“DISCOVERIES ARE NOT TO BE CALLED CONQUESTS”:
NARRATIVE, EMPIRE, AND THE AMBIGUITY OF CONQUEST IN SPAIN’S
AMERICAN EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the intellectual issues that surround the most dramatic form of human encounter: that of imperial conquest. By examining the modes of thought available to conquering societies I examine the way in which specific narrative traditions influence the process of justification and legitimization of expansion.

Based on my analysis of a specific set of narratives created by Spanish in the Americas, a wide variety of published primary resources, and research in Spanish archives, I look into the narrative traditions of a number of societies in history, assess the construction of the reconquista narrative in Spain, and then cross the Atlantic to examine variety of interest groups that emerged across Spain’s American empire and the narratives that were produced to justify those interests.

In successful cases the drama of conquest is normalized through the adoption or construction of legitimizing narratives that tap into prevailing societal self-conceptions or historical relationships. As examples of this I examine a diverse set of societies including China during the Han Dynasty, Sassanid Persia, Turkic states of central and western Asia, and the Ottoman Empire.

I then introduce the case of the Spanish, first in the Iberian Peninsula where their narrative traditions successfully justified and normalized the act of conquest, and then in the Americas. Spain’s American empire, I argue, constituted a situation so novel as to resist any attempt to make sense of it within the prevailing narrative tradition. Spain’s
central narratives fell apart in the face of such novelty, leaving narrative chaos and an imperial state unable to control the process of narrative construction. The result was a proliferation of narratives and a heated debate over the Spanish right to rule in their American possessions. This debate only diminished with the repudiation of the notion of conquest in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Through this effort, this dissertation contributes to the general understanding of the role of ideas in empire while presenting the argument that Spain’s American empire represented a novel case in world history and it was this unprecedented novelty that was responsible for many of the intellectual challenges that the empire faced. Additionally, I contend that the narrative challenges faced by Spain in the sixteenth century left important intellectual legacies for future empires.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 3

Acknowledgments 6

Table of Contents 8

List of Maps and Images 9

Chapter 1. Introduction: Conquest, Empire, and the Narrative Challenges of Spanish American Imperialism 10

Chapter 2. Legitimizing Narratives in World History 40

Chapter 3. The Reconquista: Spain’s Central Narrative 93

Chapter 4. Of Conquests and Conversions: The Narratives of Bartolome de Las Casas and Hernan Cortés 133

Chapter 5. Consolidating the Empire: The Rise of the Letrados and the End of Conquest 207

Chapter 6. After the Spanish: Expansion without Conquest and the Story of Race 257

Notes 282

Bibliography 320
List of Illustrations

Image 2.1 -- Coins of Ardashir I with Inscriptions 49
Map 2.1 -- Anatolian Beyeliks 64
Map 2.2 -- Ottoman Expansion, 1300-1683 69
Map 3.1 -- Iberia during the Reconquest 98
Map 3.2 -- Taifa Kingdoms 110
Map 4.1 -- The Conquest of Mexico 184
Image 6.1 -- McKinley Campaign poster, 1900 276
CHAPTER I

Conquest, Empire, and the Narrative Challenges
of Spanish American Imperialism

Humans are accustomed to stories. We take comfort in the notion that events,
experiences, ideas, and lives all have distinct beginnings, middles, and ends, and that
each step leads neatly into the next. Stories offer us a simplicity that is absent from our
actual lives, which tend towards the messy and are filled with experiences that do not fit
easily into any larger structure. They smooth the wrinkles out of experiences that initially
seem to follow the expected course but end unpredictably -- without redemption,
reconciliation, or any obvious lessons or legacies. In the hands of a storyteller, that
which was unintelligible makes sense and, what is more, begins to seem natural or
obvious. A recent example demonstrates the enormous potential power of storytellers.

In his State of the Union address from January 28, 2003, U.S. President George
W. Bush, after having addressed a wide variety of topics, turned his attention to national
security.
“Today,” he said, “the gravest danger in the war on terror, the gravest danger facing America and the world, is outlaw regimes that seek and possess nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.”

His point was dubious at best. He needed to convince members of Congress, the various opinion-makers of the print and television media, and the American people, that the presence of such a threat necessitated and legitimized a preventative war with Iraq. In order to make his case for what was a truly unprecedented action in the history of U.S. foreign policy, the president told a story. In telling this story, he and his speechwriters did not pioneer an innovative tool of statecraft; they simply made use of narrative as a technique for ordering information. We tend to think of the narrative as an objective means of representation, but as scholars since the 1970’s have highlighted, narratives can just as easily construct truth as represent it.

To be successful as a means of providing legitimacy for the proposed war, the narrative Bush related had to persuade his audience that what he proposed was not, in fact, novel, but that it was, instead, perfectly in line with the traditional role of the United States in the world. As is crucial to any narrative that seeks to legitimize, the president’s narrative needed to connect to society’s sense of itself.

Thus, Bush argued, the threat may have been new, but “America’s duty is familiar.” Americans, as I argue in greater detail in Chapter 6, have long held a view that their nation had a special role to play both historically, based on the principles established in the American Revolution, and in the contemporary world. As a result, this notion that
it was, once again, the duty of the United States to take action when the world needed it appealed to the people.

Bush continued by stating that in the previous century the great global threat came from, “small groups of men [who] seized control of great nations, built armies and arsenals, and set out to dominate the weak and intimidate the world. In each case, their ambitions of cruelty and murder had no limit.” These threats, in the form of “Hitlerism, militarism and communism,” were, in each case, defeated “by the will of free peoples, by the strength of great alliances, and by the might of the United States of America.”

At their most powerful, legitimizing narratives have the ability to impose meaning on people’s current experiences through allusions to experiences of the past. The president, after describing the great challenges of the twentieth century and how Americans overcame them, sought to challenge contemporary Americans to stand up to the great challenges of the new century. In the twenty-first century the, “the ideology of power and domination has appeared again, and seeks to gain the ultimate weapons of terror.” Bush argued that, just as in the previous century, the United States had to accept the responsibility to “defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind.”

Perhaps the single most important element of the president’s narrative was the connection it drew between the contemporary world and the most significant episode in recent American history, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Occurring less than two years before this address, the event, according to the president, had changed the way America and her allies viewed the rest of the world:
Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those nineteen hijackers with other weapons and other plans -- this time armed by Saddam Hussein. It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known. We will do everything in our power to make sure that that day never comes.¹

Although Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was significantly weaker than Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, the president portrayed it as an equally grave threat.

President Bush’s narrative succeeded in tapping into a vision of the U.S. as a benign, selfless beacon of freedom – a vision that corresponded with many Americans’ views of their country and its history. Using this legitimizing narrative, the president justified the invasion of Iraq.

The late evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould remarked that “humans are trend-seeking creatures” or more precisely, “‘storytelling animals’, for what we really love is a good tale.”² President Bush tapped into this human love for “a good tale” and, in doing so, took part in an activity that “small groups of men” (and women) have been engaging in consciously and unconsciously for millennia: using narratives to justify conquest and empire.

I use the term “narrative” throughout this dissertation in the sense of its formal definition:
An account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.³

In addition I refer to what I call legitimizing narratives. Legitimizing narratives are narratives that serve political purposes by supporting the interests of a ruling regime. Their goal is to connect a current political elite or society to powerful or legendary predecessors, but achieving this goal can require more elaboration in some cases than in others. For instance, in Chapter 2, I discuss the case of the Sassanid Persians, who rose to power in the third century by overthrowing the decaying Parthian Empire. Merely replacing the old regime, however, was not enough to garner legitimacy. To rectify this, the Sassanids gradually constructed an elaborate set of connections between themselves, the founders of the Achaemenid Dynasty, and even mythical heroes of the far distant Persian past. This process involved the simplest possible story, the establishment of some common ancestor at some point in the past.

In other cases, the construction of more elaborate stories was necessary as a means of explaining away seemingly contradictory facts. In the early Islamic era (another case I explore in Chapter 2), for example, when the biblical figure of Abraham became more prominent; Muslim historians created a story that established him as the first person to have governed the district of the ka’aba, which eventually became the center of Muhammad’s own city of birth, Mecca. To enhance Muhammad’s status they then constructed an elaborate genealogy connecting him to Abraham, despite the fact that
the prevailing tradition suggested that the Prophet’s immediate ancestors were relatively new arrivals to the city.⁴

For as long as there have been human societies, there have been encounters between and among human societies. While many, perhaps even the majority, of these encounters are peaceful, encounters frequently lead to violence. It is these violent encounters – conquests -- that serve as the center of this dissertation. In thinking about conquests, my main point of interest is in understanding the way human societies make sense of such violent encounters, both at the moment of their occurrence and over the long term. The question of why conquests occur is also an important one; and, while somewhat tangential to my main object of study, it is instructive to briefly review the scholarly literature on the subject.

The scholarly literature on human warfare is copious and, predictably, full of considerable debate regarding the origins of and explanations for war amongst human societies.⁵ The various theories presented in the historical, sociological, anthropological, and psychological literature on the subject tend to explain warfare as being the result of a limited number of causal factors. For instance, the anthropologist Brian Ferguson argues that war will occur in situations in which decision makers believe that material benefits will outweigh the material costs. He goes on to outline the following six material interests that decision makers can have, corresponding to the strategic objectives of warfare: to increase access to fixed resources by eliminating competitors; to capture movable goods; to impose an exploitative relationship on one or more other groups; to
conquer and incorporate one or more other groups; to enhance the power and status of those who make decisions about whether or not to make war; to defend against attacks from other groups. Ferguson takes an essentially materialist stance, while competing theories seek out the causes of warfare through cultural, environmental, or biological explanations. While Ferguson uses real historical and sociological situations as evidence for his arguments, the issue for him is less the specific circumstances that lead particular societies into war than the ultimate causes of warfare for any society.

Historical actors do not generally act with reference to the theoretical though. Theories suggest a limited number of causal factors for warfare, but violence against and conquest of others is generally not legitimized with reference to such a small number of factors. Instead, societies utilize an enormous variety of culturally specific justifications for conquest. This means that we can find nearly as many justifications for conquest as there have been societies.

