accompanied by 600 Spanish soldiers, as well as many indigenous allies, entered the Aztec capitol of Tenochtitlán (today, Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico City). On first seeing the city, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, one of the conquistadors, thought he must be dreaming; the temples and towers and fortresses all gleaming white were "a wonderful thing to behold." The Spaniards were greeted by Moctezuma (Montezuma), the Aztec king. Motecuhzoma believed that Cortés must be Quetzalcoatl, the god who it had been prophesied would return some day from across the waters. The following account was recorded in Nahuatl, the Aztec language, by students of the Franciscan friar Bernadino de Sahagún. Called the *Florentine Codex*, these narratives were taken down a few decades after the conquest and were based on the reminiscences of Aztecs who had lived through those events.

5. THE AZTEC ACCOUNT OF THE SPANISH CONQUEST, FLORENTINE CODEX, AS COLLECTED BY BERNADINO DE SAHAGÚN

[The Spaniards] had come to reach Xoloco . . . thereupon Moctezuma arrayed himself, attired himself, in order to meet them, and also a number of great lords [and] princes, his ruling men, his noblemen [arrayed themselves]. Thereupon they went to meet them. In gourd supports they set out precious flowers . . . wreaths for the head, garlands of flowers. And they bore golden necklaces, necklaces with pendants, plaited neck bands.

And already Moctezuma met them there in Uitzillan. Thereupon he gave gifts to the commandant, the commander of soldiers; he gave him flowers, he bejeweled him with necklaces, he hung garlands about him, he covered him with flowers, he wreathed his head with flowers. Thereupon he had the golden necklaces laid before him—all the kinds of gifts of greeting, with which the meeting was concluded. On some he hung necklaces.

Then [Cortés] said to Moctezuma: "Is this not thou? Art thou not he? Art thou Moctezuma?"

Moctezuma replied: "Indeed yes; I am he."

Thereupon he arose; he arose to meet him face to face. He inclined his body deeply. He drew him close. He arose firmly.

Thus he besought him: [Moctezuma] said to him: "O our lord, thou hast suffered fatigue, thou hast endured weariness. Thou hast come to arrive on earth. Thou hast come to govern thy city of Mexico; thou hast come to descend upon thy mat, upon thy seat, which for a moment I have watched for thee, which I have guarded for thee. For thy governors are departed—the rulers Itzoatl, Moctezuma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc, Auitzotl, who yet a very short time ago had come to stand guard for thee, who had come to govern the city of Mexico. Under their protection thy common folk came. Do they yet perchance know

it in their absence? O that one of them might witness, might marvel at what to me now hath befallen, at what I see quite in the absence of our lords. I by no means merely dream, I do not merely see in a dream, I do not see in my sleep; I do not merely dream that I see thee, that I look into thy face. I have been afflicted for some time. I have gazed at the unknown place whence thou hast come—from among the clouds, from among the mists. And so this. The rulers departed maintaining that thou wouldst come to visit thy city, that thou wouldst come to descend upon thy mat, upon thy seat. And now it hath been fulfilled; thou hast come; thou hast endured fatigue, thou hast endured weariness. Peace be with thee. Rest thyself. Visit thy palace. Rest thy body. May peace be with our lords."

... And when they had gone to arrive in the palace, when they had gone to enter it, at once they firmly seized Moctezuma. They continually kept him closely under observation; they never let him from their sight. With him was Itzquauhtzin. But the others just came forth [unimpeded].

And when this had come to pass, then each of the guns shot off. As if in confusion there was going off to one side, there was scattering from one's sight, a jumping in all directions. It was as if one had lost one's breath; it was as if for the time there was stupefaction, as if one were affected by mushrooms, as if something unknown were shown one. Fear prevailed. It was as if everyone had swallowed his heart. Even before it had grown dark, there was terror, there was astonishment, there was apprehension, there was a stunning of the people.

And when it dawned, thereupon were proclaimed all the things which [the Spaniards] required: white tortillas, roasted turkey hens, eggs, fresh water, wood, firewood, charcoal, earthen bowls, polished vessels, water jars, large water pitchers, cooking vessels, all manner of clay articles. This had Moctezuma indeed commanded.

