**Encomienda and Mita Systems**

**Document 3**

In the late 1520s, Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico, wrote to the Spanish king in concern about the drop in Native Americans’ birthrate. In 1542, Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas gave different reasons for the same problem.

They no longer approach their wives, in order not to beget [produce] [future] slaves[. (Zumárraga)

[Because of enforced labor services], husbands and wives were together [only] every eight or ten months, and when they met they were so exhausted and depressed on both sides that they had ... ceased to procreate. (Las Casas)

Source: Qtd. in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row), 134.

**Document 4**

In 1533, the Spanish official Castañeda wrote to the king about his concern for the Native Americans in his territory.



The Indians of this province [Nicaragua] are becoming extinct, and if something is not done quickly, there will be none left in four years. ... [T]hey are made to work in the mines, which labor by itself would be enough to destroy and extinguish them all, because the nearest of the mines are forty leagues [160 miles] away, and though the Indians who work in this province are well fed by their masters with bread, meat, and fish, as well as the other local food crops ... this is not enough to keep them from dying from the work. ... [T]he land where the mines are is very cold and rainy. ... The Indians who go to the mines work at extracting gold in the cold and rain and in great exhaustion, and since they come from the hot land of these plains, where they are accustomed to plenty of fruit, fish, and other delicacies they have among them, when they are taken ill there with the coldness of the land and the absence of the [foods] they have been raised on, even though their masters ... take good care of them, this is not enough to keep them from dying, since [they also] have a very weak constitution. ... The Indians who ... transport maize to the labor gangs have to set to work as soon they arrive after traveling forty leagues; thus, if they are taken sick, the illness catches them when they are worn out and exhausted, and in order not to die there, such people leave for their homes, where they never arrive, since they die on the way.

Source: Qtd. in John H. Parry and Robert G. Keith, ed., *New Iberian World: A Documentary History of the Discovery and Settlement of Latin America to the Early 17th Century,* Vol. III: *Central America and Mexico* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 118.

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**Document 8**

Father Bartolomé de las Casas was an energetic activist on behalf of the native peoples of the Americas among whom he worked. He realized his aim of inspiring legislation to protect Indians by his frequent reports detailing Spanish atrocities and abuses. He did not, however, succeed in getting these laws consistently enforced. The following are from his 1542 book, *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*.

a) [In Cuba in 1512, a hundred or more Spaniards, eager to compare the sharpness of their swords], began to rip open the bellies ... [of] men, women, children, and old folk, all of whom were seated, off guard and frightened, watching the mares and the Spaniards. ... not a man of all of them there remains alive. ... [I]n the same way, with cuts and stabs, [they killed all in a house nearby. The massacre then spread to other villages. Well over 20,000 were killed during this rampage].

b) [T]he Spaniards determined on a massacre [in the Mexican town of Cholula, in 1519] or, as they say, a chastisement [punishment] to sow terror and the fame of their valor throughout that country. ... [T]hey first sent to summon all the lords and nobles of the town ... and when they came ... they were promptly captured. ... They had asked for five or six thousand Indians to carry their baggage all of whom immediately came. ... Being all collected and assembled in the courtyard ... some armed Spaniards were stationed at the gates ... [and] all others seized their swords and lances, and butchered all [the Indians], not even one escaping. ... More than one hundred of the lords whom they had bound, the [Spanish] captain commanded to be burned, and impaled alive on stakes stuck in the ground. ...

c) On Hispaniola ... in the mines [where the islanders enticed there from the Bahamas] were forced to work ... life was short for them. Full of despair at finding themselves duped [into mining for the Spaniards] they poisoned themselves with yucca juice; or died of hunger and overwork, delicate as they were.

Sources: Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Very Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, quoted in a) David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust*: *Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), 71; b) Marvin Lunenfeld, ed., *1492: Discovery, Invasion, Encounter* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1991), 208-9; c) Thomas Christensen and Carol Christensen, eds., *The Discovery of America and Other Myths: A New World Reader* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), 183-4.

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**Document 9**

The Franciscan friar Toribio de Motolinía, between whose order and that of the Dominicans (to which Las Casas belonged) there was traditional rivalry and enmity, wrote to the Spanish king in 1555 about the latter’s campaign against Spanish behavior in the Indies, as follows.

Las Casas ... thinks that all err and he alone is right, [making statements such as] “All the conquerors have been robbers and ravishers, the most qualified in evil and cruelty that there ever have been, as is manifest to the whole world.” All the conquerors, he says, without making a single exception. Your majesty already knows the instructions and orders that those who go to new conquests carry ... and how they work to observe them, and are of as good a life and conscience as Las Casas ... [who seeks] to exaggerate and make worse the evils and sins that have occurred. ...

During the last ten years the natives of this land have diminished greatly in number. The reason for it has not been bad treatment, because for many years now the Indians have been well treated, looked after, and defended; rather the cause has been the great diseases and plagues that New Spain has had. ...

Source: Qtd. in Marvin Lunenfeld, ed., *1492: Discovery, Invasion, Encounter* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1991), 212-4.