In the sixteenth century, however, as Spain established a new imperial domain across the Atlantic, something interesting happened: the narratives that had once brought intellectual order in the context of Iberian expansion, proved completely unsuited to that of American expansion. The situation was extremely troubling for a Spanish state that had not, after all, set out to create an empire. Suddenly in possession of and with access to enormous amounts of land an ocean away, some began questioning the intellectual basis for this empire. A basic narrative existed, but increasingly this narrative proved unsatisfactory in explaining and justifying the experience of overseas empire.
In the ideal case, narratives serve as intellectual ordering devices; one of the main roles of a state or political elite is to construct, maintain, and disseminate a central narrative. In the Spanish case, the political center lost control, or had failed ever to gain control, of the process of narrative construction, and without such control intellectual chaos was the result.

Over the course of the next five chapters I argue the following points. 1) That the process of justifying and legitimizing conquest and empire is inextricably tied to a society’s own self-conception, its historical experience, and its relationship with surrounding societies. 2) This link is best established through the ordering device of the narrative. 3) Because legitimizing narratives are culturally specific, their ability to provide internal justification for conquest and empire (the primary goal of a legitimizing narrative) is not necessarily matched by their ability to provide external legitimacy, since the logic of one society’s narrative traditions often have no or little explanatory power for those outside that society. 4) Successful states require successful ideas and, in fact, one of their primary functions is the dissemination of such ideas often in the form of narrative. 5) States that struggle to control their internal narrative are prone to instability. It is less vital to convince outsiders, but there have certainly been cases in states have accepted the claims of their rivals thus leading to less outside pressure on imperial borders. 6) Legitimizing narratives are not static, nor are they eternal. Narratives that had once been successful may grow irrelevant over time and must be replaced by new narratives or revised in order to adapt to a new context. 7) The emergence of overseas
empires, beginning with the Spanish after 1492, created narrative challenges that had no precedent. 8) The Spanish were both the first and the last empire to confront these challenges, since the novelty of the Spanish experience was impossible to reproduce. 9) Rather than judging legitimizing narratives as successes or failures, it is more useful to determine the extent to which the narrative is disputed in its own right or challenged by a competing vision. Each of these arguments is addressed in the chapters to follow.

Ideas are central to the success of empires; the most compelling means of presenting such legitimizing ideas is through the mechanism of narrative. At root, a successful legitimizing idea is nothing more than a good story; one that connects those in power to Heaven or to the gods, to a mythical progenitor or to a legendary predecessor; one that presents a story of a people in a way that models idealized behaviors and cultural norms. Imperial projects, at least at the intellectual level, are therefore extensions or projections of a society’s prevailing narratives to the context of conquest and empire. In new imperial states, the conquering society must either attach itself to a preexisting narrative, or, if that is impossible, must establish a new narrative branch, one that shares traits with prior narrative tradition but incorporates new elements to make sense of a new situation. It is through this process that a veneer of righteousness can be attached to both the act of conquest and the subsequent era of imperial rule.

In the chapters to follow, I begin by examining examples of imperial expansion that were incorporated, with relative ease, into the prevailing narrative tradition of the conquering society. I argue that this is the norm. For much of the history of complex
societies, conquest has come at the expense of near neighbors; of societies with whom the conquerors had a substantial historical relationship. One effect of such longstanding relationships is that societies generally fit one another within established ethnocentric or culturally chauvinistic worldviews. As a result, conquests of the other could usually be made sense of based on notions of cultural superiority.

Chapter 2 shows this process at work within the longstanding relationship between China and Vietnam. The two societies shared remarkable degrees of cultural affinity. Whereas the Chinese viewed the few areas of cultural distinctiveness as markers of Vietnamese backwardness, however, the Vietnamese understood those same cultural traits as markers of their independent identity. This claim to an identity that was independent from their powerful and influential neighbor, helped encourage Vietnamese resistance to Chinese attempts at expansion. The ability of the Vietnamese to maintain their independence, even while assimilating much of China’s elite culture was somewhat unique. Usually, in similar historical situations where boundaries between societies are fluid, we find something like the gradual assimilation of the smaller society by another. Conquest may occur, but it resembles more of a gradual process rather than a sudden, dramatic event; the indigenous population becomes slowly assimilated or marginalized, as the territory becomes fully integrated into the expanding society. The Vietnamese managed to resist such a process, but the Chinese expansion into the territory of Yunnan, a case that I explore in Chapter 2, offers an example of gradual integration rather than dramatic conquest and incorporation.
After detailing in Chapters 2 and 3 some examples of traditional imperial expansions and the narrative traditions that accompanied and legitimized them, I turn in Chapters 4 and 5 to a lengthy discussion of the Spanish efforts to understand their encounter with and conquest of what became their American empire. I argue that the novelty of the American situation offers a marked contrast to other recorded examples of conquest in history. In it the Spanish conquered a territory and people with whom they had no prior history, relationship, or sets of grievances. Never before had imperial conquest and rule been so distinguished by unfamiliarity.

To be sure, unfamiliar peoples have been encountering each other since the beginnings of human history, and the Huns, Mongols, Norsemen, and Macedonians are all examples of people who conquered or at least attacked societies that were beyond their regular zones of interaction. However, the attributes of the American encounter between Spaniards and Indians represents a level of unfamiliarity on a magnitude higher than any prior recorded event. (The Norse arrival in North America in the eleventh century offers an example of an encounter that was similarly marked by unfamiliarity, but did not inspire any larger discourse, thus failing to have anything near the same kind of influence as the Colombian encounter). Given the infrequency of overseas conquests prior to 1492, the absence of anything quite comparable in the Spanish experience, and the fifteen thousand years in which Old and New Worlds had evolved separately, it is safe to say that nothing equivalent to the Spanish encounter with the Americas had ever occurred in recorded history.
The dissertation’s title, “discoveries are not to be called conquests,” refers to an actual historical document promulgated by the Spanish king Philip II in 1573, as well as that which made the Spanish imperial experience in the Americas so distinct: its origins in the Caribbean, in Mexico, in Peru, and elsewhere as twin acts of discovery and conquest.9

This experience of conquest-discovery produced problems within the Spanish imperial project. Given the novelty of the situation – the unprecedented nature of the encounter in which the Spanish took part – there existed no clear antecedent to help them make sense of, justify, and legitimize their conquests. Ideally, imperial expansions are understood within established narrative traditions that establish the key attributes of the conquerors – in their history, traditions, or religion – as well as the traits of the conquered that made them suitable victims for conquest. Attempts were made to fit the Spanish American empire into prevailing narrative strands, yet those narratives – effective as they may have been in the Old World – proved less than convincing in the context of the New World. The result, as I explore in depth in Chapters 4 and 5, was narrative chaos. Narratives proliferated and each advanced a particular set of arguments and interests, rather than the interests of the imperial elite.

Empires achieve their greatest effectiveness not as mere physical manifestations or outward projections of power, but as intellectual entities whose existence depends upon the extent to which rulers and those they rule believe that they exist. In the absence of coercive force or the potential for coercive force (a situation most prevalent in
overseas territories), people must be convinced. To be convincing requires both internal ideological justification – a means to explain their own existence to themselves – and external political legitimacy – a means for empires to attach a veneer of righteousness and rightness to their conquests. If successful, such a justification can blunt the criticism of both those who have become subject to the imperial power, and those who are rivals for that power. In Chapter 5 I examine the case of Peru, considering the issue of legitimacy as it relates to the neo-Inca state at Vilcabamba. In this case we see two parallel states with overlapping claims to legitimacy, both of which construct their own narratives in support of their own claims, and in opposition to that of their rival. When, for instance, the Inca ruler attempted to construct his own legitimizing narrative he found that the Spanish king had no sympathy for any argument, no matter its logic, that contested his own claims to territory.

At times there is an overlap between the two requirements of internal justification and external legitimacy, since that which justifies an empire can also serve to give legitimacy to an imperial enterprise. In other instances this is not the case. Patricia Seed argues that, in the early centuries of European Atlantic Empires, particular powers found that their own legitimizing ceremonies – those acts which signaled the taking of territory – had little or no meaning for the other countries involved in Atlantic exploration and conquest. Thus the English could justify their settlement of eastern North America due to a supposed lack of sedentary Indian populations in the area, but this justification did
little to confer legitimacy on such an occupation in the eyes of the Spanish – or the Algonquian Indians, for that matter.

Without access to the internal lives of historical actors, it is impossible to discern whether narratives of legitimacy are consciously constructed to produce certain ends, or are developed as part of an almost instinctive process. It is possible, however, to locate the intellectual boundaries within which a legitimizing narrative could be constructed. Thus, a given imperial actor would likely have a good idea of the kinds of criteria that would have to be met to establish the legitimacy of a conquest, whether or not that individual actually believed that the conquest was legitimate. We can therefore posit a kind of culture of legitimacy within given societies, or sometimes within larger regions. These cultures of legitimacy dictate the parameters within which a legitimizing narrative can be constructed.

In several works, Seed has argued for distinct imperial cultures that emerged amongst European overseas empires of the Atlantic World. What comes out of her work is a clearer sense of the difficulty of constructing legitimacy in this particular arena of empire. Whereas, as we will see below, within East Asia there was a relatively stable means of garnering legitimacy centered on imperial China, in Europe each individual state had its own distinct notions of legitimacy. As a result, the imperial states of the Atlantic were each involved in a sort of one-way conversation within which they were able to justify their own actions to themselves, albeit in a language and style that was often incomprehensible to the others.
The specific ceremonies performed by various actors to mark taking possession of territory were influenced by what Seed calls their “historical assumptions”:

… to each group of Europeans, the legitimacy of their … rituals, ceremonies, and symbolic acts of possession overseas were based upon familiar actions, gestures, movements, or speeches, and as such were readily understood by themselves and their fellow countrymen without elaboration, and often without debate as well.

