
A Report
by Robert F. Petrone, Esquire,
to City Council of the City of Philadelphia

on

HISTORY OF THE INDIES
BOOK I OF III

Authored by Bartolomé de las Casas
Translated and edited by Andréé M. Collard

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History of the Indies, by Bartolomé de las Casas, is one of the main primary sources regarding the life, trans-Atlantic expedition and gubernatorial administration of the West Indies of Christopher Columbus, as well as a comprehensive history of the first twenty-eight years of the Spanish settlements in that region. Bartolomé de las Casas was a Seville-born historian and social reformer who, in 1502, at the age of 18, participated in the Spanish settlement of the West Indies during the administration of Governor Christopher Columbus. In 1510, de las Casas became a priest, among the first to be ordained in the Americas. Circa 1516, the Crown of Spain and the Church appointed him *Protectoría de los Indios*, Protector of Indians, an administrative office of the Spanish colonies that was responsible for ensuring the welfare of the tribes of the Americas, including representing them in the courts and notifying the Crown of Spain regarding matters involving them. In 1523, de las Casas became a Dominican friar and, in 1527, he began the three-volume book, the first volume of which is the subject of this report, *History of the Indies*, originally *Historia de las Indias*.

The edition of *History of the Indies* that is the subject of this report, and will be the subject of the reports of the subsequent volumes to follow, was translated into English, edited and published in 1971 by Andrée M. Collard (1926 -1986), a professor and writer, who also wrote an Introduction to the book. De las Casas commences his original work with a self-authored Prologue followed by three volumes recounting the history of the West Indies. Book I begins with the discovery of the West Indies by Admiral Columbus and the first 8 years of its history, including his gubernatorial administration. Books II and III record the following twenty years of the history of the Indies, each book covering a single decade. This report comprises a summary of Collard's Introduction and the Prologue and Book I of de las Casas's *History of the Indies*, with a particular focus on the life, expedition and governorship of Christopher Columbus.

Collard's Introduction

Collard makes clear in his Introduction to his translated edition of de las Casas's *History of the Indies* that to the extent Christopher Columbus's detractors argue that his discovery of the New World ignited Spanish atrocities against the tribes of the Americas, the opposite is, in fact true. Collard notes that it was actually the *encomienda*, the Spanish feudal system that considered conquered peoples the vassals of the Spanish monarch -- which long preexisted the expedition of Admiral Columbus, and which Columbus actually restrained until his political rivals deposed him -- that sparked the brutality of the Spaniards in their conquest of the Americas. The *encomienda* system of the Crown, Collard notes, served "as the system responsible for the existence of *de facto* slavery" (Introduction, xvii). In contravention to this system of Spanish

feudalism, Admiral Columbus's expedition, Collard explains, ignited what was to be the undoing of the *encomienda*, and sparked, instead, the spread of "the enlightened Spanish legal tradition" of "the *Siete Partidas*" that had been promulgated in the 13th Century.

The *Siete Partidas*, or "Seven Parts," referring to the number of sections into which it is divided, was the Castilian statutory code first compiled during the reign of Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1284). It established a uniform body of normative rules for the kingdom akin to the *Magna Carta* or the American Bill of Rights. The *Siete Partidas* "provides for...civil rights" in the face of the institution of slavery, the "liberal tradition...of Erasmian humanism¹...which stresses the Pauline view of humanity² -- all people are God's people," and "the God-given 'natural rights of man'" (Introduction, xvii).³ The propagation of the principles of this code of civil rights, Collard maintains, was the true legacy of the Genoan explorer Christopher Columbus in spite of and in the face of the atrocities committed by the political enemies who deposed and succeeded him. Collard's assessment of Christopher Columbus as an enlightened champion of the civil rights of the tribes of the Americas is borne out by de las Casas's explicit characterization of Columbus as such throughout *History of the Indies*.

De las Casas's Prologue

De las Casas begins the self-authored Prologue of his *History of the Indies* by quoting the first-century Romano-Jewish scholar, historian and hagiographer Rabbi Titus Flavius Josephus's four reasons why "men are impelled to write history": (1) "self glory," (2) "to serve and flatter princes," (3) "to elucidate and defend the truth" upon "knowing that events they have witnessed and in which they took part are not being recorded truthfully," and (4) "to rescue the great deeds of their nations from neglect and oblivion" (Prologue, 3). He notes that the latter two reasons inspired him to write *Historia de las Indias*, and, as the remainder of the book notes, to debunk

¹ Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus was a Dutch priest and philosopher who regarded humanist principles such as human dignity, individual freedom and the primacy of human happiness as essential components of -- or at least compatible with -- the teachings of Jesus.

² Saint Paul the Apostle of Tarsus believed that human nature innately resists a state of total depravity, and that a Christian must fight against "disordered passions" and "self-will" while acknowledging that God has created him with good sentiments, desires and the needs of the body.

³ The *Siete Partidas* addressed legislative, philosophical, oral and theological topics from Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives and has been regarded as an "encyclopedia of humanism."

false claims levied specifically against Governor Christopher Columbus by the governor's political rivals: Juan Aguado, Alonso de Hojeda, Adrián de Moxica, Francisco Roldán and Francisco de Bobadilla.

De las Casas reveals the lens through which he has reviewed the history of the West Indies. He cites "the ancient historians, holy and profane" to demonstrate "that there never was a people...who, no matter how politically well organized and urbane it may be now, was not in its beginnings full of wild and irrational defects and abounding in grave and nefarious idolatry." Citing Spain as just such an example, he adds, "Many nations, today smoothly organized and Christianized, lived like animals, without houses and without cities, before their conversion to the Faith" (Prologue, 6). As such, de las Casas reasons that at his point in history, the teachings of Christianity served as one of the few catalysts, if not the only one of the time, to the shedding of primitive or prehistoric traditions and ideas. He writes, consequently, "Whenever and wherever in the universe one discovers such a Faithless group, no matter how many grave sins they may possess -- idolatry and others -- we can only treat them with the love, peace and Christian charity which we owe them." He counsels, from the perspective of his time, that Christians must "attract" the primitive and any others not exposed to the teachings of Christianity "as we would be attracted ourselves to the holy Faith through sweet and humble evangelical preaching in the form established by Christ" in order to uplift all of humanity (Prologue, 6). Thus, through this lens does de las Casas review the first twenty-eight years of the history of the Indies, commencing with what he characterizes as its "discovery," from the perspective of the Old World, by the Admiral Christopher Columbus, and continuing with the atrocities of the greedy Spanish nobles who, in defiance of Governor Columbus's repeated calls for peace, mercy and restraint, deposed the pious governor and brutally imposed their imperialistic aspirations.

