**PART I**

**Bartolomé de Las Casas,**

**"Of the Island of Hispaniola" (1542)**

God has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural Lords, and to the Christians, whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful and calm, without strife nor tumults; not wrangling, nor querulous, as free from uproar, hate and desire of revenge as any in the world. . . .

Among these gentle sheep, gifted by their Maker with the above qualities, the Spaniards entered as soon as soon as they knew them, like wolves, tiger and lions which had been starving for many days, and since forty years they have done nothing else; nor do they afflict, torment, and destroy them with strange and new, and divers kinds of cruelty, never before seen, nor heard of, nor read of. . . . .

The Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began to slaughter and practice strange cruelty among them. They penetrated into the country and spared neither children nor the aged, nor pregnant women, nor those in child labour, all of whom they ran through the body and lacerated, as though they were assaulting so many lambs herded in their sheepfold.

They made bets as to who would slit a man in two, or cut off his head at one blow: or they opened up his bowels. They tore the babes from their mothers' breast by the feet, and dashed their heads against the rocks. Others they seized by the shoulders and threw into the rivers, laughing and joking, and when they fell into the water they exclaimed: "boil body of so and so!" They spitted the bodies of other babes, together with their mothers and all who were before them, on their swords.

They made a gallows just high enough for the feet to nearly touch the ground, and by thirteens, in honour and reverence of our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, they put wood underneath and, with fire, they burned the Indians alive.

They wrapped the bodies of others entirely in dry straw, binding them in it and setting fire to it; and so they burned them. They cut off the hands of all they wished to take alive, made them carry them fastened on to them, and said: "Go and carry letters": that is; take the news to those who have fled to the mountains.

They generally killed the lords and nobles in the following way. They made wooden gridirons of stakes, bound them upon them, and made a slow fire beneath; thus the victims gave up the spirit by degrees, emitting cries of despair in their torture.

**Figuring Out How We Analyze This Document**

**APPARTS**

**1. Author** : Who created the source? What do you know about the author? What is the author's point of view?

**2. Place and time:** Where and when was the source produced? How might this affect the meaning of the source?

**3. Prior knowledge:** Beyond information about the author, and the context of the document's creation, what do you know that would help you further understand the primary source? For example, do you recognize any symbols and recall what they represent?

**4. Audience:** For whom was the source created and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

**5. Reason**: Why was this source produced and how might this affect the reliability of the source?

**6. The main idea:** What point is the source trying to convey?

**7. Significance:** Why is this source important? Ask yourself, "So what?" in relation to the question asked.

Part II

Read [Howard Zinn's Interpretation](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/Columbus_PeoplesHx.html) of Christopher Columbus's discovery of the "new world." Before you read this, review everything that you think you know about Columbus.

Questions to Answer:

1. **What does Zinn say about Columbus and the Arawaks?**
2. **What was Columbus looking for? What did he find?**
3. **What did Columbus take from the islands that could be sold?**
4. **Who was Bartolome de las Casas? What did he write, and why was this important?**
5. **What does this selection tell us about the writing of history, according to Dr. Zinn?**
6. **Finally, what was the ultimate fate of the Arawaks and other Caribbean tribes who met with Columbus and the Spanish?**
7. **-10. You create 3 provocative questions you could pose after reading this article.**

**Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress**

**excerpted from a**

***People's History of the United States***

**by Howard Zinn**

Arawak men and women, naked, tawny, and full of wonder, emerged from their villages onto the island's beaches and swam out to get a closer look at the strange big boat. When Columbus and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly, the Arawaks ran to greet them, brought them food, water, gifts. He later wrote of this in his log:

"*They... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they* *exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned....*

*They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features.... They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane.... They would make fine servants....*

*With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want*."

These Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were much like Indians on the mainland, who were remarkable (European observers were to say again and again) for their hospitality, their belief in sharing. These traits did not stand out in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, and the frenzy for money that marked Western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

Columbus wrote:

"*As soon as I arrived in the Indies, on the first Island which I found, I took some of the natives by* *force in order that they might learn and might give me information of whatever there is in these parts*."

The information that Columbus wanted most was: Where is the gold?