The reason that these ceremonies were so readily understood was because of a common set of historic cultural assumptions that came out of “distinct embedded histories and locally significant systems of meaning.” Specifically, Seed argues that these assumptions “stemmed from three fundamental sources: ‘everyday life,’ a common colloquial language, and a shared legal code.”\(^\text{11}\) This seems agreeable, but I would add a fourth source to this: their narrative traditions.

The stories a society tells about itself are less explanations of some objective truth than culturally contingent means of describing an object of study. According to Hayden White, “narration is a manner of speaking as universal as language itself, and narrative is a mode of verbal representation … seemingly natural to human consciousness … an aspect of everyday speech and ordinary discourse.”\(^\text{12}\) While narrative itself may be universal, there also exists a narrative culture within any given society that, like everyday life, language, and law, is part of that society’s “historic cultural assumptions.”

The act of creating legitimacy was relatively less important for a state such as China than it was for European countries deeply involved in a system of competing
states. Nevertheless, the tribute system – established as far back as Han Dynasty China and improved upon thereafter – was centered on a legitimizing ceremony in which representatives of neighboring states paid symbolic obeisance to the Chinese emperor as the head of the “Middle Kingdom.” As the recognized sovereign of the major power in the region, the emperor was not only the recipient of the symbolic legitimacy of others, but could himself, either personally or through his representatives, confer legitimacy upon others. On the fifth voyage of the Ming Dynasty admiral Zheng He, for instance, he traveled to the port city of Malacca, a place that was beginning to emerge as a key entrepôt of global trade. The political situation of Malacca was in flux. Zheng He’s chronicler, Ma Huan observed: “There was no king of the country; [and] it was controlled only by a chief. The territory was subordinate to the jurisdiction of Hsien-lo; it paid an annual tribute of forty liang of gold; [and] if it were not [to pay], then Hsien-lo would send men to attack it.” However, Zheng He, under orders from his emperor, bestowed upon this chief, “two silver seals, a hat, a girdle and a robe. [He] set up a stone tablet and raised [the place] to a city; and [the chief] never again paid tribute to Hsien-lo.” In return for this grant of legitimacy, the “chief,” Parameswara, would make several trips to Ming China bearing articles of tribute for the Yongle Emperor. Malacca had therefore been assimilated; not necessarily into a Chinese Empire, but certainly into a legitimizing tradition that was based in Chinese historical and political traditions.

While this Chinese case is somewhat distinct, China offers an enlightening example of the effectiveness and importance of a solid ideological framework for empire.
Such an ideology (see Chapter 2) offered the Chinese an easy means to transfer legitimacy from one dynasty to another over a period of over 2,000 years. Thus while much changed over the millennia, a diverse set of imperial aspirants was able to make similar claims to power and authority over the ever-expanding Chinese empire.

So what made the Chinese legitimizing ideology so successful? The answer is that the Chinese created a justifying narrative that was so compelling, so simple, so adaptable, that the Manchu rulers of the 19th century Qing Dynasty and Kublai Khan’s thirteenth century Yuan Dynasty based their authority on virtually the same principle first established by the Emperor Wang Mang during the Han interregnum in the first century C.E.\textsuperscript{14} The ideology, in fact, was so pervasive that it imposed upon Chinese historical studies – a history marked by spectacular innovations, dramatic invasions, intellectual ferment, and social and cultural transformations – a sense of stability, continuity, and timelessness. When western historians picked up this narrative of continuity they transformed it into a history of societal stagnation that was only interrupted upon the arrival of dynamic Europeans.

The fact that the Chinese legitimizing narrative was able to influence the writing of Chinese history suggests an important fact about narratives in general. While narrative has been the dominant form of historical writing and the most prominent ordering device for historical information for as long as people have constructed histories, since the 1970’s, scholars – with Hayden White being the most prominent – have argued that narratives are just as much a means of constructing history as representing it. “In point of
fact, history . . . is made sense of in the same way that the poet or novelist tries to make sense of it, i.e., by endowing what originally appears to be problematical and mysterious with the aspect of a recognizable, because it is a familiar, form.” What we do, as Gould suggested, is take that which is inscrutable – the totality of human history – and identify trends that fit specific social and cultural contexts, and turn those trends into stories.

Narratives, which are generally thought of as truthful representations of history, instead represent collections of often factual statements that are ordered in such a way as to impose a structure on a past with no obvious structure. Rather than “unambiguous signs of the events they report,” historical narratives more closely resemble “symbolic structures, extended metaphors, that ‘liken’ the event reported in them to some form with which we have already become familiar.” It is this ability of narrative to connect events to the familiar that has particular resonance for my discussion of Spanish attempts to narrate their conquests.

Key to White’s work on narrative is the notion that when historians write history what they are really doing is obeying the dictates of the tropes available to them, even as they think they are piecing together narratives that give a true account of historical reality. Historical narratives are, therefore, constructed by historians who, at least subconsciously, seek out information that helps them present history as romance, comedy, tragedy, or farce. This is problematic because, “no historical event is intrinsically tragic; it can only be conceived as such from a particular point of view or from within [a certain] context … For in history what is tragic from one perspective is
comic from another …” Just as tropes serve to make any historical narrative an essentially teleological account, so too are narratives of conquest or imperial expansion usually limited by the specific legitimizing idea that gives the ruling elite their authority. In this sense then, the specific story that establishes the legitimacy of a ruling elite itself becomes a powerful trope that informs and shapes subsequent narratives of conquest and expansion.

In assessing various chroniclers of the Spanish conquests in the Americas, Rolena Adorno has referred to the, “retrospective character of conquest writing”:

One of the romantic fictions regarding the accounts of conquests in the Indies is that they were written at night in military encampments by soldier-hidalgos who, with quill in hand, bravely ignored the intimidating sounds of enemy war cries and drums … Cortés’ famous second letter, which narrates the events from August 1519 through July 1520 … was written in the Autumn months … and dated October 30, 1520 … [Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga]’s epic saga of the interminable war of conquest against the Araucanians of Chile was written in the decades following his return to Spain. This retrospective quality applies also to the works of Bernal Díaz, Las Casas, Cabeza de Vaca, and El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega as well as to the debates about the conquests themselves.¹eight

Hayden White has remarked that, “lives are lived, stories are told,” and it is certainly easy to imagine, in these examples, a gulf between events as they happened and events as they were represented in narrative form. Had Bernal Díaz recorded his experiences as a conquistador in Mexico as they occurred, the resulting manuscript likely would have
looked significantly different from the one he eventually wrote five decades later as an old, blind, and slightly embittered man retired to his lands in Guatemala. The point here is not to delegitimize all acts of representation, but merely to note that the act of reflection can have dramatic consequences for the ways in which one understands prior events. Whereas survival was most likely Bernal Diaz’ key motivation while taking part in the “conquest of Mexico,” his recounting of those events years later was strongly influenced by a number of factors including his own legacy.

While few would dispute that even the most polemical of narratives is still strongly influenced by the actual events being described, scholars have argued heatedly about the role of culture, including narrative tradition, in determining one’s actions within situations that are more or less novel for the participants. Humans are certainly creatures of our social and cultural contexts, but does this preclude us from behaving in novel ways when taking part in novel situations? Just as events themselves place constraints on the ways in which the chronicler can relay those events, is it not also possible that prevailing means of narrating events can affect the way participants themselves behave while taking part in the events?

It was this issue of improvisation that was famously debated by the anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere. The pair faced off in a series of books and articles focusing on the events surrounding Captain Cook’s arrival and actions in Hawai’i which led to his eventual murder at the hands of the islands’ inhabitants. Key to this debate were issues of rationality, improvisation, and
mythmaking, but most important, perhaps, were questions regarding the role of historical structure and context in determining human action.

Sahlins argued that the encounter of Europeans and Polynesians that took place in Hawai‘i was more than an encounter between individuals, but a conjuncture between two previously separated structures, and that this conjuncture had its own structure. According to Sahlins, the Hawaiians understood Cook to be the god Lono because they could only make sense of such an unprecedented encounter by assimilating it into a preexisting myth structure. They were only able to do so because Cook’s arrival and subsequent activities closely paralleled elements in the Hawaiian spiritual calendar. For Sahlins, therefore, the prevailing narrative structure of the Hawaiians largely determined their actions.

For Obeyesekere, though, this explanation rang false. Why was it, he wondered, that seemingly every time Europeans showed up somewhere new they were taken to be gods by those they encountered? Weren’t all the Earth’s peoples equally equipped with the capacity to reason and, thus, the ability to distinguish between the human and the divine? Perhaps it was not the “natives” who struggled to see beyond their own cultural constraints, but the Europeans, who had constructed their own elaborate myth model within which their own deification at the hands of “less civilized” people was assured.

In the end, Obeyesekere crafted some compelling arguments, while at the same time misunderstanding or misinterpreting key aspects of Sahlins’s argument. While Sahlins seems to have “won” the argument, both scholars have something useful to say
about the way encounters (or in the case of the present work, conquests) are both carried out by specific actors and thought about by those removed from the situation. While Sahlins speaks to the way that culture can limit the freedom of the actors within the imperial expansion drama to improvise, Obeyesekere demonstrates the way that even passive observers of a conquest or encounter operate within relatively narrow intellectual boundaries. Regardless of whether or not the Hawaiians saw Cook as Lono because of the preexisting myth-model, it was nearly impossible for European observers to understand the encounter as representing anything but the deification of Captain Cook.