Columbus the Man

Within the first few pages of Book I of his *History of the Indies*, Bartolomé de las Casas introduces with effusive praise the man he credits with the discovery of the Americas. He names him as "the illustrious Genoese Christopher Columbus" and describes him as "good-natured, kind, daring, courageous, and pious." De las Casas marvels at Admiral and Governor Columbus's many "acquired qualities," including his masterful calligraphy, arithmetic and drawing; his skill with Latin, his "unusual insight into human and divine affairs"; "good judgment"; "sound memory and eagerness to learn"; intense study; and "proficiency in geometry, geography, cosmography, astrology or astronomy, and seamanship." Of Christopher Columbus's journals, he noted that as

admiral and governor, Columbus "avoided exaggeration" in authoring these "documents of value" (Book I, 15).

In analyzing these journals, de las Casas quotes Admiral Columbus's correspondence with the Crown, noting the admiral's "over forty years" of experience "in sailing all waters known today," and his collaboration with scholars among the "Latins and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and many others of many other sects." Here de las Casas portrays Christopher Columbus as a worldly intellectual who did not discriminate against scholars of any race, religion or creed in working with and learning from them. De las Casas cites Admiral Columbus's inspiration by these multicultural scholars, as well as by God, to undertake the "enterprise" of his expedition despite that "[e]veryone laughed at" him "and dismissed it as a joke." In the eight years that Christopher Columbus lobbied the Spanish Crown to fund his trans-Atlantic expedition, he wrote to them, forebodingly, in 1501, "My knowledge and my quoting of authorities have proved of no help. And now I trust only in Your Highnesses...." (Book I, 15-16).

De las Casas expounds upon Christopher Columbus's erudition, and expedition, in his own, superlative characterizations. He writes, "I think Christopher Columbus was the most outstanding sailor in the world, versed like no other in the art of navigation, for which divine Providence chose him to accomplish the most outstanding feat ever accomplished in the world until now" (Book I, 17). By citing Governor Columbus's complaints to the Crown in 1495 "about the craftiness of navigators who act one way instead of another in order to deceive their people" de las Casas contrasts Admiral and Governor Columbus's virtue to the defects of those who arrived in his wake, further emphasizing Christopher Columbus's morality, integrity, dignity, rectitude, honor and decency (Book I, 16). De las Casas praises Columbus as being "talkative and self-assured," as he is described in the book *Historia portuguesa* ("Portuguese History")⁴ as a man of "moderation and generosity" (Book I, 22).

To further emphasize Christopher Columbus's goodness and virtue, de las Casas relates an anecdote regarding the book *Crónica*, by the prolific Augustín Justinianus, a Fifteenth Century Genoan bishop of Nebbio, Corsica, and a member of the fifth Lateran ecclesiastical council convoked by Pope Julius II. Justinianus wrote his book *Crónica*⁵ that Christopher Columbus was "only an artisan." The ruling house of Genoa took such umbrage at the understatement that it

⁴ Though not explicitly credited by de las Casas, his mention of the book *Historia portuguesa* likely references the Sixteenth Century writings of the Portuguese historian João de Barros.

⁵ *Crónica* translates to "Chronicle" or "Annals," likely a reference to Justinianus's historical work *Castigatissimi Annali di Genova*, "The Most Abstemious Annals of Genoa," published posthumously in 1537.

issued a decree prohibiting the possession or reading of the book and withdrawing it from circulation. De las Casas concurred that its “inaccurate” depiction was “harmful to the reputation of a person as meritorious as Christopher Columbus, to whom all Christendom is so greatly indebted” (Book I, 17).

A Brief Account of Columbus’s Arrival in and Return to Spain

De las Casas recounts Christopher Columbus’s extraordinary arrival in Spain. He tells of how the navigator sailed with a Genoan privateer, also named Columbus, who was fighting the Venetians for dominance in the Mediterranean on behalf of the *doge*, akin to a “duke,” of Genoa. The privateer’s ship was burned in a naval battle, and Christopher Columbus survived by jumping overboard, grasping a floating oar, and swimming two leagues to shore, where he convalesced from paralysis of his legs (Book I, 18).

After a full recovery, the young Columbus traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, where he married the daughter of a wealthy *hidalgo* (petty noble), Don Bartolomé Muñiz Perestrello, also an accomplished mariner and explorer. Perestrello’s wife gifted her new son-in-law her late husband’s navigational instruments and maps, and Christopher Columbus joined several Portuguese expeditions, ultimately settling in Puerto Santo of the Madeira archipelago, an island Don Bartolomé had settled. Christopher Columbus’s son Diego was born in Puerto Santo to Don Bartolomé’s daughter Felipa (Book I, 18).

Christopher Columbus then went in search of Princes who might fund his proposed expedition to find an all-water route to Asia, based on the writings of Ptolemy and the geographer Marinus of Tyre (AD 70-130). He went first to the King of Portugal, who double-crossed him, sending a caravel along a route Columbus had intended for himself. Columbus learned of the double-cross when the caravel was forced to return after being damaged in a storm (Book I, 20-23).

Columbus then sent his brother Bartolomé to England to beseech King Henry VII to fund the expedition. De las Casas describes Bartolomé as “very wise and courageous” and even “more careful and astute, and less direct than Christopher.” Bartolomé Columbus provided King Henry with a hand-made map, based on the writings of the Greek geographer Strabo, the Greco-Roman astronomer Ptolemy, the Roman Philosopher Pliny the Elder, and the Seventh Century scholar St. Isidore of Seville. Bartolomé adorned the map with a poem that practically prophesied the discovery of America. After many years, King Henry VII of England agreed to fund the expedition (Book I, 24-25).

