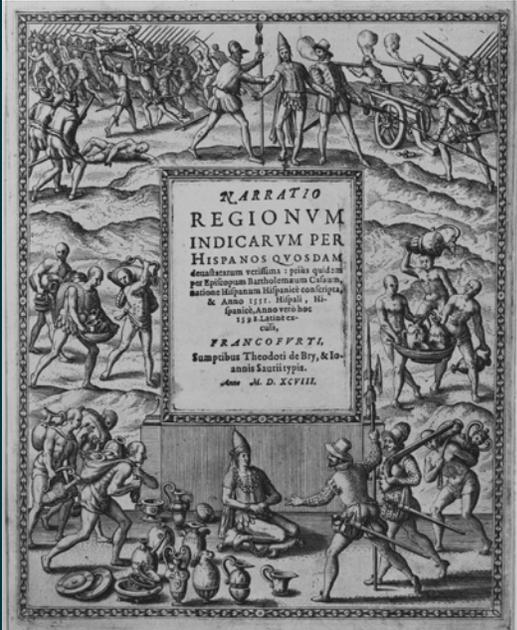
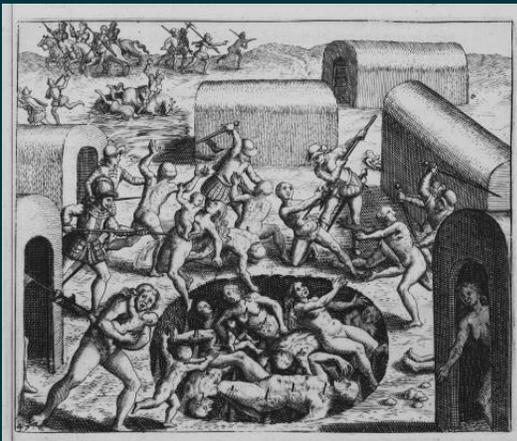


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Title page, 1598 edition [Frankfurt] published by Theodor de Bry with his engravings



And thus pregnant and nursing women and children and old persons and any others they might take, they would throw them into the holes until the pits were filled, the Indians being pierced through by the stakes, which was a sore thing to see, especially the women with their children.

Bartolomé de las Casas

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES

written 1542, published 1552 [EXCERPTS]

PRESENTATION by Bishop don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas or Casaus, to the most high and potent lord Prince of all the Spains don Felipe, our lord _____

Most high and potent lord:

Because divine providence has ordered in this world that for the direction and common utility of the human lineage the world be constituted by Kingdoms and peoples, with their kings like fathers and shepherds (as Homer has called them) and therefore the most noble and generous members of the republics, for that reason no doubt of the rectitude of the royal spirits of those kings may be held, or with right reason might be held. And if any wrongs, failings, defects, or evils should be suffered in those kingdoms, the only reason for that is that the kings have no notice of them. For these wrongs &c, if they be present and reported, it is the duty of the king, with greatest study and vigilant industry, to root them out. . . .

Considering, then, most potent lord, the evils and harm, the perditions and ruin — the equals or likes of which, never were men imagined capable of doing — considering, as I say, those evils which as a man of fifty years' and more experience, being in those lands present, I have seen committed upon those so many and such great kingdoms, or better said, that entire vast

and new world of the Indies — lands conceded and given in trust by God and His Church to the king and queen of Castile, to rule and govern them, convert them to belief in Christ and the Holy Catholic Church, and give them to prosper temporally and spiritually —, this subject was not able to contain himself from supplicating with Your Majesty, most importunately, that Your Majesty not concede such licence nor allow those terrible things that the tyrants did invent, pursue, and have committed against those peaceable, humble, and meek Indian peoples, who offend no person. . . .

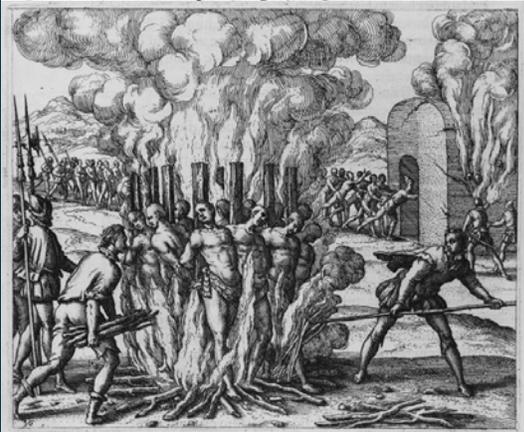
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They would erect long gibbets . . . and bind thirteen of the Indians at one time, in honour and reverence, they said, of Our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, and put firewood around it and burn the Indians alive.



Another time, because the Indians did not give him a coffer filled with gold, . . . they killed an infinite number of souls, and cut off the hands and noses of countless women and men, and others they threw to the savage dogs, who ate them and tore them to pieces.



[T]he lord asked the holy father whether Christians went to the sky. The priest replied that they did, but only those who were good. And the cacique then said . . . that he did not desire to go to the sky, but rather down to hell, so that he would not be where *they* were and would not see such cruel people.

ought hurt or wrong to Christians, but rather held them to be descended from heaven, from the sky, until many times they or their neighbours received from the Christians many acts of wrongful harm, theft, murder, violence, and vexation. . . .

Las Casas proceeds to recount specific acts of cruelty perpetrated on the people of Hispaniola, San Juan (Puerto Rico), Jamaica, Cuba, Nicaragua, New Spain (Mexico), the Yucatan, Guatemala, Venezuela, Peru, Granada and other small Caribbean islands, and "Florida," referring to Spanish claims north of Mexico in North America.

TESTAMENT

I, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, or Casaus, friar of the order of Saint Dominic, who by the mercy of God am here today in this court of Spain, was persuaded by the same notable persons resident in this Court . . . to set down an accounting of the hell that is the Indies, so that those infinite masses of souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ may not die for all eternity without any help for it, but rather know their Creator and be saved. And by the compassion that I have for my native land, which is Castile, I pray that God not destroy it for the great sins committed against its faith and honour. . . .

I have great hope that the emperor and king of Spain, our lord Don Carlos, the fifth of that name, may come to understand (for until now the truth has always been most industriously covered over) the acts of malice and treachery which have been and still are being done upon those nations and lands, against the will of God and his own, and that he may bring an end to so many evils and bring relief to that New World which God has given him, as the lover and cultivator, as he is of justice.

For political as well as religious reasons, including the evidence from las Casas, King Charles issued the "New Laws of the Indies" in 1542 to moderate the treatment of the Indians. The New Laws were opposed and ignored by most colonial officials in Spanish America.