

3. Bartolomé de las Casas on Spanish Treatment of the Indians, from *History of the Indies* (1528)

Source: *Bartolomé de las Casas: from History of the Indies*, trans./ed. Andrée Collard. Copyright © 1971 by Andrée Collard, renewed 1999 by Joyce J. Contrucci. Reprinted by permission of Joyce Contrucci.

Known as the "Apostle of the Indians," Bartolomé de las Casas, a Catholic priest, was the most eloquent critic of Spanish mistreatment of the New World's native population. Las Casas took part in the exploitation of Indian labor on Hispaniola and Cuba. But in 1514, he freed his Indian slaves and began to preach against the injustices of Spanish rule. In his *History of the Indies*, Las Casas denounced Spain for causing the deaths of millions of innocent people. The excerpt that follows details events on Hispaniola, the Caribbean island first conquered and settled by Spain. Las Casas called for the Indians to enjoy the rights of other subjects of Spain.

Largely because of Las Casas's efforts, in 1542 Spain promulgated the New Laws, ordering that Indians no longer be enslaved. But Spain's European rivals seized upon Las Casas's criticisms to justify their own ambitions. His writings became the basis for the Black Legend, the image of Spain as a uniquely cruel empire. Other nations would claim that their imperial ventures were inspired by the desire to rescue Indians from Spanish rule.

IN THAT YEAR of 1500, . . . the King determined to send a new governor to Hispaniola, which at the time was the only seat of government in the Indies. The new governor was fray Nicolás de Ovando, Knight of Alcántara, and at that time comendador of Lares.

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At first, the Indians were forced to stay six months away at work; later, the time was extended to eight months and this was called a shift, at the end of which they brought all the gold for minting. The King's part was subtracted and the rest went to individuals, but for years no one kept a single peso because they owed it all to merchants and other creditors, so that the anguish and torments endured by the

Indians in mining that infernal gold were consumed entirely by God and no one prospered. During the minting period, the Indians were allowed to go home, a few days' journey on foot. One can imagine their state when they arrived after eight months, and those who found their wives there must have cried, lamenting their condition together. How could they even rest, since they had to provide for the needs of their family when their land had gone to weeds? Of those who had worked in the mines, a bare 10 per cent survived to start the journey home. Many Spaniards had no scruples about making them work on Sundays and holidays, if not in the mines then on minor tasks such as building and repairing houses, carrying firewood, etc. They fed them cassava bread, which is adequate nutrition only when supplemented with meat, fish or other more substantial food. The *minero* killed a pig once a week but he kept more than half for himself and had the leftover apportioned and cooked daily for thirty or forty Indians, which came to a bite of meat the size of a walnut per individual, and they dipped the cassava in this as well as in the broth.

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The *comendador* arranged to have wages paid as follows, which I swear is the truth: in exchange for his life of services, an Indian received 3 *maravedís* every two days, less one-half a *maravedí* in order not to exceed the yearly half gold peso, that is, 225 *maravedís*, paid them once a year as pin money or *cacona*, as Indians call it, which means bonus or reward. This sum bought a comb, a small mirror and a string of green or blue glass beads, and many did without that consolation for they were paid much less and had no way of mitigating their misery, although in truth, they offered their labor up for nothing, caring only to fill their stomachs to appease their raging hunger and find ways to escape from their desperate lives. For this loss of body and soul, then, they received less than 3 *maravedís* for two days; many years later their wages were increased to 1 gold peso by the order of King Hernando, and this was no less an affront, as I will show later.

I believe the above clearly demonstrates that the Indians were totally deprived of their freedom and were put in the harshest, fier-

est, most horrible servitude and captivity which no one who has not seen it can understand. Even beasts enjoy more freedom when they are allowed to graze in the fields. But our Spaniards gave no such opportunity to Indians and truly considered them perpetual slaves, since the Indians had not the free will to dispose of their persons but instead were disposed of according to Spanish greed and cruelty, not as men in captivity but as beasts tied to a rope to prevent free movement. When they were allowed to go home, they often found it deserted and had no other recourse than to go out into the woods to find food and to die. When they fell ill, which was very frequently because they are a delicate people unaccustomed to such work, the Spaniards did not believe them and pitilessly called them lazy dogs, and kicked and beat them; and when illness was apparent they sent them home as useless, giving them some cassava for the twenty- to eighty-league journey. They would go then, falling into the first stream and dying there in desperation; others would hold on longer but very few ever made it home. I sometimes came upon dead bodies on my way, and upon others who were gasping and moaning in their death agony, repeating "Hungry, hungry." And this was the freedom, the good treatment and the Christianity that Indians received.

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About eight years passed under the *comendador's* rule and this disorder had time to grow; no one gave it a thought and the multitude of people who originally lived on this island . . . was consumed at such a rate that in those eight years 90 per cent had perished. From here this sweeping plague went to San Juan, Jamaica, Cuba and the continent, spreading destruction over the whole hemisphere.

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Questions

1. What do you think Las Casas hoped to accomplish by writing so critically about Spanish treatment of the Indians?

2. Why, after describing illness and starvation among the Indians, does Las Casas write, "this was the freedom, the good treatment and the Christianity that Indians received"?

4. The Pueblo Revolt (1680)

Source: Charles W. Hackett: "Declarations of Josephe and Pedro Naranjo," Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico and Otermín's Attempted Reconquest 1680-1682, Volume 2, pp. 238-48, 1942. Reprinted with permission of the University of New Mexico Press.