Meanwhile, Christopher Columbus personally appeared before the Crown of Spain, then recently comprised of the newly united Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon.⁶ As Spain was preoccupied with the *Reconquista*⁷ in Granada, the king appointed “court scholars” to entertain Christopher Columbus’s modest petition for what de las Casas characterized as “a mere trifle” in funds for the expedition. The court scholars counseled the king to reject the proposal, which he did, prompting Columbus to solicit Spanish dukes for funding. One such duke, Don Luis de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli, agreed to fund the expedition. The war in Granada ended, however, during this time, and Queen Isabella reconsidered Christopher Columbus’s petition, agreeing to fund the expedition from the Crown’s treasury. By this time, however, Don Luis has already paid for the construction of three ships, but acceded with chagrin to the Queen’s decision. She reimbursed Don Luis and paid Admiral Columbus only half the “trifle” he requested. A wealthy mariner by the name of Martín Alonso Pinzón contributed another half million *maravedís* to the fund. In consideration for the contribution, Admiral Columbus appointed Pinzón captain of the swiftest Caravel, *La Pinta*, and himself took command of the flagship, *La Santa María de la Inmaculada Concepción*, nicknamed the *Capitana* (Book I, 25-34).

Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage: Peaceful First Contact with the Tainos

In 1492, Admiral Columbus departed Spain, and before year’s end, had arrived in the West Indies, accomplishing what he had set out to do: find an all-water route to lands occupied by Asiatic peoples, the tribes of the Americas. His first contact with them was amicable and peaceful in its entirety, as was his continued relations with them during his sojourn there. Clearly inspired by Admiral Columbus’s discovery of populated continents heretofore unknown by Christendom, de las Casas waxed poetic about the accomplishment. He writes, “Many is the time I have wished [for the] eloquence to extol the indescribable service to God and to the whole world which Christopher Columbus rendered at the cost of such pain and dangers, such skill and expertise, when he so courageously discovered the New World.” The author humbles himself

⁶ The royal wedding of Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon, as well as the annexation of León resulting from Isabella’s succession to the throne of that kingdom upon the death of her brother King Henry IV, established Spain as a world superpower. This status made the nation an obvious candidate for the funding of Columbus’s planned expedition, though Spain was not Christopher Columbus’s first choice.

⁷ The *Reconquista* constituted Spain’s attempt to reacquire portions of its peninsula conquered in 711 A.D by soldiers comprising Muslim Moors, North African Berbers and Arabs, and since occupied by them.

before Admiral Columbus's deed, adding that "the fruit of Columbus's labor speaks better for himself than I do.... Is there anything on earth comparable to opening the tightly shut doors of an ocean that no one dared enter before?" As if anticipating those detractors who might point to the chance landings of previous mariners, he notes, "And supposing someone in the most remote past did enter, the feat was so utterly forgotten as to make Columbus's discovery as arduous as if it had been the first time." De las Casas marvels at the profound and beneficial effect Admiral Columbus's discovery had on the evolution of human history, what modern scholars might now call a "singularity" in human development:

But since it is obvious that at that time God gave this man the keys to the awesome seas, he and no other unlocked the darkness, to him and to no other is owed for ever and ever all that exists beyond those doors. He showed the way to the discovery of immense territories whose coastline today measures over 12,000 leagues from pole to pole and whose inhabitants form wealthy and illustrious nations of diverse peoples and languages

(Book I, 34-35). With this characterization de las Casas frames his account of Christopher Columbus's voyages to the New World.

Of Admiral Columbus's first voyage, specifically, de las Casas sums up the endeavor with no less lofty language. "And of all those distinguished and incomparable goods," he writes, "that most worthy man Christopher Columbus was the cause, second to God but first in the eyes of men, being the discoverer and only worthy first admiral of the vast territory already known as the New World" (Book I, 37).

De las Casas recounts Admiral and Governor Columbus's "Return from the First Voyage" in 1493. He writes that Christopher Columbus returned to Spain in the year following his fateful journey, "taking with him the seven Indians who survived the voyage." He notes that Castilians "flocked from all directions to see him; the roads swelled with throngs come to welcome him in the towns through which he passed." The monarchs had already begun to launch a second expedition, and "were very anxious to see him. They had organized a solemn and beautiful reception to which everybody came. The streets were crammed with people come to see this eminent person who had found another world, as well as to see the Indians" and the artifacts of their land and culture (Book I, 37).

Columbus reported favorably to the Crown about the people he encountered in the West Indies. He "praised" the indigenes for their simplicity and gentleness. Presenting those who had traveled with him as an example, he urged that the tribes he encountered were "ready to receive the Faith" (Book I, 38), to him an expression of their equality and worthiness of the protection of the Crown and the rights of all Spanish citizens.

Columbus and the Crown immediately negotiated the terms of the contract for the second voyage. In consideration for his service, the Crown granted Christopher Columbus the titles of “Admiral, Viceroy and Governor of the Islands and Mainland already discovered and to be discovered” by him. The Crown intended these titles to be hereditary, to be passed to his heirs. The Crown knighted his brothers, Bartolomé and Diego, and appointed Bartolomé the first “*Adelantado*” of the Indies (Book I, 40-41).⁸

Columbus’s Second Voyage: The Cannibalistic Caribs and the Entitled *Hidalgos*

De las Casas details Admiral Columbus’s departure, on October 7, 1493, on his second voyage, taking a more southerly route than his first, and landing him on an island he named Dominica, named for the day he spotted it: Sunday, the third of November. The crew dropped anchor at a nearby island, which the Admiral named Marigalante (meaning “courtesan” or, more literally, “flirtatious Mary”) after his ship (Book I, 43).

On Monday, November 4th, the crew sailed to a third island, which Admiral Columbus named Guadalupe.⁹ On the island, they found a deserted village on the coast containing a hut in which, remarkably, they found a ship beam that had been lost from the first voyage. The inhabitants of the village were nowhere to be found. In fact, the crew later learned that the villagers had fled into the mountains to escape a doom the Europeans found utterly shocking: capture by cannibals (Book I, 43).

The day after arriving at the abandoned village, Admiral Columbus and his crew encountered “two youths” of the already familiar Taino tribe, who explained with sign language that the Carib tribe, who inhabited the island, had abducted them from their own island of Boriquen (modern day Puerto Rico) with the intention of eating both of them. Admiral Columbus and his crew also found six women who had escaped the Caribs. The women showed the Europeans the Caribs’ huts, which contained human bones, and boiled, shrunken, decapitated human heads.

⁸ During the Spanish *Reconquista*, the *adelantados* were military *caudillos* -- leaders -- who commanded the advance of the troops of the Crown of Castile through the Moor-occupied territories. The Crown granted the *adelantados* authority to govern any reconquered districts. During the colonization of the Indies, the Spanish Crown appointed “*Adelantados de Indias*” to command the exploration of the New World and to establish settlements. *Adelantados* held the post for life and maintained gubernatorial, military and judicial powers. *Recompilación de Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias*, Book IV, Titles 3, 4 and 7 (1680).

