

Name: _____

Period: _____

Date: _____

Describe and analyze the economic and social effects of the Spanish conquest of the Americas after 1492.

Historical Background: Following Christopher Columbus's encounter with the Americas in 1492, waves of Spanish conquistadors arrived, hoping to stake their own claim on the "New World."

Document 1

Source: Hernando Cortes, Letters from Mexico, August 12, 1521:

On leaving my camp, I commanded Gonzalo de Sandoval to sail the brigantines (ships) in between the houses in the other quarter in which the Indians were resisting, so that we should have them surrounded, but not to attack until he saw that we were engaged. In this way they would have been surrounded and so hard pressed that they would have no place to move save over the bodies of their dead or along the roof tops. They no longer could find any arrow, javelins or stones with which to attack us; and our allies fighting with us were armed with swords and bucklers, and slaughtered so many of them on land and in the water that more than forty thousand were killed or taken that day.

Document 2

Source: Bernardino de Sahagun, a Franciscan friar who was instrumental in preserving information about Aztec culture, *General History of the Things of New Spain*, 1519-1521:

After the previously mentioned hardships that befell the Spaniards in the year 1519, at the beginning of the year 1520 the epidemic of smallpox, measles and pustules broke out so virulently that a vast number of people died throughout this New Spain. This pestilence began in the province of Chalco and last for sixty days. Among the Mexicans who fell victim to the pestilence was the lord Cuitlahuactzin, whom they had elected a little earlier. Many leaders, many veteran soldiers, and valiant men who were their defense in time of war, also died.

Document 3

Source: Antonio Vasquez de Espinosa, a Spanish friar and missionary who sought to convert the Indians to Christianity, describes the silver mines of Potosi:

These Indians are sent out every year under a captain whom they choose in each village or tribe, for him to take them and oversee them for the year each had to serve; every year they have a new election, for as some go out, others come in. This works out very badly, with great losses and gaps in the quotas of Indians, the villages being depopulated; and this gives rise to great extortions and abuses on the part of the inspectors toward the poor Indians, ruining them and thus depriving the chief Indians of their property and carrying them off in chains because they do not fill out the mita assignment...

So huge is the wealth which has been taken out of this range since the year 1545, when it was discovered, up to the present year of 1628, which makes it 83 years that they have been working and reducing its ores, and that merely from the registered mines, as appears from an examination of most of the accounts in the royal records, 326,000,000 pesos have been taken out.

Document 4

Juan Gines de Sepaeulveda (1490-1573), a scholar and apologist for the Spanish treatment of the Indians in the Americas:

Turning then to our topic, whether it is proper and just that those who are superior and who excel in nature, customs, and laws rule over their inferiors, you can easily understand...if you are familiar with the character and moral code of the two peoples, that it is with perfect right that the Spaniard exercise their domination over those barbarians of the New World and its adjacent islands. For in prudence, talent and every kind of virtue and human sentiment they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children are to adults, or women to men, or the cruel and inhumane to the very gentle, or the excessively intemperate to the continent and moderate...

Document 5

Bartolome de las Casas, Dominican friar, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 1542:

As we have said, the island of Hispaniola was the first to witness the arrival of Europeans and the first to suffer the wholesale slaughter of its people and the devastation and depopulation of the land. It all began with the Europeans taking native women and children both as servants and to satisfy their own bas appetites: than not content with what the local people offered them of their own free will (and all offered as much as they could spare), they started taking for themselves the food that natives contrived to produce by the sweat of their brows, (which was in all honestly little enough)...Some of them started to conceal food they had, others decided to send their women and children into hiding, and yet others took to the hills to get away from the brutal and ruthless cruelty that was being inflicted on them...

Document 6

Source: Engraving by Flemish engraver Theodor de Bry taken from a 16th-century Dutch edition on *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* by Bartolome de las Casas:

