

Treatment of Native Americans: Analyzing a Primary Source

The following selection is adapted from *Short Report of the Destruction of the Indies* by Bartolomé de Las Casas. Read the selection and answer the questions that follow.

God has made the Indians without malice or duplicity. They are humble, patient, peaceful, and calm, without hate and the desire for revenge.

They are likewise the most delicate people. Less than any other can they bear fatigue, and they very easily die of illness. Not even the sons of our princes and nobles, brought up in royal and gentle life, are more delicate than they.

They are clean and unspolled, most prompt to accept the Catholic faith. They quickly embrace virtuous customs.

Among these gentle sheep, the Spaniards entered like wolves, tigers, and lions which had been starving for many days. And for forty years the Spaniards have done nothing else than destroy them with new and diverse kinds of cruelty. Whereas there were more than three million souls on the island of Hispaniola, there are today not two hundred of the native population left.

The island of Cuba is now almost entirely deserted. Puerto Rico and Jamaica are both desolate.

We are assured that our Spaniards, with their cruelty, have depopulated the great continent, and that ten Indian kingdoms, although formerly full of people, are now deserted.

We give as a real reckoning, that in the said forty years, more than twelve million persons have perished unjustly.

The reason why the Christians have killed and destroyed such infinite numbers of souls is solely because they have made gold their ultimate aim, seeking to load themselves with riches in the shortest time. They have treated the Indians much worse than animals.

1. What did Las Casas praise about the Indians?

2. Why do you think Las Casas emphasized the religious faith, innocence, and delicacy of the Indians?

3. According to Las Casas what happened to the Indian population in lands ruled by Spain?

4. How did Las Casas explain Spanish treatment of the Indians?