**Document 11**

Andrés Chacón, an *encomendero* of Peru, wrote in 1570 in a letter to his brother in Spain as follows:

The Indians give me nothing, that is, I take little from them and have expenses for priests and other things for them and ... since they are on the main highway and have been mistreated and destroyed, few of them remain. Once there were more than 2,000 Indians, and now there are about 200. I consider them as if they were my children; they have helped me earn a living. ... I have given them 220 pesos in income [and] I will leave them free of tributes when I die, so that whoever enjoys the tributes will not mistreat the Indians to get his revenue. Probably you there will say that it would be better to give this to my relatives than to the Indians. But I owe it to these children who have served me for thirty-odd years; it is a debt of life, and if I did not repay it I would go to hell. I am obliged to do what I can for my relatives, but if I don’t, I won’t go to hell for it. ... I have sheep, goats, and pigs here, and I did have cows, but recently I sold them because they damaged the Indians’ crops.



Source: Qtd. in James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, trans. and ed., *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies: Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), 67-8.

1) List the reasons given by contemporaries for large-scale deaths and a steep decline in Native American populations after the arrival of Europeans.

Why and by How Much?

 About which reason(s) is there general agreement?

2) Consider the reliability of your documents. Take into account whatever information you have about the subject matter and the author. For each Document:

* + What reasons might you have for questioning its reliability?

* + What reasons might you have for accepting its reliability?
	+ Rank order the 3 documents above from the most to the least believable, and explain the reasons for your ranking. What questions would you ask that might help you decide on the believability or otherwise of the documents?

3) What can you tell about European attitudes towards Native Americans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from contemporaries’ comments as shown in the documents? Explain how you arrived at your conclusions.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WORLD ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

A Summary of Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) Adapted.



Sociologist Immanual Wallerstein developed a theoretical framework to understand the historical changes involved in the rise of the modern world. He divides the early modern world (1450 CE-1750 CE) world into two main regions the Core and the Periphery.



**The Core:**

The core regions benefited the most from the capitalist world economy. For the period under discussion, much of northwestern Europe (England, France, Holland) developed as the first core region. Politically, the states within this part of Europe developed strong central governments, extensive bureaucracies, and large mercenary armies. This permitted the local bourgeoisie [middle class] to obtain control over international commerce and extract capital surpluses [profit] from this trade for their own benefit...

**The Periphery:** On the other end of the scale lay the peripheral [outer] zones. These areas lacked strong central governments or were controlled by other states, exported raw materials to the core, and relied on coercive labor practices. The core seized much of the capital surplus [profit] generated by the periphery through unequal trade relations. Latin America, exhibited characteristics of peripheral regions... In Latin America, the Spanish and Portuguese conquests destroyed indigenous authority structures and replaced them with weak bureaucracies under the control of these European states. Powerful local landlords of Hispanic origin became aristocratic capitalist farmers. Enslavement of the native populations, the importation of African slaves, and the coercive labor practices such as the encomienda and forced mine labor [part of the mita system] made possible the export of cheap raw materials and silver to Europe. Labor systems in both peripheral areas differed from earlier forms in medieval Europe in that they were established to produce goods for a capitalist world economy and not merely for internal consumption. Furthermore, the aristocracy in Latin America grew wealthy from their relationship with the world economy and could draw on the strength of a central core region to maintain control.

QUESTIONS

1) What are the core regions of the global economy according to Wallerstein? What are the periphery regions?

2) What allowed for Europe to dominate international trade? [i.e. what advantages did they have]

3) What was essential that the periphery regions (Latin America) provided to the core regions (Europe)?

4) What is the relationship between labor system such as the mita system and encomiendas and the rise of Europe as an economic powerhouse?



**REACTION OF THE SPANISH CROWN**

**The New Laws of the Indies, 1542**

The following are excerpts from laws passed by the king of Spain for the government of the Indies and treatment and preservation of the Indians.

*Audiencias [government councils] are to inform themselves how the Indians [Native Americans] have been treated by the persons who have held them in encomienda, and if it be clear that in justice they ought to be deprived of the said Indians for their excesses and the abuse to which they have subjected them, We ordain [command] that they take away and place such Indians [Native Americans] under our Royal Crown [protection]....*

*We ordain and command that our said officials take great care that the Indians [Native Americans] ... be very well treated and instructed in the matters of our holy Catholic faith, and as our free vassals. This is to be their chief care, that on which we principally desire them [our government officials] to report, and in which they can best serve us. They are also to provide that they be governed with justice in the way and manner that the Indians who are under our Royal Crown are at present governed in New Spain [colonial Latin America]. . . .*

*Source: From The New Laws of the Indies, ed. Henry Stevens (London: The Chiswick Press, 1893), pp. iii-xvii, passim.*

QUESTIONS
1) What is the Spanish king's attitude toward the Native Americans?

2) What is his goal in creating these laws?

3) What do you think was the reaction of the encomenderos (Spanish landowners) to these laws? Why?