But when he summoned forth the noblemen, no longer did they obey [Moctezuma]. They only grew angry. No longer did they come to him, no longer did they go to him. No longer was he heeded. But nevertheless he was not therefore neglected; he was given

all that he required—food, drink, and water [and] fodder for the deer.

And when [the Spaniards] were all settled, they thereupon inquired of Moctezuma as to all the city's treasure—the devices, the shields. Much did they importune him; with great zeal they sought gold. And Moctezuma thereupon went leading the Spaniards. They went surrounding him, scattered about him; he went among them, he went in their lead; they went each holding him, each grasping him. And when they reached the storehouse, a place called Teocalco, thereupon were brought forth all the brilliant things; the quetzal feather head fan, the devices, the shields, the golden discs, the devils' necklaces, the golden nose crescents, the golden leg bands, the golden arm bands, the golden forehead bands.

Thereupon was detached the gold which was on the shields and which was on all the devices. And as all the gold was detached, at once they ignited, set fire to, applied fire to all the various precious things [which remained]. They all burned. And the gold the Spaniards formed into separate bars. And the green stone, as much as they saw to be good they took. ... And the Spaniards walked everywhere; they went everywhere taking to pieces the hiding places, storehouses, storage places. They took all, all that they saw which they saw to be good.

... And afterwards [Pedro de Alvarado] thereupon inquired about the Feast of Uitzilopochtli: what sort of feast day it was. He wished to marvel at it, he wished to see what it was, how it was done. Thereupon Moctezuma commanded those of his governors who could enter. They brought forth the word.

And when the word had come forth there from where Moctezuma was enclosed, thereupon the women who had fasted for a year ground up the amaranth, the fish amaranth, there in the temple courtyard. The Spaniards came forth. They were elaborately attired in battle gear; they were arrayed for battle, arrayed as warriors. They came to [the women]: they came among them; they circled about them; they looked at each one, they looked into the faces of each of the grinding women. And when it had come to pass that they came looking at

them, thereupon they entered the great palace. As was known, it was said that at the time they would have slain the men if many of us warriors had been assembled.

[The following events took place when Cortes was away from Tenochtitlan, and the Spanish soldiers were under the command of Pedro de Alvarado.]

And when the Feast of Toxcatl had arrived, toward sundown they began to give man's form to [Uitzilopochtli's amaranth seed dough image]. They formed it like a man, they gave it the look of a man, they gave it the appearance of a man. And that of which they made its body was only amaranth seed dough, a dough, a dough of fish amaranth seed. They laid it out on a framework of sticks; these were thorny sticks and sticks forming angles. . . .

And when dawn broke, when it was already the feast day, when it was early morning, already those who had made vows to him uncovered his face. Before him they formed a row; they offered him incense; before him they laid, on all sides, gifts—fasting foods, rolls of amaranth seed dough. But when this was done, not now did they take him up, not now did they lift him up to Itzpeyoc. And all the men, the young seasoned warriors, were each as if diligently engaged, as if content, in proceeding with the feast, in observing the feast, in order to make the Spaniards see it, to make them wonder at it, to show it to them. . . .

And when this was happening, when already the feast was being observed, when already there was dancing, when already there was singing, when already there was song with dance, the singing resounded like waves breaking.

When it was already time, when the moment was opportune for the Spaniards to slay them, thereupon they came forth. They were arrayed for battle. They came everywhere to block each of the ways leading out [and] leading in. . . . No one could go out.

And when this had been done, thereupon they entered the temple courtyard to slay them. Those whose task it was to slay them went only afoot, each with his leather shield, some, each one, with his

iron-studded shield, and each with his iron sword. Thereupon they surrounded the dancers. Thereupon they went among the drums. Then they struck the drummer's arms; they severed both his hands; then they struck his neck. Far off did his neck [and head] go to fall. Then they all pierced the people with iron lances and they struck them each with iron swords. Of some they slashed open their backs: then their entrails gushed out. Of some they cut their heads to pieces; they absolutely pulverized their heads; their heads were absolutely pulverized. And some they struck on the shoulder; they split openings, they broke openings in their bodies. Of some they struck repeatedly the shanks; of some they struck repeatedly the thighs; of some they struck the belly; then their entrails gushed forth. And when in vain one would run, he would only drag his intestines like something raw as he tried to escape. Nowhere could he go.

