



STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (063)

TEXT: *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*

AUTHOR: Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas

EDITOR: Jean-Paul Duviols (Université de Paris-Sorbonne)

PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on Prof. Duviols' Introduction)

1. FROM ENCOMENDERO TO DEFENDER:

- **The Transformation:** Las Casas was not born a defender of the Indians. He arrived in Hispaniola in 1502 as a colonizer and held an *encomienda* in Cuba.
- **The Turning Point:** The sermon by Fray Antonio de Montesinos (1511) – "Ego vox clamantis in deserto" – planted the seed, but witnessing the massacre at Caonao (Cuba) and his subsequent reading of Ecclesiasticus 34 ("He that sacrificeth of a thing wrongfully gotten...") led to his "conversion" in 1514.
- **Key Concept:** Las Casas renounced his encomienda to dedicate his life to the "reformation of the Indies."

2. THE "BREVÍSIMA" AS A POLITICAL WEAPON:

- **Genre:** It is not a history book in the modern sense; it is a "**Memorial de Agravios**" (legal grievance) and a pamphlet.
- **Rhetorical Strategy:** Las Casas uses *accumulatio* (piling up atrocities) and *manichaeism* (Indians as "gentle sheep," Spaniards as "starving wolves") to shock Prince Philip II into action.
- **The Statistics Controversy:** While his numbers (millions dead) are often hyperbolic, modern historians agree with his core thesis: the demographic collapse of the Caribbean indigenous population was near-total (from ~1 million to almost zero).

3. THE "BLACK LEGEND" (LA LEYENDA NEGRA):

- **Origin:** The text was weaponized by Spain's enemies (Protestant Dutch, English, French) to depict Spaniards as uniquely cruel.
- **The Irony:** It was cited by Latin American independence leaders (Bolívar, Martí) as justification for breaking with Spain, yet in Spain, it was banned by the Inquisition in 1659 not for heresy, but for "state security."
- **Modern View:** Duviols argues that Las Casas represents the "first cry for human rights" in the Americas, transcending the nationalistic debate of the Black Legend.



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PART 2: CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

THEME A: The Just War (La Guerra Justa)

- **Debate:** Analyze the arguments of the *Valladolid Controversy* (1550).
 - **Sepúlveda's View:** Indians are "natural slaves" (Aristotle); war is necessary to civilize them.
 - **Las Casas' View:** All nations are human; evangelization must be peaceful. War against them is tyrannical.
- **Question for Class:** How does the "Requerimiento" (read to indigenous people in Spanish) illustrate the legalistic absurdity of the conquest?

THEME B: The Power of Rhetoric

- **Analysis:** Have students pick a passage from the *Brevísima* and identify the rhetorical devices used. How does Las Casas manipulate language to evoke pity and rage?
 - **Keywords:** "Destrucción," "Despedazar," "Tiranos," "Inocentes."

THEME C: Precursor to Human Rights?

- **Discussion:** Is it accurate to call Las Casas a "human rights activist" before the concept existed? Discuss his famous maxim: "*All the nations of the world are men*" (Todas las naciones del mundo son hombres).
- **Nuance:** Discuss his initial (and later regretted) suggestion to import African slaves to save the Indians. How does this complicate his legacy?

PART 3: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

- 1. What event primarily triggered Las Casas' conversion from encomendero to defender of the Indians?** A) The arrival of Christopher Columbus. B) The "Sermon of Montesinos" and the massacre at Caonao. C) A direct order from King Ferdinand. D) His appointment as Bishop of Chiapas. (Correct: B)
- 2. According to Prof. Duvíols, what is the literary genre of the "Brevísima relación"?** A) An objective historical chronicle. B) A personal diary. C) A "Memorial de Agravios" (legal grievance) and pamphlet. D) A theological treatise. (Correct: C)
- 3. What was the "Requerimiento"?** A) A request for more gold sent to the King. B) A legal document read to indigenous people demanding submission to the Spanish Crown and Pope. C) A letter of peace offered by Las Casas. D) The list of goods traded between Europe and the Americas. (Correct: B)
- 4. How did Las Casas view the "Black Legend" usage of his work?** A) He wrote it specifically to help England and France attack Spain. B) He never intended it to be used by foreign powers; his goal was internal reform of the Spanish Empire. C) He published it in London to gain international support. D) He denied writing the book. (Correct: B)
- 5. In the Valladolid Controversy (1550), Las Casas debated against Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda regarding:** A) The route to the Spice Islands. B) The legitimacy of the "Just War" against indigenous people. C) The taxation of gold imports. D) The boundaries of the Bishopric of Chiapas. (Correct: B)



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PART 4: CITATION GUIDE (Stockcero Edition)

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