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The Indians, Columbus reported, "*are so naive and so free with their possessions that no one* *who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone*...." He concluded his report by asking fora little help from their Majesties, and in return he would bring them from his next voyage "*as* *much gold as they need . . . and as many slaves as they ask*." He was full of religious talk: "*Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities*."

Because of Columbus's exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread of the Europeans' intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians, after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.

Now, from his base on Haiti, Columbus sent expedition after expedition into the interior. They found no gold fields, but had to fill up the ships returning to Spain with some kind of dividend. In the year 1495, they went on a great slave raid, rounded up fifteen hundred Arawak men, women, and children, put them in pens guarded by Spaniards and dogs, then picked the five hundred best specimens to load onto ships. Of those five hundred, two hundred died en route. The rest arrived alive in Spain and were put up for sale by the archdeacon of the town, who reported that, although the slaves were "*naked as the day they were born*," they showed "*no more* *embarrassment than animals*." Columbus later wrote: "*Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold*."

But too many of the slaves died in captivity. And so Columbus, desperate to pay back dividends to those who had invested, had to make good his promise to fill the ships with gold. In the province of Cicao on Haiti, where he and his men imagined huge gold fields to exist, they ordered all persons fourteen years or older to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. When they brought it, they were given copper tokens to hang around their necks. Indians found without a copper token had their hands cut off and bled to death.

The Indians had been given an impossible task. The only gold around was bits of dust garnered from the streams. So they fled, were hunted down with dogs, and were killed.

Trying to put together an army of resistance, the Arawaks faced Spaniards who had armor, muskets, swords, horses. When the Spaniards took prisoners they hanged them or burned them to death. Among the Arawaks, mass suicides began, with cassava poison. Infants were killed to save them from the Spaniards. In two years, through murder, mutilation, or suicide, half of the 250,000 Indians on Haiti were dead.

When it became clear that there was no gold left, the Indians were taken as slave labor on huge estates, known later as encomiendas. They were worked at a ferocious pace, and died by the thousands. By the year 1515, there were perhaps fifty thousand Indians left. By 1550, there were five hundred. A report of the year 1650 shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island.

The chief source-and, on many matters the only source-of in formation about what happened on the islands after Columbus came is Bartolome de las Casas, who, as a young priest, participated in the conquest of Cuba. For a time he owned a plantation on which Indian slaves worked, but he gave that up and became a vehement critic of Spanish cruelty.

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In Book Two of his History of the Indies, Las Casas (who at first urged replacing Indians by black slaves, thinking they were stronger and would survive, but later relented when he saw the effects on blacks) tells about the treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards. It is a unique account and deserves to be quoted at length:

"*Endless testimonies . . . prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives.... But our work* *was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy; small wonder, then, if they tried to kill one*

*of us now and then.... The admiral, it is true, was blind as those who came after him, and he was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians*..."

Las Casas tells how the Spaniards "*grew more conceited every day*" and after a while refused to walk any distance. They "*rode the backs of Indians if they were in a hurry*" or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays. "*In this case they also had Indians carry large leaves to* *shade them from the sun and others to fan them with goose wings*."

Total control led to total cruelty. The Spaniards "*thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and* *twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades*." Las Casas tells how"*two of these so-called Christians met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took* *the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys*."

The Indians' attempts to defend themselves failed. And when they ran off into the hills they were found and killed. So, Las Casas reports: "*they suffered and died in the mines and other labors in* *desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could turn for help*." Hedescribes their work in the mines:

"... *mountains are stripped from top to bottom and bottom to top a thousand times; they dig, split* *rocks, move stones, and carry dirt on their backs to wash it in the rivers, while those who wash gold stay in the water all the time with their backs bent so constantly it breaks them; and when water invades the mines, the most arduous task of all is to dry the mines by scooping up pans full of water and throwing it up outside....*

*After each six or eight months' work in the mines, which was the time required of each crew to dig enough gold for melting, up to a third of the men died. While the men were sent many miles away to the mines, the wives remained to work the soil, forced into the excruciating job of digging and making thousands of hills for cassava plants.*

*Thus husbands and wives were together only once every eight or ten months and when they met they were so exhausted and depressed on both sides . . . they ceased to procreate. As for the newly born, they died early because their mothers, overworked and famished, had no milk to nurse them, and for this reason, while I was in Cuba, 7000 children died in three months. Some mothers even drowned their babies from sheer desperation.... In this way, husbands died in the mines, wives died at work, and children died from lack of milk . . . and in a short time this land which was so great, so powerful and fertile ... was depopulated.... My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write*...."

