

## Bartolomé de las Casas on the Spanish Atrocities

*Bartolomé de Las Casas had taken part in the conquest of Cuba. However, he later gave up the land he was granted and began speaking out against the mistreatment of native people in the New World.*

The Spaniards with their horses, their spears and lances, began to commit murders, and strange cruelties: they entered into towns, burroughs, and villages, sparing neither children nor old men, neither women with child, neither them that lay in, but that they ripped their bellies, and cut them in pieces, as if they had been opening of lambs shut up in their fold. They laid wagers with such as with one thrust of a sword would paunch or bowel a man in the midst, or with one blow of a sword would most readily and most deliverly cut off his head, or that would best pierce his entrails at one stroak. They took the little souls by the heels, ramping them from the mother's dugges, and crushed their heads against the cliffs. Others they cast into the rivers laughing and mocking, and when they tumbled into the water, they said, now shift for yourself such a one's corpse. They put others, together with their mothers, and all that they met, to the edge of the sword. They made certain Gibbets long and low, in such sort, that the feet of the hanged one, touched in a manner the ground, every one enough for thirteen, in honor and worship of our Savior and his twelve Apostles (as they used to speak) and setting to fire, burned them all quick that were fastened. Unto all others, whom they used to take and reserve alive, cutting off their two hands as near as might be, and so letting them hang, they said; Get you with these letters, to carry tidings to those which are fled by the mountains. They murdered commonly the Lords and Nobility on this fashion: They made certain grates of pearches laid on pitchforks, and made a little fire underneath, to the intent, that by little and little yelling and despairing in these torments, they might give up the Ghost.



One time I saw four or five of the principal lords roasted and broiled upon these gridirons. Also I think that there were two or three of these gridirons, garnished with the like furniture, and for that they cried out pitifully, which thing troubled the Captain that he could not then sleep: he commanded to strangle them. The Sergeant, which was worse than the hangman that burned them (I know his name and friends in Seville would not have them strangled, but himself putting bullets in their mouths, to the end that they should not cry, put to the fire, until they were softly roasted after his desire. I have seen all the aforesaid things and others infinite. And forasmuch as all the people which could flee, hid themselves in the mountains, and mounted on the tops of them, fled from the men so without all manhood, empty of all pity, behaving them as savage beasts, the slaughterers and deadly enemies of mankind: they taught their Hounds, fierce Dogs, to tear them in pieces at the first view, and in the space that one may say a Credo, assailed and devoured an Indian as if it had been a swine. These dogs wrought great destructions and slaughters. And forasmuch as sometimes, although seldom, when the Indians put to death some Spaniards upon good right and Law of due justice: they made a Law between them, that for one Spaniard they had to slay a hundred Indians ...

One time the Indians came to meet us, and to receive us with victuals, and delicate cheer, and with all entertainment ten leagues off a great city, and being come at the place, they presented us with a great quantity of fish, and of bread, and other meat, together with all that they could doe for us to the uttermost. See incontinent

the Devil, which put himself into the Spaniards, to put them all to the edge of the sword in my presence, without any cause whatsoever, more than three thousand souls, which were set before us, men, women, and children. I saw there so great cruelties, that never any man living either have or shall see the like.

Another time, but a few days after the premises, I sent messengers unto all the lords of the province of Havana, assuring them, that they should not need to fear (for they had heard of my credit) and that without withdrawing themselves, they should come to receive us, and that there should be done unto them no displeasure: for all the country was afraid, by reason of the mischiefs and murderings passed, and this did I by the advice of the Captain himself. After that we were come into the province, one and twenty lords and caciques came to receive us, whom the Captain apprehended incontinently, breaking the safe conduct which I had made them, and intending the day next following to burn them alive, saying that it was expedient so to do, for that otherwise those lords one day, would do us a shrewd turn. I found myself in a great deal of trouble to save them from the fire; howbeit in the end they escaped.

After that the Indians of this island [Cuba] were thus brought into bondage and calamities like unto those of the lie of Hispaniola, and that they saw that they died and perished all without remedy: some of them began to fly into the mountains, others quite desperate hanged themselves, and there hung together husbands with their wives, hanging with them their little children. And through the cruelty of one only Spaniard, which was a great tyrant, and one whom I know, there hung themselves more than two hundred Indians: and in this fashion died an infinite [number] of people.

There was in this lie an officer of the kings, to whom they gave for his share three hundred Indians, of whom at the end of three months there died by him in the travel of the mines, two hundred and sixty: in such sort, that there remained now but thirty, which was the tenth part. Afterwards they gave him as many more, and more, and those also he made havoc of in like manner, and still as many as they gave him, so many he slew, until he died himself, and that the Devil carried him away.

In three or four months (myself being present) there died more then six thousand children, by reason that they had plucked away from them their fathers and mothers, which they sent into the mines.