In historical studies the point of the narrative is to convey “truth,” to offer a representation of the “real story”; in a conquest, however, the narrative was less important for its ability to convey truth and more vital as a means of conveying power and legitimacy. The elements included and the elements excluded are very different in these two cases. Additionally, in the pre-modern world one’s closeness to the events was often prized above one’s objective stance – the very thing that is most highly prized among modern historians. The importance of the participant was magnified by the fact that virtually all those who read early Spanish accounts of the Americas were reading about a place to which they had never been. Indeed those who took part in the events would make frequent resort to the first person as a means of emphasizing their special authority as the narrator of the events (this was the case even in accounts that in other ways fit more into the genre of history than memoir.) Accounts of this nature belong “to a category in ancient rhetoric known as autopsy”:
It is the appeal to the authority of the eye witness, to the privileged understanding which those present at an event have over all those who have only read or been told about it. The use of phrases like ‘I saw’, ‘I found’, ‘this happened to me’ … was not a device to ‘show myself off’. It was evidence that ‘these things are within my understanding, that is from the experience and sight I had of them’, and because ‘I will speak of things that it is very probable that no-one before has ever seen, much less written about’. In America this was to dominate the long and bitter struggle over the nature, representation, and status of the New World and its inhabitants.  

Thus, in the famous debates between Bartolomé de las Casas, who had spent time in the New World, and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, who had not, Sepúlveda depended on the work of authors with personal experience in the New World, and even personally consulted with Hernan Cortés, as a means of giving his arguments more authority.  

In Spanish American historiography there were three genres of narrative used to glean meaning from events. The first of these was the relación, a genre that was “the least formal and most personal,” and tended to offer accounts of specific events by one of the actors in said events. Next was the crónica, claiming a wider “scope in time and space and focused on the clarification of time sequence, giving thereby the means for cause-and-effect analysis. Participants or at least people who could claim some special and often personal knowledge of the events also often wrote crónicas.” The last narrative genre was that of the historia where, “the canvass expanded to centuries, and the explanatory effort aspired to show the temporal events’ significance alongside the
eternal.” Historias were most similar to our modern historical narratives with their claims of objectivity and thus academic legitimacy.21 The three narrative genres were related in that “historians read crónicas, and the writers of crónicas appear to have read relaciónes.”22 Attempts to construct a legitimizing narrative in the first century after the Spanish conquest was marked by disputes between observers’ versions of the history and that of the historiadores, with the accounts of the participants often contradicting and refuting the claims of the academic historians.

This gets to the crux of the difficulties: while learned councilors of Spanish monarchs sought to create narratives that would serve as post-facto justifications of the conquest, those actually on the ground in the Americas, both Spaniards and indios, had various financial, legal, spiritual, or other reasons for constructing their own narratives. These narratives justified Spanish claims on different grounds than the more official narratives. The intent of legitimizing narratives was to serve the needs of the ruling regime, but in the case of the Spanish American Empire the sheer number of relaciónes, crónicas, and historias produced made it exceedingly difficult to establish any single interpretation of the events since there were always multiple authors offering their own particular version and vision of the events, many of which were considered unsuited to the needs of those in power.

Although commonly related to actual historical events, legitimizing narratives frequently have some mythical components to them. These myths can become so powerful, so pervasive as to become the model for the creation of further myths.
Obeyesekere’s notion of the myth model, although not directly related to the issue of legitimacy, is nevertheless a helpful tool in understanding the often-constrained nature of narrative construction. Similar to White’s view of the limiting nature of tropes for historians, Obeyesekere argues that certain important or paradigmatic myths may serve as a model for other kinds of myth construction. Additionally, Obeyesekere’s “myth model” refers to underlying sets of ideas (or myth structure) so ubiquitous in a society that they are employed in a variety of narrative forms.

These idea-sets are ‘structures of the long-run’ that get attached to larger narrative forms such as fiction, history, or biography. Historical conditions obviously play a role in resuscitating a myth model buried in a tradition; and social and political conditions may either foster a particular myth model, rendering it dominant, or help in the invention of a new myth model based on older ones no longer apposite to the times … These myth models are … constructed out of real life experiences and then, in turn, influence consciously or unconsciously both art (narrative) and lived existence.

His key example, the one for which he created the entire concept, was the great myth of the age of exploration: the White-god. Most likely originating in the observations of Columbus himself but reaching its purest form with the exploits of Hernan Cortés, the myth of the White-god assured white men that whenever they encountered native people – whether in Canada, the Caribbean, or Hawai’i – they would be deified. This may have been true, according to Obeyesekere, but it was not the natives themselves doing the deifying. Instead, it was the Europeans – both participants in the encounter and those who
only heard the stories second-hand – who were so enthralled by this particular myth model that they were unable to interpret the experience of encounter through any other lens. Captain Cook’s supposed deification by the native Hawaiians – which serves as the basis of Obeyesekere’s work – was in some ways merely an updating of myths surrounding earlier discoverers like Cortés and Francisco Pizarro. Within the myth model, Cook as an individual was “totally subsumed … and in fact is irrelevant, except in footnotes.”

Just as we see individuals subsumed within the myth model, individual conquests become engulfed by larger narrative traditions. In their recollection of events, the Spanish conquistadors seemed to view, or at least represent, the world they encountered through the lens of Medieval Romances or the exploits of the reconquista. In these retellings, the famed Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan morphs into a typical Islamic city; Santiago, the patron saint of Spain, goes from slayer of Moors to slayer of Indians; and illiterate pig farmers become epic heroes worthy of chivalric romances. That which was wholly unfamiliar was thus made entirely familiar:

We know that the cataclysms of Spanish “discovery” and conquest in the New World occasion furious circulation between the projects of war and the projects of writing: both mutually inform and advance New World carto-graphy, New World ethno-graphy, New World historio-graphy. These projects, in turn, are marked not by their “newness,” but rather by their consistent attempts to account for the incommensurability of the “New” with recourse to known formulations of the “Old”…
This is not, it should be said, a trait singular to the Spanish – they had no special powers of self-delusion – but something distinctly human. If Hawaiians could only make sense of Cook’s arrival with recourse to Lono; if the Mexica could best understand the sudden appearance of Cortés and his men by fitting him into a minor myth about the return of the god Quetzalcoatl; if New Guineans could only comprehend the arrival of Western missionaries and colonists through the creation of cargo cults; then this is not a mark of their primitiveness but an indication of the intellectual parameters within which societies comprehend absolute novelty. I am not arguing that human societies lack the ability to improvise, but rather that they improvise within a set of boundaries established, at least partially by the stories a society tells about itself. This is as true for sixteenth century Spanish conquistadors or eighteenth century British sea captains as it is for the “primitive” peoples whom they encountered.

When Anthony Pagden refers to “the canon,” in relation to the set of ideas Europeans had with which they could attempt to make sense of the encounter with America, he is explicitly talking about a set of written texts that, he argued, dominated European intellectual life into the seventeenth century. In reality, all societies, whether literate or not, have their own canons which influence the way they relate to and experience the world around them:

It was obviously the case that not only did the canon determine what could be said with any degree of conviction within any given community, it also established what the objects of inquiry might be in the first instance. It determined, that is, what could be seen.
For Spaniards and Indians alike, during the initial decades of their encounter, the extreme novelty of the situation meant that, very often, what could be seen would not necessarily resemble what was seen. Pagden was writing specifically about the European experience within such encounters, but there is no reason to assume that those on the other side of the encounter did not have their own canon (even if it was oral rather than written) within which they understood and represented what they experienced.29

I do not suggest that ideas, and more specifically narratives, place limitations on human action. Instead, I am interested in the way a society’s canons, to use Pagden’s term, place limits on the way people think about and represent that which they do. An example I will develop further in Chapter 2 illustrates this issue well.

Prior to the large-scale conversion of Turkic groups to Islam, Turks and Muslims engaged in cross-frontier raids against each other. For Turks and other nomadic pastoralists of Central Asia, raids of this sort had long been common, one of many economic activities that helped ensure their survival. Eventually Islam expanded across these frontiers, encompassing the Turkic peoples on the other side. The conversion was significant, not so much because it changed what islamicized Turks did, but because it changed the way they thought about what they did. They continued to raid – their targets now mainly unconverted Turks – but they now understood these raids differently. The idea of the raids as part of a traditional lifestyle or a survival strategy was replaced by the idea that they were part of the Islamic tradition of ghazi, a term suggestive of holy war to
protect or expand the borders of Islam. The activity had barely been altered at all, but what justified it had changed radically.

It is here that we return to the Spanish. Christians who took part in the middle and latter stages of the reconquista (after 1085 and after 1369) were certainly driven by a wide range of motivations, but because of the strength of the overall narrative – one that posited an Islamic usurpation and then a Christian struggle to set things right – any individual motivation could be subsumed into the larger story. For example, an important source of revenue for Christian states was tribute from rival Islamic states; this continued to be the case after 1085, but after that point it was increasingly presented “as a means of sapping the vitality of the Muslim princes preparatory to a Christian takeover of their territories.” By contrast, the Americas, and those who resided there, represented an unprecedented and alien experience for the Spanish. The novelty of their situation made it extremely difficult for participants in the Spanish Empire to identify a narrative that could explain and justify that which they experienced. As a result, rather than subsuming their personal motivations within a larger narrative rationale, the narratives that Spanish participants constructed became shaped by their desires.

It is best, therefore, to understand the Spanish experience with the Americas primarily as an intensely novel experience, not just for Spaniards or Indians, but for humanity. This is what makes the study of Spain’s empire in America so fascinating for regional or world historians. What we are studying is one society’s dramatic discovery and subordination of another but also, more generally, humans attempting to make sense
of an encounter that had no precedent in history. In the history of the Spanish experience in the Americas we get a rare glimpse into a society that needed to make sense of a novel form of expansion using a set of stories that were insufficient for the task.
CHAPTER 2

Legitimizing Narratives in World History

Ideas are vital for the success of states. This is equally the case if whether we are thinking of “states” or “the state” as both of these entities are essentially ideological in nature. In the contemporary world it is perhaps more difficult to accept the state as idea rather than entity because it is so visible, so physically manifest in structures and locales that can be seen, touched, and visited. Even as the state appears to be a material entity, the society over which it presides seems ephemeral and elusive – more a bundle of characteristics than a discrete thing. In truth, however, the state is not so easily divisible form the society as both are constitutive of the other. Social realities help determine the foundation of what Philip Abrams calls “the state-idea,” and this state-idea feeds back into and helps construct certain practices and ideals of the society.\(^1\) Commenting on Abrams work, Alejandro Cañete notes that, “[t]he state is an ideological project, an exercise in legitimation, a mystification of [the] process of subjection.”\(^2\) This chapter
presents the state as an ideological project while also examining the ideological projects of the state.

