



Diego Rivera: *Encomiendas*

1. List the objects or people that you see in the painting. (Write at least 5-10 items)
  
2. Which objects/people are symbols? What do you think each one means?
  
3. Describe what is happening in the four quadrants of the painting.
  - a. Quadrant 1:
  - b. Quadrant 2:
  - c. Quadrant 3:
  - d. Quadrant 4:
  
4. What is the political or social issue presented in the painting?
  
5. What is the artist's viewpoint on this issue? How do you know?

## ***The Spanish in the Caribbean***

The Caribbean served as a Spanish base of operations for the next thirty years; it is here that they formed their first ideas about the Americas and its inhabitants. During these first years, the Spanish struggled to establish processes and policies by which they could gain wealth and power for themselves and the Crown, and converts for their faith. Sometimes these goals worked hand in hand; more often they worked against each other. This tension was summed up in by conquistador and chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who wrote, "We came for the glory of God and to get rich!"

The colonial economy of Spanish America was an economy of exploitation in two senses. First, the organization of labor within the Spanish empire involved structures of highly servitude or slavery. Second, the resources of the continent were exploited for the economic advantage of Spain. The early conquistadors were interested primarily in gold; they soon devised a series to institutions to exploit Native American labor. The first and most important was the encomienda, a formal grant by the Crown of the right to the labor of a specific number of Native Americans for a particular time. It usually involved a few hundred Indians, but sometimes numbered in the thousands.

The practice began in the Caribbean and spread as lands were conquered and peoples subdued. As Indians died of disease and overwork, Spaniards resupplied their labor force through slave raids in Central and South America. Areas such as Nicaragua were especially hard hit by these raids, and were soon depopulated. The institution of encomienda was intended to harness Indian labor while simultaneously Christianizing and "civilizing" them; encomienda holders were granted labor, but in return they were charged with making sure that the natives were taught the Christian faith, baptized, and taught to live like Spaniards. Few encomienda holders were willing to spend the time and effort Christianizing their charges or the money to bring a priest to do it on their behalf.

Ultimately, encomienda became little more than a system of slavery. The Spanish Crown disliked the encomienda; the monarchy was distressed by the reports that Indians were mistreated, and feared the encomienda holders were attempting to transform themselves into a new, powerful nobility in the Americas. The king did not want any competition in the Americas.

<http://faculty.northgeorgia.edu/rwbyers/The%20Conquest%20of%20Mexico%20revised811.pdf>

### ***The Spanish in the Caribbean – extended thinking questions:***

1. What does the text mean when it says the "economy of Spanish America was an economy of exploitation?"
2. What is the encomienda system? How did the Spaniards get people to work in the encomienda system?
3. What were the two main purposes for the encomienda system?
4. Why was the Spanish king threatened by the encomienda system occurring in the Caribbean?

## Bartolomé de las Casas

*Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican friar, writer, and advocate for the humane treatment of the indigenous people of the Americas, was one of the most important religious figures of the 16th-century Spanish world. As Spain struggled to develop a policy regarding the peoples of the New World, Las Casas, spent years attempting to expose the abuses that the native population was subjected to under the **encomienda** system. He also devoted a great deal of energy trying to convince the Spanish Crown that its mission to spread the Christian faith in the Americas did not have to deprive indigenous people of their freedom, sovereignty, and property rights.*

“On the mainland, we know for sure that our fellow-countrymen have, through their cruelty and wickedness, depopulated and laid waste an area which once boasted more than ten kingdoms, each of them larger in area than the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. The whole region, once teeming with human beings, is now deserted over a distance of more than two thousand leagues: a distance, that is, greater than the journey from Seville to Jerusalem and back again.

At a conservative estimate, the despotic and diabolical behaviour of the Christians has, over the last forty years, led to the unjust and totally unwarranted deaths of more than twelve million souls, women and children among them, and there are grounds for believing my own estimate of more than fifteen million to be nearer the mark...

The reason the Christians have murdered on such a vast scale and killed anyone and everyone in their way is purely and simply greed. They have set out to line their pockets with gold and to amass private fortunes as quickly as possible so that they can then assume a status quite at odds with that into which they were born.”

-*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, Bartolome de las Casas

<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/when-worlds-collide/people/bartolome-de-las-casas.html>

1. Does Bartolome de las Casas agree with the treatment of South & Central Americans? Circle the key words that tell you how he feels.
2. What are some effects of Spanish colonization in South and Central America?
3. How does de las Casas explain the cause for such poor treatment of Native Americans?