⁹ Though not explicitly stated by de las Casas, the name is most likely an homage to the town in Extremadura, Spain, made famous for a 14th Century Marian apparition.

Admiral Columbus took the two Taino youths and the women on board his ship to rescue them all from the cannibals, and continued his trek through the archipelago (Book 1, 43-44).

From Admiral Columbus's journals, de las Casas relates the crew's navigation to and from many islands, meeting various tribes, some hostile and warlike, and others peaceful. From the latter came emissaries of the Tainos of King Guacanagarí, who would go on to become Christopher Columbus's best friend, and whose son Columbus would eventually adopt upon Guacanagarí's death in a battle with a rival tribe (Book I, 45-47).

On his trek from island to island, Admiral Columbus found signs of more conflict. At first, he could not discern if they evidenced internecine warfare among the local tribes, or conflict between the indigenes and the Spanish settlers. They were, in fact, evidence of both. Regarding the latter conflict, however, members of a Taino tribe informed Admiral Columbus of the shocking tragedy that entire villages of Spaniards had been wiped out, either by disease or from attacks by indigenes; the Tainos provided confused stories as to the exact details of the settlers' ghastly fate (Book I, 46).

Though dismayed by these grisly tidings, Admiral Columbus and his crew carried on with their mission, and settled in a large river port on Hispaniola, which he named Isabela, after the Queen. There, the crew hastened to build homes, a church, a hospital, and a fort. But the men were exhausted and hungry; their food rotted with unexpected celerity due to the humid climate. To make matters worse, many of the settlers were entitled *hidalgos*, Spanish nobles, who deemed themselves above manual labor and refused to toil. De las Casas relates that "many noblemen raised in comfort who had never known a day of hardship in their lives found their misery intolerable and some died in a state of great turmoil." By March 29th, starvation, sickness, demoralization and death were the hallmarks of the Isabela settlement. With the very survival of the settlers hanging in the balance, Governor Columbus promised harsh penalties to the *hidalgos* if they refused to contribute their share of the work. To avoid the growing threat of famine, he also rationed food among the settlers. For these desperate measures, the *hidalgos* grew fiercely resentful of Governor Columbus, falsely accusing him of being "hateful of all Spaniards." Moreover, the *hidalgos* and other high-born Spaniards regarded Governor Columbus as a low-born foreigner in their midst, and this bigotry exacerbated their indignation, discontent and acrimony toward him (Book I, 47-50).

At this low point in the settlement effort, Captain Pedro Margarite of the settlement of Santo Tomás advised Governor Columbus that the tribe of Chief Caonabo planned to attack the fort at that location. The governor sent Captain Margarite a reinforcement of seventy men, and ordered Alonzo de Hojeda -- who would later become one of Governor Columbus's political rivals

-- to make a show of force with his squad to frighten the tribal warriors out of attacking, and thus avoid bloodshed. Hojeda exceeded his mandate in response to an act of deception by a chief of a nearby tribe. The chief double-crossed Hojeda by sending members of the tribe to “help” Hojeda’s men ford a river; the tribe members left the Spaniards stranded and stole their supplies. Hojeda’s retaliation was fierce, and far beyond what Governor Columbus had authorized; Hojeda cut off the ears of the chief’s kinsman, and shackled the chief and other members of his family to bring them back to the settlement (Book I, 50-51).

All the while, Governor Columbus was sick, starving, sleepless, and under enormous pressure and expectation from the Crown to deliver on their sizable investment in the second voyage. Hojeda brought before the beleaguered governor the double-crossing chief. The governor threatened capital punishment for the crime, but when the chief offered a tearful apology for the robbery, Christopher Columbus revoked the sentence immediately (Book I, 51).

No sooner had the situation been resolved did horsemen arrive with news of yet another conflict: an insurrection of the chief’s warriors who surrounded and attempted to kill five settlers. These continuing incidents made clear to Governor Columbus that in his absence, and without his pacifying presence and disciplined rulership of the settlers, relations between the indigenes and the Spaniards had soured terribly, resulting in some tribes declaring outright war on the settlers (Book I, 51-52).

De las Casas, as Protector of the Indians, sympathized with the tribes in these conflicts. He opined that “with their lord taken away prisoner” by Hojeda, the indigenes “had a right to declare a just war” against the settlers. Though he criticizes the settlers’ efforts “first and foremost to instill fear in these people” where they “should have taken pains to bring love and peace,” he exonerates Governor Columbus for his actions in this crisis thrust upon him. De las Casas writes, “Truly, I would not dare blame the admiral’s intentions, for I knew him well and I know his intentions were good.” Indeed, the governor ordered only a show of arms against the chief and his tribesmen in order to frighten them out of warring against and otherwise terrorizing the settlers. De las Casas notes that the Spaniards “were such a fierce-looking novelty, trespassing with arms and horses that seemed so ferocious.” Despite Hojeda’s indiscretion and the tensions it caused, Columbus availed himself of the Spaniards’ appearance of strength to ensure that not a single, additional drop of blood was spilled over the incidents (Book I, 52).

De las Casas demonstrates that despite the souring of relations between the indigenes and the Spanish settlers that occurred in Christopher Columbus’s absence -- when he had returned to Spain after the first voyage -- and the growing resentment of the *hidalgos* for Governor Columbus’s rationing of their food and insistence that they pull their weight in constructing the

Isabela settlement, the governor still managed to foster a mutual trust between himself and the tribes of the Americas. The indigenes informed Columbus of “the multitude of other islands in the vicinity,” which he explored “[t]o make provision of water and food” (Book I, 53-55).

On July 7, 1494, an elderly chief visited Columbus and his crewmen in Cuba, during a Mass. The chief noted “the priest’s rituals, the Christians’ signs of adoration, reverence and humility, and the respectful way they treated the admiral.” The chief gifted Columbus “a pumpkin-like bowl of native fruit,” sat with Columbus, and offered him kind counsel -- both spiritual and political -- regarding relations with the tribes. Columbus was delighted to learn that the spiritual beliefs of this particular tribe broadly mirrored those of Christianity. Columbus promised the old man that it was his solemn mission “to prevent” the “man-eating cannibals or Caribs...from doing such evil” against the other tribes and the settlers, “while defending and honoring the good people who lived in peace.” De las Casas recounts that “[t]he wise old man heard these words with tears of pleasure” and expressed his desire to travel with Columbus back to Castile. The old chief “sank to his knees with signs of admiration for men of such quality that he was not quite sure whether they had been born on earth or in Heaven.” De las Casas cites the writings of Christopher Columbus’s son Hernando, which are corroborated by “the more lengthy account in [15th Century historian] Pedro Martyr’s [epistolary historical accounts of Central and South American explorations] *Decadas*” and editorializes that he is not at all surprised by “the old man’s speech” (Book I, 55-56).