There is no single manner in which states or empires establish legitimacy over their domains. Those things that lead to the success of a legitimizing project are not universal but instead are dependent upon the specific contexts within which the territorial expansion occurs. It is therefore important to identify these contexts in order to establish a more systematic means of discussing legitimization and empire.

Two factors are especially crucial in shaping the legitimizing projects of imperial states. First, is the historical relationship between the conquerors and the conquered. In examining this relationship we can ask the following questions: Is there a long history of rivalry between the two? Is there a shared border? Within the history of the relationship was there frequent contact that resulted in the exchanges of goods, people, ideas, or other materials? Was there a prior history of conquest? One example I explore is the case of East Asia where Chinese expansion occurred across many dynasties and at the expense of peoples who became increasingly assimilated into the Chinese cultural orbit both before and after becoming subject to imperial expansion. In nearly every conquest in history a relationship, although sometimes only indirect, existed between those who conquered and those who were conquered. Significant, however, is the exception to this: the Spanish conquests in the Americas. In this example we find no relationship between the Spanish and the peoples of the Americas but even more importantly we find a complete lack of familiarity with each other. By first examining cases where such historical relationships
did exist we can better understand the anomalous and indeed, bizarre nature of the situation the Spanish found themselves in after 1492.

The second key factor that can shape the contours of both conquest and the legitimizing process that accompanies it, is the self-conceptualization of the expansionist society. The question here is how the society sees and identifies itself in relation to the other peoples and polities that it comes into contact with? The ways in which a society defines itself, however, are often closely tied to the way it perceives the “Other” and so in this sense historical relationships and self-perception should not be seen as unrelated. Relationships between societies often lead to the sharing of numerous cultural and material artifacts and as this process continues differences may narrow to the point that meaningful distinctions between one group and the other can be hard to identify. In many cases, however, the reduction of difference can lead societies to magnify those differences that remain into the basis for distinct cultural and social identities. As this occurs conflict can come to be seen as natural based on those things which differentiate oneself from others.

The obvious example of this is the relationship between Christian and Muslim societies throughout the Mediterranean but we can also think of the relationship between China and Vietnam. Brantley Womack argues that, “in general, there is no country more similar to China than Vietnam, and there is no country more similar to Vietnam than China.” Yet, even as the Vietnamese undertook the sinification of their politics, administration, and elite culture in the 15th century they did so only with a concurrent
emphasis on Vietnamese independence from China. The Chinese on the other hand generally thought the Annamese – a Chinese term for the Vietnamese meaning the “pacified South” – were semi-civilized but retained barbarous customs including relatively equal gender relations which went against notions of proper Confucian hierarchy. Indeed, Alexander Woodside suggests that the Vietnamese made this dilution of the traditional hierarchy an important element of their collective identity. Interestingly, China and Vietnam were governed according to very similar political and social principles yet for the Chinese these principles legitimized assimilation of Vietnam into their territory while for the Vietnamese they served as part of the inspiration for resistance.

The understanding that a society’s self-conception, or collective identity to use Woodside’s term, is at least partially constructed based on its relationship to those around it is thus crucial to understanding the nature of legitimacy. For the rest of the chapter therefore I examine a number of examples of societies examining the stories they tell, their relationship with others, and the ways in which these factors allow them to legitimize expansion. In doing this I show the manner in which the success or failure of an imperial project is tied to the ideas at their center. I begin with an examination of legitimacy and self-conception in the conflict between Sassanid Persia and the Byzantine Empire, move on to the case of China and its expansion in East Asia, then look at the emergence of islamicized Turkic states, explore the related topic of Ottoman emergence and development, and finally, I move backward chronologically to look at tribal identities
in pre-Islamic Arabia and the significance of Islam as a new narrative tradition in the region. These examples seem to privilege Islamic societies but I believe that this is not problematic for two reasons: first, in looking for examples of expansionist societies in the pre-modern world a great number of them happen to be Islamic given the rapid growth of the Islamic societies after the seventh century; second, Islamic societies are not monolithic so rather than thinking in terms of a single society spread out over time and space, we can think of a number of diverse societies sharing certain traits but thinking and behaving somewhat differently.

Where there exists long historical relationships between societies there is less of a need for a conscious process of narrative construction. In historical cases of this sort, conquest is often part of a long process marked by fluid territorial and cultural boundaries, and as a result territorial expansion does not represent a sudden, dramatic event in need of special explanation and justification. Indeed, the history of the Christian *reconquista* in the Iberian Peninsula – a history I will examine in greater detail in the next chapter – represents just such a case. In situations like this, where longstanding historical relationships tie societies together, conflicts among them can become so regularized as to become part of one’s identity.

The relationship that emerged between Christians and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula after 711 was nothing if not familiar. Centuries of conflict across depopulated frontiers helped create societies that became accustomed to warfare with each other. This normalization did not occur instantly, but emerged in the four hundred years following
the initial invasions. Thus, in the *Historia Silense* it is recorded that when Fernando I attacked the Islamic city of Viseu in 1055, he did so to avenge the death of his father-in-law. R.A. Fletcher notes that although this justification was implausible, it was nevertheless significant that any justification was offered since it suggests that, “the author thought that a reason was needed for attacking Muslims. You did not make war on them just because they were there. Later generations were not so scrupulous.”

Within a generation of the Viseu campaign, for instance, members of the military order of Belchite all took an oath promising, “never to live at peace with the pagans but to devote all their days to molesting and fighting them.” Cross-cultural contact between the societies led to much sharing of culture and traditions, but also had the effect of making warfare seem natural and even moral.

This Iberian example offers some distinct features, but is not unique. In fact, the relationship that developed there between Christians and Muslims had corollaries elsewhere. A few centuries earlier, at the other end of the Mediterranean, similar circumstances emerged on the frontier between the Roman Empire and the territory of Sassanid Persia.

By the third century, the Parthian empire, which had long shared a border with the Roman Empire, had declined significantly. External pressures, succession struggles, and uprisings from among vassal states had conspired to sap the empire of its ability to hold onto its territory. From southwestern Persia a local governor named Ardashir rose up against Parthian rule and, after defeating an army sent against him in 224, had himself
named Shahanshah, or “king-of-kings,” of the new Sassanid Empire. Ardashir was determined to secure all the territory of his Parthian predecessors but also had greater ambitions and in 230 he led his forces across the frontier of the Tigris River and into Roman territory. After initially being caught off guard the Romans were able to rally and push the Persian army back across the Tigris. In these early years of conflict ideological lines were still unclear. The Romans were already a mature empire at this point, but they were also undergoing a significant ideological transition connected to the rising popularity of Christianity. The Sassanids, on the other hand, were new enough that their ideas were still in development. Thus, in the early years of the history of Sassanid-Roman relations the two sides were characterized by not just emerging identities, but also by a “mutual ignorance” of the other as each side, “allowed traditional attitudes to flourish long after their irrelevance might have been seen.”9 Even as the Romans were unsure of their new enemy, they were secure in their own claims to legitimacy over their own imperial territory. The Sassanids, by contract, still had to construct a solid basis for their legitimacy.

Sassanid ideology was based on two ideas. The first was a sense of legitimacy based on connection to the Zoroastrian priesthood of which the dynasty’s founder had been a part. Somewhat connected to this was the second element of Sassand ideology: the notion that the Sassanids were the heirs and successors of the great Achaemenid Dynasty that had once dominated the Eastern Mediterranean. Eventually, the line of
ancestry would be drawn back even further than the Achaemenids to the heroes of the
mythical Persian past.

Zoroastrianism had been the faith of the Achaemenids until their destruction at the
hands of Alexander of Macedon. In the Hellenic period that followed it lost its official
backing under Seleucid rule but continued to play an important if diminished role in
Persian society. This remained the situation when the Parthians, in turn, replaced the
Seleucids. The Sassanids, however, had strong links to the Zoroastrian faith since Papak,
father of the founders of the dynasty, had been high-priest in the Zoroastrian temple of
his home province of Persis. It was perhaps this status that helped him seize the throne of
the territory in the early third century C.E., after which he ruled jointly as priest-king with
his eldest son Shapur. However, it was Papak’s second son, Ardashir, who would carry
Sassanid ambitions beyond the territory of Persis and by 224 he defeated the last Parthian
ruler and begin uniting the country under his rule.

With Ardashir, “religion ascend[ed] the throne of Iran.” Connecting the new
dynasty to the dominant faith in the region was crucial to Ardashir’s claim to legitimacy
and over time he made this connection even closer. Thus on coins from early in
Ardashir’s reign he followed the style of his brother in placing his own image on one side
and that of his father Papak, the high-priest, on the reverse. This can be read as
representing the two elements of power, both secular and religious. Later examples of
coins, however, demonstrate a significant change: Ardashir still occupies one side but on
the other Papak has been replaced by the Zoroastrian fire-altar. The inscription reads:
“the Mazda worshipper, the divine Ardashir, King of Iran, King of Kings of Iran.” The fire itself was labeled, “the fire of Ardashir (Image 2.1).”

Associating himself with Zoroastrianism, and indeed placing himself at the very top of the structure, was a key means of winning the support of the priesthood and even perhaps gaining suzerainty over local rulers but had the additional purpose of establishing a link to the Achaemenids of the distant past. Thus, in comparing inscriptions from Achaemenid times to those of the Sassanid, we find some clear similarities. First the Achaemenid:

Thus speaks Darius, king by grace of Ahura Mazda – I am king. Ahura Mazda gave me the kingship … Thus speaks Darius the king: these lands were given to me. By the grace of Ahura Mazda [they] were placed under me.

