



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1992 Volume II: Writing and Re-writings of the Discovery and Conquest of America

Dividing the Spoils: Portugal and Spain in South America

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.02.06
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This unit presents, in stages, the history of the discovery and conquest of the South American lowland rain forest people. The first section explores the conflict between Spain and Portugal over the rights to unexplored territories. For this maps and overlays are used. The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas and the resultant 20th century national boundaries in South America will be a focus point in this segment of the unit.

The second section encompasses the early history of the exploration and conquest of South America focusing particularly on the comparison between the Spanish and Portuguese custom or style of expansion. The systems of agriculture and slavery are compared.

In the third section, students will be exposed to the reactions the natives may have had to the Europeans. Early writings about the initial contact between Europeans and the South American Indians are included. Excerpts from Columbus' diaries about the people he "discovered" will be used. In contrast, excerpts from "Broken Spears" will be used to suggest the response the Indians had to the Europeans. Some passages from "The Harp and the Shadow" will also be helpful.

In the next section, our journey through time will take us from the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas to the 1750 Treaty of Madrid which reestablished the territorial claims of Spain and Portugal. We will study the Jesuit expansion and establishment of missions (*reducciones*) especially in Paraguay. We will focus on the growing jealousy over Jesuit power in Europe leading to the expulsion of Jesuits from the Americas in 1767. At this point the class will watch the movie "The Mission."

Our study will continue with writing and reading excerpts from novels, journals, newspapers, National Geographic and other sources about the continuing threat to the natives of the Amazon and Rio de la Plata basins. We will look at sections from "The Storyteller" by Vargas Llosa, and Hudson's novel, "Green Mansions," which was made into a romantic and panoramic film about the endless green rain forest. There are several new books about the vanishing tribes of Amazonia.

Finally we will end our journey with the very real questions of 21st century obligation to the stone age people who survive. As Vargas Llosa clearly describes, any contact destroys the cultural fabric and thus the existence of these people. Even benevolent contributions toward food, sanitation, and shelter cut the threads which bound the Indians in groups which could survive their environment. Issues of progress, growth, environment, development and responsibility will be explored.

(Recommended for History of South America, Spanish, and Latin American Colonial History, adaptable for various grades)

Key Words

History Latin American Catholic Church Literature South Native

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