The “Scheme” Against Columbus by the Inimical *Hidalgos*

De las Casas recounts the seeds of sedition against Governor Columbus laid by the nobles chagrined by the governor’s labor distribution and strict rationing of food, including Benedictine Monk Fray Bernardo Buil and Captain Pedro Margarite of the Fort of Santo Tomás. The *hidalgos* retaliated fiercely. They seized Bartolomé Columbus’s ship and returned to Castile. They falsely told King Ferdinand “that he should not entertain any hopes of acquiring wealth in the Indies, for the whole affair was a joke, there simply was no gold on the island.” They conveniently neglected to inform the Crown that, being busy with constructing the settlement, no one had yet mined for any gold. In fact, Governor Columbus prohibited the settlers from stealing gold from the tribes; he allowed them only to barter for it. The deceptions of the resentful *hidalgos* convinced King Ferdinand that “Columbus’s enterprise [w]as a waste of money, which was reinforced by the fact that these gentlemen had not brought any gold with them.” De las Casas counters the lies of the *hidalgos* by arguing that given that Columbus only “had been there [in the West Indies] four months and a few days; how, then, could he have mistreated the Spaniards and

what was his bad government...? God only knows.” De las Casas notes that the angry *hidalgos* “worked hard against him in court” by hatching “the first and bitter trick against him”: they deceived the Crown into believing that “Columbus was busy unjustly harming the Indians, a scheme...that meant his first severe reprimand” (Book I, 56-57).

Juan Aguado: Royal Spy, Political Saboteur, Instigator of War

De las Casas introduces those confederates of the treacherous “scheme” to destroy Governor Columbus’s reputation and authority who carried out their respective roles in the colonies. The false reports of the resentful *hidalgos* who returned to Castile prompted King Ferdinand to send a spy to the West Indies, Juan Aguado. Aguado “began by throwing cold water on the admiral’s pleasure and prosperity” by portraying him as “tyrannically offending the Indians instead of converting them.” In fact, “the admiral was engaged in the war against King Caonabo.”¹⁰ De las Casas writes that “Aguado took on airs of authority and liberties he did not have when he meddled in juridical matters,” including “treating the admiral’s brother, Bartolomé, then acting governor, with little respect. Then Aguado went looking for the admiral.” Aguado incited the indigenes affected by their war to “thirst” for Governor Columbus’s murder, and diverted their attention from how such an event “might bring about worse disasters,” which Christopher Columbus’s pacifying influence prevented. Aguado’s machinations prompted “large gatherings of Indian chiefs [who] discussed the benefits that might result from a new admiral.” Aguado led them to believe that Governor Columbus “mistreated them; but they were mistaken.” This mistake would ultimately result in their extinguishment by the Spaniards who unseated Christopher Columbus from the governorship by the ultimate unfolding of this nascent, deceptive and ruinous “scheme” (Book I, 57-58).

Columbus Returns to Spain to Refute Aguado’s Slander

De las Casas relates Governor Columbus’s return to Spain after the second voyage. He left his brothers and “Chief Mayor” Francisco Roldán in charge of the West Indies in his absence. Upon his arrival in Spain, Governor Columbus presented the Crown with evidence to refute the resentful *hidalgos’* pernicious allegations that the West Indian “enterprise was a waste of money”: masks adorned with gold, and news of his discoveries of Cuba, Jamaica and other islands. De

¹⁰ Chief Guacanagarí informed Governor Columbus that Caonabo and his warriors had burned the Spanish settlement of La Navidad and murdered all of its inhabitants. Saunders, Nicholas J. *The Peoples of the Caribbean: An Encyclopedia of Archeology and Traditional Culture*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005, p. 41. Print.

las Casas writes, “[W]e shall not waste time mentioning Aguado’s reports since little attention was paid them,” further vindicating Christopher Columbus (Book I, 58-59).

Columbus and the Crown immediately discussed the terms of the third voyage -- whereupon Columbus intended to find the continent -- including how the Crown could entice Castilian citizens to move to and work in the New World. Among others, those convicted of all but the most serious crimes were granted clemency by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand for a few years of service on Hispaniola. So long as Christopher Columbus served as governor of the Indies, even these men of questionable background made fine settlers. De las Casas writes of a Castilian “whose ears had been cut off for a crime in Castile, and his conduct here [in Hispaniola] was beyond reproach” (Book I, 59-60). Only after the *hidalgos*’ grand scheme to unseat Columbus succeeded did these former criminals run amok under the new administration.

Alonso de Hojeda: The Pretender

Alonso de Hojeda, the military officer who exceeded the mandates of Governor Columbus in punishing a tribe of indigenes who had robbed his men, reappears in de las Casas’s account as one of the key conspirators in the sedition against the governor during the third voyage. Hojeda had learned, in the late 1490s, of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the continent of South America at the Paria peninsula of Venezuela. Without the Crown’s knowledge, Hojeda acquired the permission of Bishop Juan de Fonesca of Badajoz to explore the peninsula, and enlisted Amerigo Vespucci as his pilot. Hojeda lied about his departure date from Cádiz, Spain -- claiming he departed in 1497, though he actually departed in 1499 (Columbus departed on May 30, 1498) -- “in order to claim the discovery of the continent for himself, thus usurping the glory and honor due to Columbus alone” (Book I, 61).

De las Casas ensures to set the record straight. He cites a “number of eyewitnesses” who attest that “Columbus had discovered Paria” for the world east of the Atlantic, “as Pedro Martyr corroborates in his *Decadas*, I, 8, 9.” De las Casas notes also that Hojeda himself admitted eventually “that, having seen the chart [drawn by Christopher Columbus] in Castile, he explored Paria, the land already discovered by Columbus” (Book I, 61-62).

Christopher Columbus’s discovery of Paria and his first contact with the indigenes there yielded no known conflict. Hojeda’s crew was not so fortunate, experiencing mixed results from his first contact with the tribes of Paria (Book I, 62-63). In one encounter, the tribes of Paria attacked Hojeda and his men, wounding twenty-two of them, and killing one, according to the journals of Amerigo Vespucci, after whom the Americas were named. De las Casas notes as an

aside to this account that the continents rightly “should have been called Columbia” (citing Chapter 139 of the unabridged *Historia de las Indias*, p. 40), and that Hernando Columbus has “documentary proof” making “clear that [Christopher] Columbus discovered the continent” for Europe (Book I, 62).