Now an inscription from the time of Ardashir’s son, Shapur I:

I am the worshipper of Ahura Mazda, the lord Shapur, King of Iran and non-Iran, of divine origin, son of the worshipper of Ahura Mazda, the lord Adashir, King of Kings of Iran, of divine origin, grandson of the lord Papak, the king.¹¹

There are some similarities in the inscriptions, but a more explicit connection between the dynasties was established through genealogies. It was in these genealogies that the Sassanids constructed the narrative of their past.
The earliest genealogies created during Ardashir’s reign were less ambitious than their descendants would be and only traced the line back to its progenitor, Sasan. By the fourth century reign of Shapur II, however, Sasan was connected to both the ancient rulers of Persis and, more significantly, to the great Darius founder of the Achaemenid Empire. In the fifth century, the Sassanid genealogies grew even more ambitious. Not content to connect themselves to the greatest empire of the ancient world, the new genealogies now linked the Sassanids with the mythical Kayanian dynasty, heroes of the sacred Zoroastrian text Avestra. Inscriptions on coins from this era added among the many royal titles listed, the new title of Kayanid. Through stories like this, an empire that was less than two hundred years old was made to seem divine and part of an ancient line of kings who had ruled Persia since the time of Zoroaster himself.
Such a narrative had ramifications that went beyond Persia. Ardashir had been the first Sassanid to cross the Tigris frontier and attack Roman territory, and since his time such attacks had continued intermittently. The motivation for these invasions were most likely numerous, but the justification for them came directly from the genealogies. Thus, Ardashir claimed all of Asia as his ancestral right and announced his ambition to reunite the empire of his Achaemenid ancestors. Shapur I continued his father’s policy and in a monumental inscription he boasted of his significant conquests all of which had brought him closer to fulfilling the dream of restoring the empire to its ancestral glory. Shapur II, took a slightly different path. In a letter to the Roman Emperor Constantius, Shapur claimed that his ancestral heritage technically included territory that extended all the way to the borders of Macedonia. The obvious implication was that Constantinople itself was part of the rightful possessions of the Sassanids even as Shapur II graciously suggested that he would be willing to overlook his legal claims for the modest price of Armenia and Mesopotamia.12

This serves as an excellent example of how narratives are culturally specific. For Persians, it may have made perfect sense that they should have territory that rightfully belonged to them, but to the Romans, whose role in the Sassanid narrative was essentially that of usurpers, such a claim seemed absurd. Not only had the Roman Empire ruled those territories for centuries, but since the empire had reoriented itself to the east in the fourth century the region had taken on an even greater significance.
By the sixth century the rivalry between the two states reached a new level such that after 502 C.E. warfare became so frequent between them that it became the norm in their relationship while peace became anomalous. Two societies founded on different narratives laid claim to the same territory for different reasons and this produced a situation, like that which would emerge centuries later in the Iberian Peninsula, in which conflict came to seem natural and thus did not require additional justification.

Another region where a developing ideology influenced the process of state-building and imperial expansion was in East Asia. There, a number of states and societies took part in longstanding interactions that led eventually to the development of a general culture of legitimacy in the region. Below I examine the relationships that emerged between various Chinese dynasties and their neighbors within East Asia and the way that these relationships ultimately made the process of Chinese expansion easier.

Legitimacy in China was based on two separate but related ideas. First, was an historical and ideological construction that connected contemporary dynasties to their predecessors through an understanding of Chinese history. This was the source of the emphasis on continuity within Chinese historiography. Second, legitimacy in China was based on the development of a pseudo-geographical representation of the region. Within this representation, societies were contrasted with a developing notion of “China” and assessed based on their distance from Chinese cultural, political, and societal norms. I begin by discussing the development of a Chinese notion of imperial legitimacy based on historical cycles and the Mandate of Heaven, and then move on to describe the Chinese
idea of civilization as radiating out from the center until it encompassed peripheral societies within its influence.

One of the keys to maintaining order within complex societies is the ability of the ruling elite to control the narrative. Once a narrative is established that supports the claim to authority of a given group of elites, it is vital that they retain control of that narrative. Destabilizing events like rebellions and succession crises are challenges to ideological authority as much as they are challenges to political authority. Struggles over succession are essentially struggles to control the future of the narrative, within which each of the competing parties claim that the next chapter of the story should rightfully continue through their line. Victory in such a competition means the elimination of alternative narrative lines and a re-centralization of the story through the victor, but where succession crises end without decisive resolution the result is a narrative that branches out into separate strands. Rebellions, on the other hand are often ideologically based on either the claims of a new group to the legitimizing narrative, or, conversely, the sense that the old narrative has lost relevance and needs to be replaced. When new elites arise, therefore, one of the things they must accomplish in order to survive over the long term is the reduction of narratives or ideologies, preferably until the ruling group acquires an ideological monopoly.

This gets us back to China. For much of the first millennium B.C.E. no single entity existed which we could call China and instead a number of independent and competing states ruled over the territory within and between the Yangtze and Yellow
River basins. Within this era of political disunity the time from the end of the ninth through the fifth century is known as the Spring and Autumn Period, while the fifth through the third century is traditionally designated the Warring States Period. Despite or perhaps because of the lack of unity, the two eras produced some of the most lasting contributions to later Chinese civilizations. Chief among these contributions were the so-called “Hundred Schools” of Chinese philosophy, and of these, four – legalism, Taoism, Moshism, and Confucianism – had particular long-term influence.

By the time that the Han Dynasty emerged in 207 B.C.E. there continued to exist a number of competing philosophical systems each with distinct views of moral virtue, the role of the emperor, human nature, and the Chinese narrative. For the first century of Han rule this situation did not change but under Emperor Wu (r. 146-86 B.C.E.) and the court scholar Dong Zhongshu a concerted attempt was made to limit imperial patronage only to the Confucian school while marginalizing the other philosophical schools. The Song Dynasty scholar Ouyang Xiu explained that, “during the Han Dynasty, all the schools of thought flourished together. Master Dong deplored this, and withdrew to study the Confucian school. Thus the Way of the Confucian school became illustrious and the other schools of thought came to an end.” From that point on, political theory would be primarily based on a set of texts associated with Confucius.

The most important questions for Han scholars regarded the role of the emperor and the nature of imperial rule. The former is not important for our purposes, but the latter is vital since it was an argument about the legitimacy of the emperor. In order to answer
such an important question, Han scholars referred to a particular text called *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. The Annals were the court chronicles of the state of Lu from 722-481 B.C.E. and to the uninformed they would seem to be of little value. The entries were terse, cryptic, and reported seemingly random events with one typical example simply reporting, “Winter. Locusts Arose.” However, since at least the fourth century scholars had come to believe that the Annals had been edited by Confucius himself and, as a result, its seemingly innocuous passages could be interpreted in such a way as to, “reveal to readers the most profound wisdom pertaining to government and history. Mencius said that when Confucius edited the *Annals*, ‘corrupt ministers and lawless sons were in terror’: their iniquity had been revealed.”\(^\text{14}\) The connotation of Mencius’s statement was that in editing chronicles of the past the great sage Confucius was also revealing vital information to future generations. Such information revealed the secrets of good government, and in this way, could be used as a means of critiquing the contemporary state. In the hands of the most creative scholars, these centuries old documents could even offer predictions of the fate of contemporary figures. Generations of Confucian scholars from Han times onward would therefore seek from the past the answers to the questions of the present.

Within the commentaries of Han Confucians we also see an adoption and refinement of the idea of the Mandate of Heaven. In previous eras the notion that kings ruled under a special mandate of Heaven had been accepted sporadically but there had
been disagreement about the proper place to direct prayers. For instance, the Mandate of Heaven was not invoked at all during Western Han times (207 B.C.E. – 9 C.E.) and only became traditional after the interregnum of Wang Mang’s Xin Dynasty. Prior to this point, legitimacy was generally understood genealogically with the “political structure … as a permanently accepted central authority.” As a result dynastic change was seen as anomalous and required an explicit justification to explain why one dynasty had to be replaced by another. We can see evidence of this view in the case of the Han regent Hao Guang, regent for the young Emperor Zhao. While Hao seemed to have served the young emperor faithfully, there were some in court circles who had greater ambitions for him. This is evidenced by the fact that sometime during his regency there began to appear forged genealogies connecting him to the legendary, and probably mythical, Yellow Emperor:

The Yellow Lord was given documentary change for Heaven’s Mandate, and ruled all under Heaven. The beneficient influence of his moral power penetrated deeply, to his later descendants, and so his sons and grandsons were all re-established as Sons of Heaven. This is Heaven’s repayment for the possession of moral power … The Grand General of the Han, Huo Zimeng, whose personal name was Guang, was also a descendant of the Yellow Lord.

We see here reference to the Mandate, but in a different form than it would later be understood. In this formulation of the concept, the Mandate of Heaven had been acquired
by the Yellow Emperor and then passed down through the generations within his line, rather than being something the Han obtained and then lost.

In this form the Mandate of Heaven bears some resemblance to the understanding of imperial legitimacy that would emerge in Japan. There the idea developed that the imperial line was of divine origin. Rather than precluding political change, however, this ideology resulted in the gradual political marginalization of the emperor and the emergence of figures who exercised their power outside of and often parallel to that of the emperor. This very well could have been the fate of Chinese emperors as well, but instead of a system in which there was stability in the imperial line but instability in the general political structure, the Chinese constructed a system where the imperial line was subject to change but the basic political system remained stable. Key to this system was the development, over the remaining centuries of Han rule, of the idea of historical cycle. It was this concept that would explain and naturalize the process of historical change in subsequent eras of Chinese history.

