

A Summary on "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies"

By Bartolomé de las Casas

The book's name is the following: "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies" by Bartolomé de las Casas. It was written by him in 1542. It was later published in 1552. Bartolomé de las Casas was a Spaniard who was there when the Americas were being colonized for the first time. He would then write "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies" based on the atrocities, inhumanity, brutality, and massacre of the indigenous peoples of the newly discovered Americas. It was written as a message to the Spanish Crown to show the lack of morals and a plea for justice in the Americas. I believe that it was pretty effective in showing the inhumanity of the Spaniards because of the passion he shows, as well as the fact that he was an eyewitness to the whole thing, meaning he was actually there. Though his argument had strengths, it definitely had flaws, such as showing the Natives as completely innocent, and that some accuracy of the events was given up for the sake of making a point.

De las Casas' main point was that the Spaniards were overwhelmingly violent and cruel to the Native populations of the Americas. He claimed that there were numerous accounts of torture, massacres, and enslavement of the Native population. A quote that I believed showed that brutality would be the following: "They made some low wide gallows on which the hanged victims' feet almost touched the ground, and they burned the Indians alive thirteen at a time, in honor of our Savior and the twelve Apostles." Las Casas also believed that obviously that the Spanish were morally wrong and went against Christian values. An example being the

following.” And it is a great sorrow and heartbreak to see this land which was so flourishing, and so happy, destroyed, and turned into a desert by the Christians who call themselves sons of God and followers of Christ.” Another piece of evidence that he provided was when the Natives would welcome the Spanish just to get slaughtered. The author repeatedly stated the mass killings executed by the Spanish. He would often get into detail to make the Spanish look even worse. One such quote being,” They would snatch young children from their mothers' breasts by the feet, and dash their heads against the rocks.” He truly wanted to reveal the true morals of the Spanish conquistadors to the Spanish Crown.

The book itself is rather convincing in getting Bartolomé de las Casas' message out there. The message being that the Spaniards' actions are against Christian morals as well as unreasonably brutal and violent, and straight up morally unjust. There are numerous strengths and weaknesses to his argument. The biggest strength to aid his argument would be the fact that he is speaking from a first-person point of view. This means he was physically there for the events and actions that he is writing about. He isn't reporting the stories that he has heard, but rather his personal experiences that he himself witnessed. -“I saw all these things, and many others that I omit, with my own eyes, and I swear before God that it is the truth.” Another strength of his book would be the tone he speaks in. He speaks rather emotionally, showing how harsh the situation is for the indigenous people of the Americas and how urgent it is for the audience(Spanish Crown) to interfere. A quote that can back this up would be “Such inhumanities and barbarisms were committed in my sight as no age can parallel... My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature that I now tremble as I write.” His graphic

descriptions of the events make it feel as if there was no way that what he is describing could be lies. “The Spaniards tore the natives to shreds, hacking, stabbing, and slaughtering them with swords and lances, and invented new ways of torturing and killing, such as burning them alive, cutting off their hands and noses, or throwing them into pits full of sharp stakes.” That quote went into detail about what they were doing causing the audience to think about the question, “would he really think about writing that if it didn’t happen?” Another thing you could factor in would be the fact that Bartolomé himself was Spanish. I’d say there is little to no bias, as he would just be talking down on his own people. There are indeed weaknesses to his argument, though. One being his over exaggeration of data. I’m talking about the millions he claimed to be dead, when in reality it’s practically impossible to find out the true amount, being that the book was written back in 1542. Another flaw in his writing is that he portrays the Natives as completely or close to perfect which simply couldn’t be true as there was definitely some resistance. Once again another weakness would be the point that he is pleading to the court, not the people. He is still loyal to the monarchy, which at the time, could be questionable. One last major flaw I’d say would be the fact there is no perspective or input from the Native population. The whole record is based off Las Casas’ word.

In conclusion, “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies” is a very powerful book to showcase the actual, “Destruction of the Indies” It was emotionally written about the Spanish crime that has been committed. His first-person narration of the everything provides a new light to the what is really happening in Americas at the time. Though there are

exaggerations and weaknesses to the overall book it still is a vital piece of history that showcases the conquest of the Spanish and the bloodied history of the United States and the rest of the Americas.