

CH 01 PRIMARY SOURCE EXERCISE - INTRODUCTION

FOCUS QUESTION 4. What happened when the peoples of the Americas came in contact with Europeans?

The topic of European interaction with, and conquest of, the Americas is an important one. The two documents included in this exercise cannot possibly do the topic justice. However, they do offer a glimpse into the attitudes and experiences of both the Spanish and the indigenous people of Mexico at the time of the "collision of their cultures."

DOCUMENTS

Document 1 is the Spanish "Requerimiento." This Law of Requirement, composed by officials of the Spanish monarchy, was read under ceremonial fanfare wherever Spanish ships landed on American shores.

Document 2 is an excerpt from a compilation of oral histories that tell of the conquest of what is now Mexico, from the perspective of the Aztecs themselves. This second document poses many challenges to modern historians. The history of Mexico was passed along from one generation to the next through oral traditions, along with artwork from the period. An anthropologist from the mid-twentieth century set these histories to paper. Consequently, the written account, an important source for historians, was created hundreds of years after the original event, which makes historical analysis and interpretation more difficult.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1) Read chapter 1 of the textbook, with special attention to the section titled, "Contact" (Full pp. 21-24; Seagull pp. 18-22).
- 2) Read Document 1, The Spanish Requerimiento of 1510.
- 3) Read Document 2, excerpts from The Broken Spears: The Aztec account Account of the Conquest of Mexico.
- 4) Answer the questions that follow.

DOCUMENT 1

Requerimiento of 1510

On the part of the King, Don Fernando, and of Doña Juana, his daughter, Queen of Castile, and León, subduers of the barbarous nations, we their servants notify and make known to you, as best we can, that the Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created the Heaven and the Earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, all the men of the world, were and are descendants, and all those who came after us. But, on account of the multitude which has sprung from this man and woman in the five thousand years since the world was created, it was necessary that some men should go one way and some another, and that they should be divided into many kingdoms and provinces, for in one alone they could not be sustained.

Of all these nations God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be Lord and Superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of the whole human race, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction.

And he commanded him to place his seat in Rome as the spot most fitting to rule the world from; but also he permitted him to have his seat in any other part of the world, and to judge and govern all Christians, Moors [Muslims], Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects. This man was called Pope, as if to say, Admirable Great Father and Governor of men. The men who lived in that time obeyed that St. Peter and took him for Lord, King, and Superior of the universe; so also they have regarded the others who after him have been elected to the pontificate, and so has it been continued even till now and will continue till the end of the world.

One of these Pontiffs [popes] who succeeded that St. Peter as Lord of the world, in the dignity and seat which I have before mentioned, made donation of these isles and Tierra-firme to the aforesaid King and Queen and to their successors, our lords, with all that there are in these territories, as is contained in certain writings which passed upon the subject as aforesaid, which you can see if you wish.

So their Highnesses are kings and lords of these islands and land of Tierra-firme by virtue of this donation: and some islands, and indeed almost all those to whom this has been notified, have received and served their Highnesses, as lords and kings, in the way that subjects ought to do, with goodwill, without any resistance, immediately, without delay, when they were informed of the aforesaid facts. And also they received and obeyed the priests whom their Highnesses sent to preach to

them and to teach them our Holy Faith; and all these, of their own free will, without any reward or condition, have become Christians, and are so, and their Highnesses have joyfully and benignantly received them, and also have commanded them to be treated as their subjects and vassals; and you too are held and obliged to do the same. Wherefore, as best we can, we ask and require you that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it, and that you acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and Queen Doña Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this Tierra-firme by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.

If you do so, you will do well, and that which you are obliged to do to their Highnesses, and we in their name shall receive you in all love and charity, and shall leave you, your wives, and your children, and your lands, free without servitude, that you may do with them and with yourselves freely that which you like and think best, and they shall not compel you to turn Christians, unless you yourselves, when informed of the truth, should wish to be converted to our Holy Catholic Faith, as almost all the inhabitants of the rest of the islands have done. And, besides this, their Highnesses award you many privileges and exemptions and will grant you many benefits.

But, if you do not do this, and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us. And that we have said this to you and made this Requisition, we request the notary here present to give us his testimony in writing, and we ask the rest who are present that they should be witnesses of this Requisition.

**SOURCE: Accessed from National Humanities Center, 2006/2011:
nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/**

DOCUMENT 2

Motecuhzoma Awaits Word from the Messengers

While the messengers were away, Motecuhzoma could neither sleep nor eat, and no one could speak with him. He thought that everything he did was in vain, and he sighed almost every moment. He was lost in despair, in the deepest gloom and sorrow. Nothing could comfort him, nothing could calm him, nothing could give him any pleasure.

He said, "What will happen to us? Who will outlive it? Ah, at other times I was contented, but now I have death in my heart! My heart burns and suffers, as if it were drowned in spices...! But will our lord come here?"

Then he gave orders to the watchmen, to the men who guarded the palace, "Tell me, even if I am sleeping, 'the messengers have come back from the see'." And he gave this order, "Two captives are to be painted with chalk."

The messengers went to the house of the Serpent, and Motecuhzoma arrived. The two captives were sacrificed before his eyes, their breasts were torn open, and the messengers were sprinkled with their blood. This was done because the messengers had completed a difficult mission. They had seen the gods, their eyes had looked upon their faces. They had even conversed with the gods!

When the sacrifice was finished, the messengers reported to the king. They told him how they had made the journey, and what they had seen, and what food the strangers ate. Motecuhzoma was astonished and terrified by their report, and the description of the strangers' food astonished him above all else.

He was also terrified to learn how the cannon roared, how its noise resounded, how it caused one to faint and grow deaf. The messengers told him, "A thing like a ball of stone comes out of its entrails, it comes out shooting sparks and raining fire. The smoke that comes out with it has a pestilent odor, like that of rotten mud. This odor penetrates even to the brain and causes the greatest discomfort. If the cannon is aimed against a tree, it shatters the tree into splinters. This is a most unnatural sight, as if the tree had exploded from within."

"The strangers' bodies are completely covered so that only their faces can be seen. Their skin is white, as if it were made of lime. They have yellow hair, though some of them have black. Their beards are long and yellow, and their moustaches are also yellow. Their hair is curly, with very fine strands.

"As for food, it is like human food. It is large and white, and not heavy. It is something like straw, but with the taste of a cornstalk, of the pith of a cornstalk. It is a little sweet, as if it were flavored with honey; it tastes of honey, it is sweet-tasting food.

"Their dogs are enormous, with flat ears and long, dangling tongues. The color of their eyes is a burning yellow; their eyes flash fire and shoot off sparks. Their bellies are hollow, their flanks long and narrow. They are tireless and very powerful. They bound here and there, panting, with their tongues hanging out. And they are spotted like an ocelot."

When Motecuhzoma heard this report, he was filled with terror. It was as if he were conquered by despair.

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