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### Enslaved Peoples

- **Spanish:** [Enslaved Indians in the Caribbean](#), 1500s (PDF)

- **Spanish:** [Enslaved Africans in Mexico](#), 1537 (PDF)

Europeans' enslavement of Native Americans began with Columbus. As the governor of Hispaniola, he forced the Taino Indians to labor in the Spanish fields and mines, and he brought Taino slaves to Spain on his return journeys. About 50,000 Taino died within two years of Columbus's arrival, and by 1510 the Taino population had declined by nearly 90%, primarily from European diseases but also from brutal treatment. A new source of forced labor was required. In 1518 the Spanish king allowed the importation of slaves directly from Africa (previously they had been Spanish-born Africans), and the Atlantic slave trade to the western hemisphere began in earnest, finally ending over three centuries later with the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888.

- **INDIANS of the CARIBBEAN.** Brief selections from the accounts of three clergymen in the Spanish Caribbean are presented here, all commenting on the use of forced Indian labor by the colonists. Dated from 1518 to 1561, they include a stern condemnation of slavery, a recommendation to liberate and convert the Indians (the better to exploit their labor), and a plea to import "Negro slaves" to replace the disappearing Indians. [Accounts and reports of Fr. Bernardino de Manzanedo, 1518; the Bishop of Santiago, 1544; and Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas, 1561]
- **AFRICANS in MEXICO.** The first major slave revolt in North America occurred on the island of Hispaniola in 1522 when enslaved African Muslims rebelled and killed nine Spanish before being recaptured. Thereafter the Spanish were fearfully attuned to the rumors of slave rebellion. In this selection the viceroy of Mexico reports on a thwarted revolt by enslaved Africans in 1537, requesting that the shipment of slaves be temporarily suspended in order to limit the African numbers. Otherwise, the viceroy warns, the Spanish "might be unable to control the situation and the land might be lost." [Report of Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, to King Charles I of Spain, 1537]

The transition from Indian to African slavery in Spanish America is encapsulated in these selections that, while brief, convey years of domination and suffering. (4 pages.)

## Enslaved Africans in Mexico: The 1537 Rebellion Plot

Report of Antonio de Mendoza,  
Viceroy of New Spain, to King  
Charles I of Spain. Excerpts.

**on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September** I was advised that the Blacks had chosen a king and had reached an agreement to kill all Spaniards and seize the land, and that the Indians were also involved. Since the news was brought to me by one of the Blacks, I did not give it much importance. Nevertheless, I did attempt to find out secretly what truth there was in the rumor, and at the same time I ordered some members of my own household to go among the Indians and, if such were found, to inform me at once. For I had been warned, and although I had not really believed in the existence of danger, I did not want to be unprepared for the possibility that the rumors might be true and the Blacks might overwhelm us. . . . As a result of my efforts I did uncover a few clues, and I immediately ordered the arrest of as many of the principal plotters as could be apprehended. I also sent word to the mines and towns where there are Spaniards living so that they would be forewarned and keep a close watch on the Blacks in those places; and this they did. The Blacks who were arrested confessed that it was true that they had plotted to seize the

country. Groups of sentries were formed and stationed in this city and in the mines of Amatepacque, where I sent two dozen of them, together with four Black men and one Black woman, to Francisco Vazquez de Coronado. The Indians killed these Blacks . . . since I had ordered that they be arrested or killed. With this the matter was brought to an end.

We have tried to find out all that we could about the complicity of the natives in this, but as of this moment have been unable to establish any more than the fact that they were unaware of the plot, although the Blacks originated it; it would have been unfortunate for us if they had persisted in it.

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There is no doubt that among the things which gave the Blacks the courage to plot this revolt were, first of all, the wars and preoccupations which beset Your Majesty.<sup>1</sup> The news from abroad is sent in more detail than is necessary and reaches the ears of the Blacks and the Indians in its entirety, with nothing hidden from them. Secondly, under present conditions ships take such a long time to reach us that one friar was said to have spread the rumor that no ships would be coming from Spain for ten years. He says that this remark was falsely attributed to him, but I am not surprised by what the Blacks have attempted because the Spaniards do betray anxiety about the arrival of ships in spite of the fact that tranquility has now been restored. Your Majesty should send ships regularly so that news from abroad reaches us regularly. If this were done, it would contribute greatly to the general contentment, and the country would be more peaceful. In view of all this and in the belief that, if there were fewer Blacks in this land, such plots would not be lightly undertaken, I write to ask Your Majesty to suspend the sending of the Blacks I had requested for the time being, because if there were large numbers of them [here] and another such plot occurred we might be unable to control the situation and the land might be lost. Since this revolt of the Blacks I have attempted to make the populace more alert to the dangers and also to determine what arms and horses each resident has. We can count on 450 men with horses and an equal number on foot but well armed, and a few others.