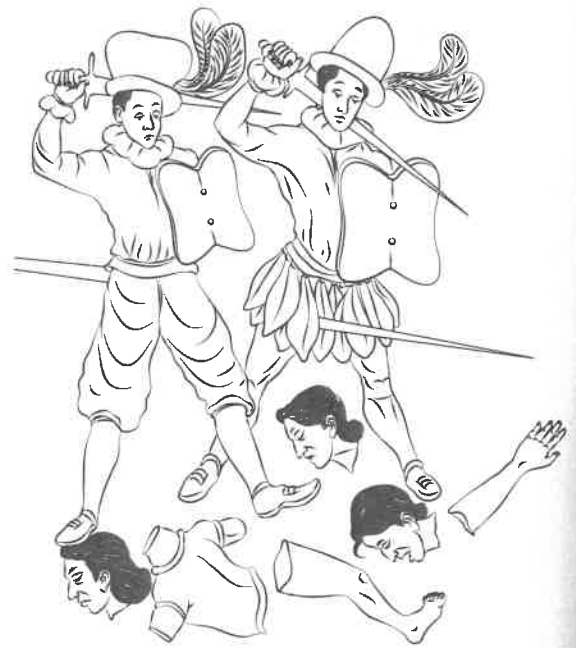


Image 1.3 Representations from the Florentine Codex
The Spanish massacre of the Aztecs in the main temple,
Tenochtitlan.

Source: Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, translators, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, Fray Bernardino de Sahagun (School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1975).

And him who tried to go out they there struck; they stabbed him.

But some climbed the wall; they were able to escape. Some entered the *calpulli* [buildings]; there they escaped. And some escaped [the Spaniards] among [the dead]; they got in among those really dead, only by feigning to be dead. They were able to escape. But if one took a breath, if they saw him, they stabbed him.

And the blood of the brave warriors ran like water; it was as if it lay slippery. And a foul odor rose and spread from the blood. And the intestines were as if dragged out. And the Spaniards went everywhere as they searched in the *calpulli* [buildings]. Everywhere they went making thrusts as they searched, in case someone had taken refuge. They went everywhere. They went taking to pieces all places in the *calpulli* [buildings] as they searched.

And when [the massacre] became known, thereupon there was shouting: "O brave warriors,

O Mexicans, hasten here! Let there be arraying—the devices, the shields, the arrows! Come! Hasten here! Already they have died, they have perished, they have been annihilated, O Mexicans, O brave warriors!" Thereupon there was an outcry, already there was shouting, there was shrieking with hands striking the lips. Quickly there was a marshaling of forces; it was as if the brave warriors each were determined; they bore the arrows and the shields with them. Thereupon there was fighting. They shot at them with arrows with barbed points, with spears, and with tridents. And they cast at them barb-pointed arrows with broad, obsidian points. It was as if a mass of deep yellow reeds spread over the Spaniards.

And the Spaniards then enclosed themselves behind the stone [walls]. And the Spaniards also shot the Mexicans with iron arrows and fired the guns at them. And then they placed Moctezuma in irons.⁵

POSTSCRIPT

The Aztecs were formidable opponents. It took the Spanish nearly two years to conquer them, as the native warriors inflicted heavy casualties and sometimes drove their enemies before them. But greed, superior technology, and the European diseases that ravaged the indigenous population finally did their work.

QUESTIONS

1. Contrast the celebrations of "Discovery Day" in 1892 and "Columbus Day" in 1992. How do you explain the differences?
2. Compare the ways Columbus and Las Casas described the environment and peoples of the New World. How do you account for the similarities and differences in their observations?
3. To what degree did religion influence Spanish exploration and colonization? How might contemporary views of geography have shaped their actions and approaches to the New World?
4. In what ways did the Spanish conquest of the New World affect the political, economic, social, agricultural, and dietary patterns of the two continents?
5. Using all three sources, retell the story of Columbus as if you were living in the Caribbean when the Spanish arrived.
6. What label—*hero*, *villain*, *victim*, *product of his time*, or some other term—best captures your feelings about each of the following: (a) Columbus, (b) Las Casas, and (c) Motecuhzoma? Justify your responses.