When he arrived on Hispaniola in 1508, Las Casas says, "*there were 60,000 people living on this* *island, including the Indians; so that from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it*...."

Thus began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas. That beginning, when you read Las Casas-even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says, or less than a million, as some historians have calculated, or 8 million as others now believe?) is conquest, slavery, death. When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure-there is no bloodshed-and Columbus Day is a celebration.

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The treatment of heroes (Columbus) and their victims (the Arawaks) the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress-is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, in which the past is told from the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders. It is as if they, like Columbus, deserve universal acceptance, as if they-the Founding Fathers, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt, Kennedy, the leading members of Congress, the famous Justices of the Supreme Court-represent the nation as a whole. The pretense is that there really is such a thing as "the United States," subject to occasional conflicts and quarrels, but fundamentally a community of people with common interests. It is as if there really is a "national interest" represented in the Constitution, in territorial expansion, in the laws passed by Congress, the decisions of the courts, the development of capitalism, the culture of education and the mass media.

"*History is the memory of states*," wrote Henry Kissinger in his first book, A World Restored, in which he proceeded to tell the history of nineteenth-century Europe from the viewpoint of the leaders of Austria and England, ignoring the millions who suffered from those states men's policies. From his standpoint, the "peace" that Europe had before the French Revolution was "restored" by the diplomacy of a few national leaders.

But for factory workers in England, farmers in France, colored people in Asia and Africa, women and children everywhere except in the upper classes, it was a world of conquest, violence, hunger, exploitation-a world not restored but disintegrated.

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When the Pilgrims came to New England they too were coming not to vacant land but to territory inhabited by tribes of Indians. The governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop, created the excuse to take Indian land by declaring the area legally a "vacuum." The Indians, he said, had not "subdued" the land, and therefore had only a "natural" right to it, but not a "civil right." A "natural right" did not have legal standing.

The Puritans also appealed to the Bible, Psalms 2:8: "*Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen* *for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*." And to justify theiruse of force to take the land, they cited Romans 13:2: "*Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,* *resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*."

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The Indian population of 10 million that lived north of Mexico when Columbus came would ultimately be reduced to less than a million. Huge numbers of Indians would die from diseases introduced by the whites. A Dutch traveler in New Netherlands wrote in 1656 that "the Indians . .

. affirm, that before the arrival of the Christians, and before the smallpox broke out amongst them, they were ten times as numerous as they now are, and that their population had been melted down by this disease, whereof nine-tenths of them have died." When the English first settled Martha's Vineyard in 1642, the Wampanoags there numbered perhaps three thousand. There were no wars on that island, but by 1764, only 313 Indians were left there. Similarly, Block Island Indians numbered perhaps 1,200 to 1,500 in 1662, and by 1774 were reduced to fifty-one.

Behind the English invasion of North America, behind their massacre of Indians, their deception, their brutality, was that special powerful drive born in civilizations based on private property. It was a morally ambiguous drive; the need for space, for land, was a real human need. But in conditions of scarcity, in a barbarous epoch of history ruled by competition, this human need was transformed into the murder of whole peoples.

**PART III**

Be prepared to write an in class essay on this topic on day 2 of class:



**Should Christopher Columbus be considered a hero in American culture?**

**Why/Why not?3**

1. You may **bring any notes** and **graphic organizers** that you have a **hard or physical copy** of you wish to use during the timed writing.
2. **No** phones or computers can be used.
3. You will have approximately **45 minutes**.
4. You will be asked to **write a short essay** with **strong historical** **evidence and supports** for your answer.
5. Choose a **side** – **hero** or **not a hero** - and “**prove**” your assertion.