De las Casas relates another encounter in which Hojeda and his men “rowed to shore” making “the Christians’ signs of peace and friendship” to “an intimate number of naked people” who “stood gaping” at the sight of their arrival. So shocked were these indigenes by the sight, they nevertheless went “fleeing into the woods” (Book I, 63).

Hojeda and his crew set sail again, dropping anchor two leagues further down the coast. There, they found yet another tribe of “people lining the banks, gathered there to see such a novelty.” Forty Spaniards “went ashore, calling to the people and flashing mirrors and Castilian beads until some of the Indians dared to approach to take what was offered them.” The following morning, “the beach was full of Indians, men, women and children happily staring at the ship. And when the Christians put the boats out to sea, some swam up to meet them. The trusting Indians welcomed our men, milling around them as if they had known them all their lives.”

The difference in outcomes between Columbus’s encounters and those of Hojeda likely had less to do with fortune than with the varying traditions and beliefs of the disparate tribes. More importantly Admiral Columbus’s success in dealing with the tribes of the West Indies resulted from his “good natured, kind...and pious” character (Book I, 15), which Hojada sorely lacked.

Amerigo Vespucci’s Anthropography of the Tribes Encountered on Hojeda’s Voyage

De las Casas offers some insight into the difficulties the Europeans and indigenes experienced in dealing with one another. In very large part, these difficulties resulted from a wide disparity in cultural mores that to European sensibilities seemed shocking and even horrifying, as evidenced, for example, by the settlers’ reactions to the cannibalism of the Caribs (Book I, 43-44). To the indigenes, the Spaniards seemed fearsome, as evidenced, for example, by the flight of the Paria denizens upon seeing Hojeda’s crew alight from their technologically sophisticated sailing ship carrying mirrors and other alien artifacts (Book I, 63). He synthesizes the anthropographic writings of Amerigo Vespucci, the pilot of Hojeda’s ship, detailing the observed cultural traditions of the various tribes they encountered on their expedition through the Paria peninsula (Book I, 63-68). The traditions of the various Venezuelan tribes that de las Casas highlights makes the culture clash self-evident.

Of that tribe that Hojeda's crew encountered on the peninsular coast, de las Casas recounts that Vespucci observed that they wore no clothing, but went about entirely naked, a shocking, visual first impression that could not go unnoticed by the Europeans. The tribe members carried "very sharp weapons and were excellent marksmen" who fought and warred with other tribes "of another language group who ha[d] killed one of them." They ate fish and meat in clay pots and slept in cotton hammocks in large, bell shaped houses made of wood and palm, "housing up to 600 people at one time." Having lived in such a close communal arrangement, "[t]hey are extremely generous with their possessions...and expect the same degree of liberality" from others (Book I, 63-64).

De las Casas notes, however, that the writings of Vespucci reveal habits of some Paria tribes that "on the other hand" seemed so foreign to the Europeans that "it reads like pure fiction." Perhaps the most shocking of these was that "that they seldom eat meat unless it be the flesh of their enemies," and that the tribes "were astonished to see that Christians do not eat their enemies." The tribes of Paria had no marriages, but shared their womenfolk and daughters, choosing to impregnate them "and leave them as they please." The women "force stillbirths" of their babies by eating certain herbs "if they tire of their men." The tribes of Paria "do not seem to have any religion; at least, they have no temples or prayer houses." Almost as a comic afterthought, de las Casas adds that Vespucci noted, "they think nothing of urinating and passing wind in public" (Book I, 64-65).

De las Casas also quotes the writings of "the Portuguese priests of the Company of Jesus," the Jesuits, who wrote of the tribes inhabiting Brazil, to whom they referred -- not necessarily pejoratively -- as "castes of heathens." Some of these tribes seemed relatively benign and even pleasing to the Jesuits. Of the Goyanzes and Carijos, for example, the Jesuits noted that they embraced Christianity "so well that they had convent-like houses for women and retreat houses like monasteries for men." Of the "giant" people of the Cayamure tribe, they noted that although they pierced their underlips and nostrils with bone ornaments and practiced sorcery, they otherwise lived in the mountains in isolation, wore beards (unlike the other tribes who depilated their faces, heads and bodies), were able to "run [through] the woods at great speed," inspired great fear among their enemy tribes by fighting ferociously with "the strongest bows...in one hand and a club in the other," and called the Portuguese "brothers" (Book I, 66-69).

However, other tribes, such as the Tupeniques and Tupinambas, practiced traditions that, at best, unnerved and, at worst, appalled the Europeans. Of the former sort, the Jesuits noted, these tribes "live in large palm houses [containing] up to fifty families per house" and slept near fire "to protect them from cold and evil spirits." They "worship no other gods than thunder, which

they call *tupana*, meaning something like ‘divine object.’” Every few years, shamans arrived wearing painted pumpkin masks, each “chang[ing] his voice to that of a child” and counselling or predicting nonsensical things, such as that “food will grow and come to their houses by itself”; “tools will go out digging and arrows will fly out to the woods and bring back the game”; and “old women will turn into maidens and daughters will be free for all.” Of the latter, more disturbing, variety, the Jesuits noted that prisoners of war were fattened and pampered before a grisly slaughter in front of “everyone...from the neighboring villages” who came “to see the festivities.” Each war prisoner was “given the girl of his choice or the chief’s daughter” as a concubine, “and is fattened like a pig until judged ripe for the killing.” The Tupeniques and Tupinambas then cleaned and killed the prisoner of war; “then they cut him to pieces and eat them roasted or boiled” (Book I, 67-68).

