

Spain in the New World: *Printable Documents*

Important: *You do not need to print these documents if you are working online.*

From *The New Laws of the Indies (1542)*

Charles by the divine clemency Emperor ever august, King of Germany ... To the Most Illustrious Prince Don Philip ... and those of our Council of the Indies ... Know ye, That having for many years had will and intention as leisure to occupy ourselves with the affairs of the Indies, on account of their great importance, as well in that touching the service of God our Lord and increase of his holy Catholic faith ...

... We command that the said Audiencias enquire continually into the excesses and ill treatment [of the Indians] ...

...

As We have ordered provision to be made that from henceforward the Indians in no way be made slaves, including those who until now have been enslaved against all reason and right ...

...

Moreover, We ordain and command that from henceforward no Viceroy, Governor, Audiencia, discoverer, or any other person have power to allot Indians in encomienda ...

From *Natural History of the West Indies (1526)*

Two very notable things can be concluded regarding your Majesty's West Indies ... One is the shortness of the route of the South Sea for commerce with the Spice Islands, and the innumerable riches of the provinces ... The other is to consider the great treasure that has entered Castile because of these Indies and continues to come in every day, and it is hoped this will continue ...

Excerpt from NATURAL HISTORY OF THE WEST INDIES by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, translated and edited by Sterling A. Stoudemire. NORTH CAROLINA STUDIES IN THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE, No. 32. Copyright © 1959 by the University of North Carolina Press, renewed 1987 by Sterling A. Stoudemire. Used by permission of the publisher.

Bartolomé de las Casas Reveals Abuses Against the Indians (1542)

God made all the peoples of this area, many and varied as they are, as open and as innocent as can be imagined ... Never quarrelsome or belligerent or boisterous ... they are among the least robust of human beings: their delicate constitutions make them unable to withstand hard work or suffering and render them liable to succumb to almost any illness, no matter how mild...

...[F]rom the very first day they clapped eyes on them the Spanish fell like ravening wolves upon the fold, or like tigers and savage lions who have not eaten meat for days. The pattern established at the outset has remained

unchanged to this day, and the Spaniards still do nothing save tear the natives to shreds, murder them and inflict upon them untold misery, suffering and distress, tormenting, harrying and persecuting them mercilessly.

...

The Spaniards have shown not the slightest consideration for these people, treating them (and I speak from first-hand experience, having been there from the outset) not as brute animals--indeed, I would to God they had done and had shown them the consideration they afford their animals--so much as piles of dung in the middle of the road.

Jacobo de Testera's Letter to Charles V (May 1533)

How can anyone say that these people are incapable, when they constructed such impressive buildings, made such subtle creations, were silversmiths, painters, merchants, able in presiding, in speaking, in the exercise of courtesy, in fiestas, marriages, solemn occasions ... ready to be educated in the ethical, political, and economic aspects of life?

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda Explains the Savage Nature of the Indians (1550)

Now compare their gifts of prudence, talent, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and religion with those little men ... in whom you will scarcely find traces of humanity; who ... do not even know how to write, who keep no records of their history except ... some things put down in certain pictures, and who do not have written laws but only barbarous institutions and customs ... And don't think that before the arrival of the Christians they were living in quiet and the Saturnian peace of the poets. On the contrary they were making war continuously and ferociously against each other with such rage that they considered their victory worthless if they did not satisfy their monstrous hunger with the flesh of their enemies ...

...

The proof of their savage life, similar to that of beasts, may be seen in the execrable and prodigious sacrifices of human victims to their devils; it may also be seen in their eating of human flesh, their burial alive of the living widows of important persons, and in other crimes condemned by natural law, whose description offends the ears and horrifies the spirit of civilized people.

Opinion of the Friars of St. Dominic (May 15, 1554)

As everyone knows, the Indians are weak by nature and are satisfied with having enough to get along on from day to day. And if there is any way to bring them out of their laziness and carelessness, it is to make them help the Spaniards in their commerce. In it the Indians are benefited through their wages, and thus they will become fond of commerce and profits, as, indeed, some of them have already done, in imitation of the Spaniards... And besides this, great good comes to the state and his Majesty from having the Indians help the Spaniards in their commerce and on their estates, because without Indians all trade and profit cease.