The concept of the historical cycle is complex and somewhat fluid, but for the purposes of this discussion we can focus on some of the basic elements that emerged in Han times. The essential idea was that each dynasty possessed and exercised a specific virtue – they were wholehearted, refined, or reverent, for instance – but that eventually that virtue became over-applied. When a new dynasty emerged they brought a new virtue, “each of which was an antidote for the vices engendered by the overapplication of
its predecessor. The ramification of this was that change rather than stasis was necessary to political order, and that every dynasty would reach a point where its rule did more harm than good. Thus, while genealogy was never completely removed from notions of legitimacy, an ideology was developed in which the role of every new dynasty was to restore virtue that had been lost in the previous dynasty. Every dynasty ruled, therefore, with explicit reference to the dynasty that preceded it. This notion was expressed in many ways, but perhaps most clearly with the tradition that each new dynasty would compile a history of its predecessor. Within these histories, successes and failures would be cataloged with a special emphasis placed on describing the specific weaknesses that necessitated the emergence of a new ruling class. As the idea of historical cycles developed, the change in dynasties came to be seen as a natural and necessary part of the political order. Just as dynasties justified their own rule based on the weaknesses of the prior dynasty, they were also expected to be aware of when their own time came. A tradition thus emerged in which the last emperor of a dynasty would abdicate in favor of a rival when the situation became untenable. In the thirteenth century, for instance, as Mongol armies advanced into China, the Song emperor, realizing the futility of further struggles wrote a letter to Kublai Khan:

The Mandate of Heaven having shifted, your servant chooses to change with it, . . . yet my heart is full of emotions and these cannot countenance the prospect of the abrupt annihilation of the . . . altars of my ancestors.
Whether they be misguidedly abandoned or specially preserved intact rests solely with the revitalized moral virtue you bring to the throne.¹⁸

The Mandate of Heaven thus created a situation in which change was frequent but each change was assimilated into a view of history that stressed continuity.

Within the narrative of Chinese history each dynasty possessed moral virtue (at least until the point that it lost it), but also significant was the idea, around since at least Zhou times, that China represented, “a radiating civilization, shedding its light in progressively dimming quantity on the surrounding areas …” The imperial center was not just a physical location but, “a central seat of political and moral authority.” A common means of mapping the relationship between central and peripheral areas was as a series of inscribed squares and, “[t]he farther the areas inhabited by foreign peoples are from the center [square], the less civilizing influence these areas receive, and the more ‘alien’ they are.”¹⁹ Distance was not seen as purely geographical, it was a matter of culture. As a result those who were once alien or uncivilized could be progressively assimilated until the point that they were no longer on the periphery and could receive the full influence of Chinese civilization even as their physical distance from the center remained the same.

Chinese expansion was therefore legitimized based on two associated ideas. First, an understanding of history that understood moral virtue as something that passed from one dynasty to the next, and second, the sense that moral and political authority radiated outward from this center and encompassed surrounding societies. Societies could be
conquered by a Chinese Empire but remain essentially uncivilized and peripheral while others were wholly assimilated to the extent that they ceased to be peripheral and became central. The latter was what occurred in the territory of Yunnan, a region that long existed on the fringes of Chinese civilization. A millennium of contact between Chinese and Yunnanese societies saw the nature of their interactions go through significant changes. Yunnan was at various times China’s formal ally, its trading partner, a tributary state, a conquered territory with a degree of local autonomy, and even a major rival for regional power. In this context, when we see Yunnan finally incorporated into China during the Ming Dynasty the act doesn’t seem incongruous, or sudden, but an event that made sense within a long history of interaction.

Because of the long history of interaction between China and Yunnan, the legitimizing project did not represent a significant ideological challenge to the Chinese state. Rather than imposing a sudden and rapid transformation upon Yunnan, the system established by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) took a very similar form to previous eras of Chinese occupation. At the same time the Ming gradually altered the cultural and administrative structure of the province while maintaining retaining relative autonomy of local communities. The gradual nature of the process was such that there was little need for any sort of centrally constructed narrative to make sense of the events. For the people of Yunnan, life under the rule of Ming China would not have seemed dramatically different from that which had prevailed previously. Similarly, for the Chinese, initially the expansion into Yunnan would not have dramatically altered the nature of bureaucratic
rule or required any sort of reconceptualization of its imperial identity. It was only in later centuries, after the idea of Yunnan as part of China had become gradually naturalized, that large scale Han migration and administrative incorporation radically altered the nature of Yunnanese society. The basic nature of Chinese self-conception, the notion of Chinese civilization as radiating its influence outward, and the long historical relationship between China and Yunnan were perfectly suited to the task of explaining and justifying the Chinese expansion. Indeed, they were so well-suited to the situation that virtually no additional explanation was needed at all. As we will see, this Chinese example stands on stark contrast to that of the Spanish expansion into the Americas, a situation that could not be easily understood or justified given prevailing Spanish ideas about itself and others.

Unlike the Han Chinese in East Asia, the Turkic tribes who came to play such a profound role in the history of Islamic societies were relative newcomers to Southwest Asia. Although not as spectacular as the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, Turkic migrations from Central to western Asia represent a more enduring, if not dramatic, episode in world history. The Mongol armies themselves were responsible for a lot of movement of Turkic peoples – both because Turks made up a large proportion of the armies and because other Turkic groups moved west in response to Mongol conquests – but it was in the centuries prior to these invasions that Turks became a major force in Anatolia and the Islamic Middle East.
As Turks moved west and came into contact with new peoples and new ways of life these nomadic herders and hunters had to adapt to their changing circumstances. In doing so they were aided immeasurably by their adoption of Islam, a faith that would become a vital part of Turk self-identity. Within Islam old behaviors came to be understood and justified in new ways even as a new set of behaviors, inspired by the changed cultural, social, and political context, continued to be understood based on Turkic traditions. The advent of the Turks in West Asia and Anatolia offers an excellent example of a people adapting to a new historical situation by accessing a preexisting narrative but in a manner that was novel. The success of islamicized Turks in and beyond Asia was partially due to their military prowess but owes just as much to their ability to establish an ideological basis for their power within a set of ideas that connected them to a history that had been written centuries before they arrived to the region.

Turks first gained influence in ninth century when those captured in border raids began to be used as slave-soldiers of the Abbasid Caliph or other Islamic rulers. In this capacity these former infidels would be converted and culturally assimilated, and, as a result, created little lasting Turkish influence in the region. Nevertheless, this early period is significant because it was through these slave-raids that many Turks first gained exposure to Islam. In the borderlands between the Islamic Middle East and the Turkic areas of Inner Asia still marked by spiritual beliefs sometimes referred to as “shamanistic,” raiding was a common occurrence as Turkic tribesmen raided Muslims
while Muslims raided them. This sort of raiding was not a new activity for these Turkic nomads and had long been one source of survival for tribes throughout the steppeland. For Muslims, in contrast, raids of this sort offered material rewards but were primarily understood and justified through the lens of religion rather than a means of survival. Arabic sources refer to these raids under the term *ghaza*, a concept that for centuries would have enormous significance for the self-imagining of Turks.

In the contemporary, world political circumstances have made the Arabic term *jihad* familiar to a wide number of people beyond those with any formal interest or expertise in Islam. In popular usage the word is generally used as a synonym for “holy war” and in this manner offers support to those who wish to imagine Islam as a particularly violent faith. However, it is more accurate to translate jihad as the more benign “struggle,” which can connote a struggle for self-mastery just as much as struggle to advance or defend Islam. In fact, for many centuries the latter was more commonly referred to by above-mentioned term *ghaza*. Ghaza has pre-Islamic roots and referred to the sort of raids carried out among the Bedouin tribes of the Arabian Peninsula. With the islamicization of the Peninsula, however, the term acquired connotations relating to the struggle to defend or expand the boundaries of Islamic rule. Just as Islam took a preexisting Arab activity and gave it religious validation, it would do the same for Turks.

As Carter Findley observed, “… ghaza would become the leitmotif in the Turks reimagining of themselves in Islamic terms and in giving them a sense of common purpose that transcended tribal difference.”

This serves as an excellent example of how
a new narrative identity – in this case a new view of themselves as part of a longer Islamic history dating back to the time of the Prophet – can also lead to a new way of thinking about a set of activities that are anything but new. In other words, while many of the behaviors, survival strategies, and military tactics of newly islamicized Turks remained the same, their ways of understanding and justifying these was reshaped.

While a new phase of Turkish history would begin in the eleventh century with the establishment of empire by Seljuks, for many Turks living on the frontiers of empire, ghaza would continue to be key to their self-concept. By the thirteenth century the mountainous regions of western Anatolia had become a prominent site for these ghazis (the term used to describe those who carry out ghaza). Seeking to settle into the rich plains of Byzantium these frontier nomads, “incited men to a ghaza, a Holy War against Byzantium.” While called a “war” the attacks on Byzantine territory continued to be more akin to raids than a formal invasion. The raids were organized by a variety of ghazi leaders who organized the Turkish warriors of the frontier, and carved out for themselves independent principalities in parts of western Anatolia previously held by Byzantium (see map 2.1). One of the most successful of these Turkish beys was a man named Osman Gazi. As Osman won more and greater victories against the Byzantines more men flocked to his standard, and by 1302 we can begin to talk about an Ottoman principality as existing in northwest Anatolia. Osman’s origin as a ghaza leader was to leave a profound legacy for both his successors and for the legitimization of subsequent Ottoman conquests.
Interestingly, but not surprisingly, as the successors of Osman continued to expand and eventually formalize an imperial structure, they found themselves facing a problem similar to that of Spanish monarchs in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Americas. In all three of these cases we find frontier societies whose success at expansion was based less on regular armies than on the efforts on semi-private armies only loosely controlled by central political figures. As monarchs emerged who desired greater control over their territories and populations, however, it became crucial to curtail the independence of these armies whether styled as ghazis, crusaders, or conquistadors.

We have been accustomed to a view of war that emphasizes conflict between political units that is waged with clear-cut and limited purposes in mind. Implicit in this
notion is that peace is the normal order of things and war an anomaly. In European history, for instance, we can find conflicts which have been named according to their duration – The Seven Years War, The Thirty Years War, The Hundred Years War – and reflects an understanding of warfare as something periodic (even if it lasts for one hundred years), and which has a discrete beginning and ending. “Far more common in the broad sweep of history are prolonged conflicts where the transition from peace to war is blurred … and where objectives tend to be total … The term war is frequently inadequate [to describe such conflicts].”