In 1680, the Pueblo Indians of modern-day New Mexico revolted against Spanish rule. During the seventeenth century, governors, settlers, and missionaries had sought to exploit the labor of an Indian population that declined from about 60,000 in 1600 to some 17,000 eighty years later. Franciscan friars worked diligently, often violently, to convert Indians to Catholicism. Some natives accepted baptism. But the friars' efforts to stamp out traditional religious ceremonies in New Mexico—they burned Indian idols, masks, and other sacred objects—alienated far more Indians than they converted. Under the leadership of Popé, a local religious leader, the rebelling Indians killed 400 colonists, including twenty-one Franciscan missionaries. The Pueblo Revolt was the most complete victory for Native Americans over Europeans and the only wholesale expulsion of settlers in the history of North America. The uprising, concluded a royal attorney who interviewed survivors in Mexico City, arose from the "many oppressions" the Indians had suffered. In 1692, the Spanish launched an invasion that reconquered New Mexico.

DECLARATION OF JOSEPHE, SPANISH-SPEAKING INDIAN.
[PLACE OF THE RIO DEL NORTE, DECEMBER 19, 1681.]

Asked what causes or motives the said Indian rebels had for renouncing the law of God and obedience to his Majesty, and for committing

so many kinds of crimes, and who were the instigators of the rebellion, and what he had heard while he was among the apostates, he said that the prime movers of the rebellion were two Indians of San Juan, one named El Popé and the other El Taqu, and another from Taos named Saca, and another from San Ildefonso named Francisco. He knows that these were the principals, and the causes they gave were alleged ill treatment and injuries received from the present secretary, Francisco Xavier, and the maestre de campo, Alonso García, and from the sargentos mayores, Luis de Quintana and Diego López, because they beat them, took away what they had, and made them work without pay. Thus he replies.

Asked if he has learned or it has come to his notice during the time that he has been here the reason why the apostates burned the images, churches, and things pertaining to divine worship, making a mockery and a trophy of them, killing the priests and doing the other things they did, he said that he knows and has heard it generally stated that while they were besieging the villa the rebellious traitors burned the church and shouted in loud voices, "Now the God of the Spaniards, who was their father, is dead, and Santa Maria, who was their mother, and the saints, who were pieces of rotten wood," saying that only their own god lived. Thus they ordered all the temples and images, crosses and rosaries burned, and this function being over, they all went to bathe in the rivers, saying that they thereby washed away the water of baptism. For their churches, they placed on the four sides and in the center of the plaza some small circular enclosures of stone where they went to offer flour, feathers, and the seed of maguey, maize, and tobacco, and performed other superstitious rites, giving the children to understand that they must all do this in the future. The captains and chiefs ordered that the names of Jesus and of Mary should nowhere be uttered, and that they should discard their baptismal names, and abandon the wives whom God had given them in matrimony, and take the ones that they pleased. He saw that as soon as the remaining Spaniards had left, they ordered all the estufas erected, which are their houses of idolatry, and danced throughout the kingdom the dance of the

cazina, making many masks for it in the image of the devil. Thus he replied to this question. . . .

Asked if he knows, or whether it has come to his notice, that the said apostates have erected houses of idolatry which they call estufas in the pueblos, and have practiced dances and superstitions, he said there is a general report throughout the kingdom that they have done so and he has seen many houses of idolatry which they have built, dancing the dance of the cachina, which this declarant has also danced. Thus he replied to the question.

DECLARATION OF PEDRO NARANJO OF THE QUERES NATION.
[PLACE OF THE RÍO DEL NORTE, DECEMBER 19, 1681.]

Asked for what reason they so blindly burned the images, temples, crosses, and other things of divine worship, he stated that the said Indian, Popé, came down in person, and with him El Saca and El Chato from the pueblo of Los Taos, and other captains and leaders and many people who were in his train, and he ordered in all the pueblos through which he passed that they instantly break up and burn the images of the holy Christ, the Virgin Mary and the other saints, the crosses, and everything pertaining to Christianity, and that they burn the temples, break up the bells, and separate from the wives whom God had given them in marriage and take those whom they desired. In order to take away their baptismal names, the water, and the holy oils, they were to plunge into the rivers and wash themselves with amole, which is a root native to the country, washing even their clothing, with the understanding that there would thus be taken from them the character of the holy sacraments. They did this, and also many other things which he does not recall, given to understand that this mandate had come from the Caydi and the other two who emitted fire from their extremities in the said estufa of Taos, and that they thereby returned to the state of their antiquity, as when they came from the lake of Copala; that this was the better life and the one they desired, because the God of

the Spaniards was worth nothing and theirs was very strong, the Spaniards's God being rotten wood. These things were observed and obeyed by all except some who, moved by the zeal of Christians, opposed it, and such persons the said Popé caused to be killed immediately. He saw to it that they at once erected and rebuilt their houses of idolatry which they call estufas, and made very ugly masks in imitation of the devil in order to dance the dance of the cacina; and he said likewise that the devil had given them to understand that living thus in accordance with the law of their ancestors, they would harvest a great deal of maize, many beans, a great abundance of cotton, calabashes, and very large watermelons and cantaloupes; and that they could erect their houses and enjoy abundant health and leisure.

Questions

1. What actions did Indians take during the Pueblo Revolt to demonstrate their new freedom from Spanish rule?
2. Why do you think religion played such a large role in the Pueblo Revolt?