De las Casas views these shocking traditions not through the lens of xenophobia, but rather as a function of the absence of what he considered to be the singular civilizing force of his day: “the Faith” (Prologue, 6; Book I, 38). He writes, “When we examine this world, experience shows us the truth of what the Scriptures teach us about God’s infallible Providence” (Book I, 65). De las Casas emphasizes that Christianity converted the Spaniards of ancient times from “liv[ing] like animals” and “full of wild and irrational defects,” such as “grave and nefarious idolatry,” into a “smoothly organized” nation (Prologue, 6). Thus, he concludes, “divine Providence ordained” that to the tribes of the West Indies “the practice of moral virtue...be taught...according to the principles established by Christ” (Prologue, 8). For Christopher Columbus’s adherence to this same philosophy in the face of the “schemes” of those who sought to “usurp[] the glory and honor due” him, de las Casas continuously characterizes “the illustrious Genoese” as “good-natured, kind[,] pious,” and a man of “good judgment” chosen by “divine Providence” (Book I, 15, 17). De las Casas counsels that like Christopher Columbus, all who encounter the tribes of the West Indies “admit to the world that the Indians descend from Adam our father, and this suffices for us to respect the divine principle of charity toward them, since we were so privileged as to be brought to Christianity before them” (Book I, 65-66).

The Final Plot Against Governor Columbus

Book I concludes with de las Casas’s reproduction of a letter from Christopher Columbus to Doña Juana de Torres, the governess of the deceased Prince Juan de Torres, son of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand. Columbus wrote the letter during his abrupt return from this third voyage in 1500, the result of the treachery of his political enemies. The Crown was torn between the false accounts of the resentful *hidalgos* that no gold was to be found in the West Indies, and

the accounts of Governor Columbus, who assured the Crown that through mining and barter with the tribes, enough gold could be procured to constitute a satisfactory return on the sizeable investment it made on the voyages from the royal treasury. To settle the matter, the Crown tasked Francisco de Bobadilla, a Spanish politician, with visiting the West Indies to provide an accounting of the gold to be found there. The Crown authorized Bobadilla, if he found the *hidalgos'* accusations to be true that Governor Columbus was purposefully withholding gold or engaging in any other wrongdoing, to replace him and assume the title of Viceroy of the West Indies. Fueled by this promise of usurping the office of Governor Columbus and seizing control of the West Indies, Bobadilla launched a merciless attack on Columbus to remove him from office by any means necessary (Book I, 69).

Upon Bobadilla's arrival in Hispaniola, he fabricated false charges against Governor Columbus and his two brothers; ordered them arrested and shackled in chains; and transported them back to Cádiz, Spain as prisoners. André Martín, the master of the caravel transporting the Columbus brothers, tried to remove Christopher Columbus's chains, but Columbus refused, insisting that "only the monarchs could do this." During the journey, Columbus wrote letters presenting his defense to the Crown, including the letter to Doña Juana that de las Casas reproduces in *Historia de las Indias*. Upon arriving in Spain, Master Martín "dispatched a secret message to the King from Cádiz, hoping to counterinfluence the reports of Bobadilla" and refute his slander (Book I, 69).

Christopher Columbus's letter to Doña Juana poignantly reveals his own mindset, morals and motivations. He wrote that he finds himself fighting "a thousand battles" by which he has been "cruelly cast down." He laments that in his current condition, "the basest of men thinks nothing of abusing me," and that he "would give up the whole business if it were not for the honor of the Queen and God." In other words, for piety and chivalry did he bear the countless injuries and indignities inflicted upon him. But Christopher Columbus's piety was also his preserving hope; citing the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, in which God closed the maws of lions to save the eponymous Israelite, who was cast into their den while in service to the King of Babylon (Daniel 6: 1-28), and repelled the flames of the fire pit from Daniel's three companions when they refused to bow to the Babylonian idol (Daniel 3: 1-30), Columbus maintained faith that "Our Lord exists...and He displays His wisdom and power when he pleases" (Book I, 73). Columbus entrusted that "the world will in time praise the man who abstained from abuse, thinking it virtuous to abstain (Book I, 70).

Hojeda and Pinzón: Fomenting War and Suspicion

Christopher Columbus recounts in his letter to Doña Juana the events that caused the settlement effort to go awry. First, upon establishing communities in Paria, Venezuela, he hired the occupants to fish for pearls, but they violated their contracts and stole the pearls by the bushel. “Then [Alonzo de] Hojeda arrived and upset everything.” Hojeda warred with the tribes of Paria, joined by “little else but vagabonds,” each without “a wife or children.” Hojeda’s hostilities caused the Paria tribes to attack Columbus “most seriously.” Governor Columbus dealt with Hojeda by peaceably sending him back to Spain in spite of all the bloodshed Hojeda caused. “Then [conquistador] Vicente Yáñez [Pinzón] arrived with four caravels.” Pinzón had captained the *Niña* on Admiral Columbus’s first voyage. Columbus relates that Pinzón’s return was troublesome to the Hispaniola settlements, “causing excitement and suspicion but no damages” (Book I, 70-71).

Adrián de Moxica and Francisco Roldán: Agents of Betrayal and Rebellion

The exile of Hojeda did little to end hostilities with the tribes. Columbus recounts, “A certain Adrián [de Moxica],” a Spanish nobleman who, with the assistance of Mayor Francisco Roldán, initiated atrocities against the tribes against the will of Governor Columbus, “tried to rebel again.” Columbus attests, “I had determined never to touch a hair on anyone’s head,” but that he “could not save” Moxica from arrest and hanging. Columbus emphasized his regret that Moxica’s crimes called for capital punishment, but laments that they were so heinous that Columbus “would have acted in the same way toward my own brother” if he had done the same (Book I, 71).

Betrayed by his own mayor, and beleaguered by the hostilities of the conquistadors, Columbus beseeched the Crown for help. He writes, “I wanted to escape from governing these dissolute people...full of vice and malice” and “begged Their Highnesses...to send someone at my expense to administer justice.” This request would be Columbus’s undoing as governor of the West Indies. The Crown complied. They sent Francisco de Bobadilla (Book I, 71).

Weary though Governor Columbus was of these troublesome conquistadors when he made his request to the Crown for help, he nevertheless had succeeded, after the conclusion of the Moxica affair, in restoring peace and prosperity to the West Indies. To Doña Juana, he wrote, “When Comendador Bobadilla arrived in Santo Domingo I was in La Vega” in the Dominican Republic, “and my brother [Bartolomé] the *Adelantado* was in Xaraguá” in Hispaniola; “only by now things were calm, the land was rich and everyone lived in peace” (Book I, 71). This *pax Columbiana* was to be short-lived. Bobadilla “took up residence in my home and he took everything,” including all of Governor Columbus’s documents. In particular, “those which would

have cleared me are the ones he kept most hidden” (Book I, 76). Bobadilla then took control of the settlements. “The day after he arrived he constituted himself governor, appointed officials, performed executive acts, and announced gold franchises and the remission of titles...for a period of twenty years, which is a man’s lifetime” (Book I, 72).

