

God, Gold, and Glory Voices of Texas History *Advanced*

Unit 2: Age of Contact – Extension Lesson

Name:

Date:

Period:

Excerpt 1:

The Context – Christopher Columbus wrote in his journal about how his men would trade items they considered useless with the American Indians in order to get more valuable resources like gold. Read the excerpt below to see how Columbus states he felt about this trade and how he says he handled this issue.

No request of anything from [the American Indians] is ever refused, but they rather invite acceptance of what they possess, and manifest such a generosity that they would give away their own hearts... I forbade my men to purchase their goods with such worthless things as bits of platters and broken glass, or thongs of leather, although when they got possession of one of these, they estimated it as highly as the greatest jewel in the world... The whole of an Indian's property might be purchased of him for a few [coins.] ... I thought such traffic unjust, and therefore forbade it... I presented them with a variety of things, in order to secure their affection, and that they may become Christians, and enter into the service of their Highnesses and the Castilian nation, and also aid us in procuring such things as they possess, and we stand in need of.

- *Excerpt of a letter from Columbus to Luis de Santangel, the treasurer for the king and queen of Spain. Personal narrative of the first voyage of Columbus to America. Library of Congress.*

1. How does Columbus describe trade with the American Indians he encountered?
2. When Columbus learned that his men were trading things they thought were useless to get more valuable things from the American Indians, what was his response?
3. How does Columbus state he interacted with the American Indians he encountered? What reason does he give for his actions?

Excerpt 2:

The Context – The following excerpt was written by a Catholic religious leader named Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas accompanied Columbus and his men on their third voyage to the Caribbean in 1498. He lived there for a number of years. He wrote about the treatment that he witnessed of American Indians by Spanish explorers.

“Over the twelve years of which we are speaking, and during the course of what they term ‘conquest’ (which is really nothing other than a series of violent incursions into the territory by these cruel tyrants: incursions condemned not only in the eyes of God but also by law...), the Europeans have, throughout these four hundred and fifty leagues, butchered, burned alive or otherwise done to death four million souls, young and old alike, men, women and children. . . Indeed, they invented so many new methods of murder that it would be quite impossible to set them all down on paper and, however hard one tried to chronicle them, one could probably never list a thousandth part of what actually took place.”

- “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies” by Bartolomé de las Casas.
The Library of Congress. Translated into English from the original Spanish.

1. How does Bartolomé de las Casas characterize the Spanish treatment of the American Indians in the Caribbean?
2. What is one significant result of Spanish conquest in the Caribbean, according to las Casas in this excerpt?
3. How does this excerpt by las Casas compare to Columbus’ characterization of Spanish interactions with the American Indians? What might be the explanation for these two different points of view?