Bobadilla did all this in Governor Columbus’s absence (Book I, 73), and without notifying the Crown (Book I, 76). He announced to the populace that he intended to arrest the governor and his brothers and put them in chains (Book I, 72, 74). Diego Columbus became Bobadilla’s first prisoner. Unaware of any of this, Christopher Columbus “wrote to welcome” Bobadilla from La Vega, thinking him the agent sent by the Crown to “administer justice” that he requested (Book I, 72). Instead Bobadilla’s “first concern was to take the gold while I was away; he said he wanted it to pay the people, but I heard that he kept the first part for himself and sent for new traders.” Columbus added, “When I heard of this, I thought it was only something mild like the Hojeda affair” (Book I, 72). However, when Columbus arrived from La Vega, Bobadilla carried out his threat to put him in chains, and then did the same to the *adelantado*, Bartolomé Columbus, when he finally arrived (Book I, 74). Having made captives of all three of the Columbus brothers, Bobadilla had successfully usurped the hereditary title of Viceroy of the West Indies.

Columbus had no idea of the extent of Bobadilla’s depravity. As the self-appointed Viceroy of the Indies, Bobadilla provoked the settlers, gathered “rebels and other untrustworthy people” and aroused against Columbus “a quantity of people [who] did not deserve baptism before God or the world,” including slavers “who go out to look for women [and] nine- or ten-year-old girls [selling them] at a premium” on the slave market (Book I, 73). As Bobadilla’s prisoner, Columbus learned that Bobadilla “did everything in his power to harm me” and such damage to Hispaniola that “Their Highnesses...would be astonished to find that the island is still standing” (Book I, 74).

Once Bobadilla had removed Christopher Columbus as an obstacle, he undid all the restraints on the Spanish *encomienda* system that Governor Columbus had effected to discipline the indolent *hidalgos*. Thus, Bobadilla’s true reign of terror commenced. He eliminated the *hidalgos*’ requirement to pay all but nominal taxes. He imposed forced labor upon the indigenes as miners and cooks so the *hidalgos* would not have to labor (Book II, 78). Worse, Bobadilla

assigned Indian tribes to [the colonists], thus making [the Spaniards] very happy. You should have seen those hoodlums, exiled from Castile for homicide with crimes yet to be accounted for, served by native kings and their vassals doing the meanest chores. These chiefs had daughters, wives and other close relations whom the Spaniards took for concubines either with their own consent or by force

(Book II, 78). With Bobadilla’s usurpation from Christopher Columbus of the governance of the West Indies, the *encomienda*, as well as Bobadilla’s own personal brand of tyranny, reigned

supreme. De las Casas writes of this dark time, "The Spaniards loved and adored [Bobadilla] in exchange for such favors, help and advice, because they knew how much freer they were now than under Columbus" (Book II, 78-79).

Bobadilla not only "took no measures to remedy or avoid the situation," but told the *hidalgos*, "Take as many advantages as you can since you don't know how long this will last" (Book II, 79). Indeed Bobadilla knew that his calumnious writings against Columbus were lies; that his own deeds as the new Viceroy were nothing short of the most profane wickedness; and that when the Crown heard Christopher Columbus's true accounts, much, if not all of Bobadilla's unjust overreaching would be revoked.

Indeed, Christopher Columbus set forth to set things right, even in chains. In captivity in Hispaniola, and on the ship to Cádiz where, shackled, he wrote his letter to Doña Juana, Columbus relied not only on his faith for assurance and internal strength, but on his confidence in his position and the propriety of his deeds. He wrote that "Comendador Bobadilla is striving to explain his conduct, but I will easily show him that his scant knowledge, great cowardice and exorbitant greed are the motives that pushed him into it." He adds, "Their Highnesses will know this when they order him to give an account, especially if I am present when he gives it" (Book I, 74-75).

Though confident in his rectitude, Christopher Columbus bore no hubris or illusions that he was an infallible governor. Indeed, he recognized his own limitations as a politician, including his naive trust that the *hidalgos* would respect his authority, though he was, in fact, a low-born Genoan among entitled Spanish nobles. He admonished that he should not be "judge[d] as if I were a governor in Sicily or of a well-regulated town or city" -- where the social fabric is intact and the laws "observed in their entirety." Rather, "I should be judged as a captain who left Spain for the Indies" and found himself unwittingly in "a warlike nation [with] no towns or governments," all the while opposed by villainous conquistadors who imposed upon him "the ingratitude of injuries" (Book I, 75).

Conclusion

Thus ends Book I, and de las Casas's account of the first eight years of the history of the West Indies. The chronicle of Bobadilla's nightmarish reign of terror, as well as the account of Christopher Columbus's vindication at trial and triumphant return on his fourth voyage, which the Crown agreed to fund, appear in greater detail in Book II of *History of the Indies*, of which I shall provide a report subsequently.

The account in Book I, as well as the reproduction of Columbus's journal and epistles, reflects the belief of de las Casas and Christopher Columbus that the civil rights of the indigenes proceed logically from the transcendent value of all humans, which is nested in the metaphysical beliefs of Judeo-Christian mores. Columbus's and de las Casas's piety and devotion to these sacred tenets demonstrate a consensus of morality of the civilized nations of the time that was predicated on the metaphysical presupposition that an intangible divinity inhabits each individual, so transcendent and valuable that even the law must acquiesce to it. De las Casas states this explicitly when he writes "that the Indians descend from Adam our father, and this suffices for us to respect the divine principle of charity toward them, since we were so privileged as to be brought to Christianity before [encountering] them" (Book I, 65-66)." De las Casas notes that organized societies of this time in human history were predicated on this belief of the divine spark of humanity, and that this belief is imbedded in the law and the idea of natural right that undergirded Spain's *Siete Partidas* and the laws of its sister nations, such as England -- and indeed continues to undergird modern Western law as it has evolved.

De las Casas's and Christopher Columbus's belief in the divinity of the human soul, the transcendence and value of each individual, and the self-evident truth of natural right provided the cornerstone of the European Enlightenment, the first sparks of which were but a century away, in no small part due to the contributions of Christopher Columbus himself, the scientist and civil rights activist. Equally predicated on this profound axiom is the presumption of innocence, eradicated by Bobadilla during his persecution of Governor Columbus until, as Book II of *History of the Indies* relates, as will my next report, "the illustrious Genoese Christopher Columbus" vindicated himself forever after before the Crown of Spain and the world.