Conflicts between and among frontier societies fit this description well and because of the long-term nature of the fighting, the incessant raids and counter-raids, the impermanence of territorial possessions and frequently therefore the presence of a sort of siege mentality, the situation tended to permeate the larger society. The conflict, in other words, became an important part of the story the society told about itself. The notion, for instance, that the reconquista had helped forge a Spanish society, “organized for war,” is a common one and while it is not incorrect this view can have the result of conflating the period before 1369 when the frontiers of Iberia were legitimately in flux and the period between 1369 and 1482 when the borders achieved relative stability and large-scale conflict was infrequent. What is key for our purposes is that even as the actual situation became more stable, the mentality remained essentially the same. The style and method of warfare that emerged in frontier societies was a response to specific conditions. However, when those conditions changed (when a more centralized political structure emerged, for instance), the characteristics of warfare
that had once been practical shift into the realm of tradition. In other words, a set of activities and behaviors that emerged more or less organically, become formalized as part of the ideology of the larger society.

Something like this occurred in relation to Ottoman society as it evolved from a band of ghazi warriors to the dominant single power in the region. Whereas once beys like Osman himself had led his warriors in raids on Byzantine territory, as later Ottoman rulers became more and more powerful they ceased to take part in frontier raiding. But even as sultans shifted their focus to other matters, ghazis continued to operate in their name and became increasingly difficult to control. This made for a delicate transition in which ghazis who had been central to the expansionist effort of the early Ottomans had to reined in. In order to do this, the state incorporated them into a more formal institutional framework – as part of a composite force that included janissaries, the provincial cavalry, and the navy – pushed them into new frontier areas further from the center, and subjected them to greater accountability and revenue management, including the assertion that the state should receive a fifth of the booty captured in ghaza raids (interestingly because of Spain’s Islamic heritage conquistadors in the Americas would also provide their monarchs with “the royal fifth” of their plunder).

As the former frontier statelet became an empire, the institutions that had sustained it in its infancy became increasingly irrelevant and a need emerged to create “institutions to rule an Islamic state with a large interior.” Chapter 5 explores a similar process in Spanish America, and in both case the needs of the state increasingly
demanded a move from the informality of the conquest period to a political structure that was more formal. For the Ottoman the people who could help create such a structure “were not so much ghazis and heterodox dervishes, or foreigners and converts, as elites specially formed for the purpose … [T]he Ottoman house had to part ways with its earliest retainers.” Even as this occurred, the Ottoman center “appropriated the ghazi as one claim to legitimacy,” and modified their own political culture, which previously had been based on a kind of meritocratic egalitarianism and the relative autonomy of subordinates, “to ensure state dominance.”

Maintaining a narrative that highlighted the ghazi origins of the Ottoman was probably necessary in the short term but had dangerous implications for the long term. In this we see another link with the Spanish experience. Just as the culture and ethos of the ghazi warrior was highlighted and extolled within the Ottoman Empire so to was that of the conquistador celebrated in Spain. In both cases, however, states emerged who wished to establish greater control over their subjects and found that doing so put them at odds with those they once honored.

As their self-conception as ghaza leaders became more symbolic than actual, the Ottomans more emphatically placed themselves within a new historic narrative, that of Islam. While their had certainly been prior Islamo-Turkic regimes in the Middle East, no previous one had so permanently integrated Turkish culture, most obviously a Turkish literary culture, into the region nor so fully integrated the political, religious, and cultural legacies of the region (Islamic as well as Byzantine) into their own society. The concept of ghaza was one of the easiest means of affecting this integration because its meaning
could be understood to be close to an already prevailing Turkic tradition of raiding, but there were other methods as well. This especially became the case after the defeat of the Mamluks in 1512, a victory which gave them control of the key cities of Islam: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem (see map 2.2).

Sovereignty over these territories put the Ottomans in a unique position within the Islamic World and gave them the opportunity to present themselves as not just an Islamic empire, but effectively as the Islamic empire. As a result, in the sixteenth century the Ottoman based more of their self-identity upon their claim to primacy within Islam. Soon after taking the Holy Land Ottoman sultans began referring to themselves as “servitor of the Two Holy Cities,” but as the century went on the titles they claimed became far loftier than in any earlier period. Thus, we find references to the Ottoman sultan as “shadow of God on Earth” (zill Allah fi ’l-alem) and, more significantly “caliph of the face of the earth” (halife-I ru-yi zemin). Caliph had been the title of the generations of men who succeeded Muhammad as head of the Islamic community, but the designation had been dormant since the Mongol destruction of Baghdad and the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258. There had been a number of significant Islamic states since that time but none had made the claim to centrality entailed by the caliphal ideal.

Having now laid claim to the position of caliph, Ottoman sultans became more than just regional rulers but, as successors to Muhammad, head of the larger Islamic
community that stretched across the globe. The claiming of the title of caliph represents the picking up of a narrative thread that had been vital for Islam for six hundred years, but inactive since the thirteenth century. As a whole, therefore, the Ottomans emerged into a situation that was in some ways novel but not unprecedented, and were able to make sense of and legitimize their own expansion using a prevailing narrative structure.
that had meaning to large numbers of their subjects. This was the case because they expanded at the expense of a number of territories and peoples with whom they had long historical relationships, and because they were able to craft a self-conception that, even though they were relative newcomers to their region, allowed them to tap into narrative traditions, like that of Islam, that made sense of their activities.

Ottoman expansion was not achieved by moving into empty space, and instead it occurred at the expense of many different states and peoples. As a generalization, we can think of Ottoman wars of expansion as being waged against three large categories of states each of which had a particular relationship to the Ottoman. Osman’s earliest victories were against Byzantium and much of the Ottoman expansion of the early centuries of its existence came at the cost of Christian polities in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. This expansion was justified by some of the basic tenets of the Islamic Faith. The quranic prohibition against spilling the blood of fellow Muslims turned warfare outward and made the only justifiable war that which expanded the rule of Islamic law. In theory at least this created a permanent state of war between the Dar al-Islam (house of Islam) and the Dar al-Harb (house of war). Expansion into the territory of neighboring Christian states was in theory always justified.

However, the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia were the home of a variety of Muslim states and peoples in addition to that of the Christian Byzantine Empire. For the Ottomans to expand, therefore, would require war with and subjugation of people already residing within the Dar al-Islam. The easiest of such territory to justify
expansion into was that held by the Persian Safavids and their predecessors who were Shi’a. Although the Ottomans had very real concerns about the potential for Shi’a-inspired unrest on the Eastern frontiers between the Ottoman and Safavid domains, the wars themselves were legitimized as being fought for the defense of religious orthodoxy.

Finally there were those wars fought against rival Sunni states of which the most significant took place from 1516-1517 under Selim I against the Mamluk sultanate. Such conflicts were for obvious reasons the most difficult to justify. Generally, the arguments were based on the need for Islamic unity and the protection of the Islamic world. As the most powerful Islamic state it made the most sense for the Ottomans to take on the burden of both unifying and protecting Muslims. This was particularly the case during the war with the Mamluks since this was a time of increased Portuguese incursions into the Red Sea. Both the Arab world and the Mamluks themselves viewed the Ottomans as a necessary counterbalance to Portuguese naval might and the Ottomans were happy to fulfill this role. Additionally, this particular war was couched in terms that made the enemy the Mamluks rather than their subjects. Thus, when Selim I marched into Arabia he announced to the Arabs, “that he came to free them from the Mamluk yoke and to protect the Islamic world.” In fact the protection of the Islamic world required the substitution of Ottoman authority where once the Mamluks had ruled. Similar to his tactics on the Arabian Peninsula, after crossing the Sinai with his army Selim announced a grant of amnesty to all the people of Egypt since, “his campaign was directed only against the Mamluks.”

So while war against Sunnis was a much more complex
enterprise than wars against Shi’as or Christians, it could also be realized in such a way
as to minimize the awkwardness of the undertaking.

As the above examples illustrate, where there exists long historical relationships
among societies complex processes of narrative construction are less vital for
legitimizing conquest. That being said, the historical relationships themselves are in
some cases less a matter of history than part of a construction relating to a given societies
own self-concept. The Ottomans could only justify war against the Shi’a Safavids or the
Mamluks based on their own claim to be defenders of orthodoxy and defenders of Islam.
In fact, it was in the sixteenth century that Ottoman rulers took on the illustrious
designations noted above.

Thus the Ottoman state, positioned among Christian, Shi’a, and Sunni polities had
established means for justifying expansion at the expense of any of the three. Its also
important to note that not only did the Ottoman Empire have established means of
legitimatizing conquests of different peoples, but they also had established traditions for
ruling those they conquered that stretched back to the very beginnings of Islamic
expansion in the seventh century. This was best exemplified through the category of
dhimmi. Dhimmi were “protected people” who agreed to live under Islamic rule and, in
turn, received permanent protection from their rulers while being allowed to maintain
their faith and traditions. The notion was a complex one, that was subject to vigorous
debate between different legal traditions each of which had their own notions about who
qualified for the designation, the status of those who qualified, and the rights that should
be accorded to dhimmi. These debates did not end under the Ottoman but despite these disagreements, they were still provided with a basic tradition that they could refer to rather than having to create something from scratch. By placing themselves within the Islamic tradition, therefore, the Ottoman were able to pull from centuries of practice in order resolve the major questions of imperial rule.

I will end this chapter with one more example of narrative and legitimacy. It again comes from the Islamic World, but from a much earlier period of history. Whereas the Ottomans constructed their own sense of legitimacy from a complex set of traditions the early leaders of the Islamic community had to construct an entirely new thread, although certainly one with roots in pre-Islamic Arabia, that would justify and legitimize a new form of power and a new sense of unity in a region that had traditionally lacked both structures of power and bases of unity.

There are several elements connected to the rise of Islam that are of particular interest here. First, it is a history that offers an example of a situation where an old narrative tradition that no longer provided satisfying answers within a changing society was replaced with a newer and more effective narrative. Even as Islam represented a complete repudiation of the old narrative, however, it did so without altering, at least initially, the traditions, practices, or habits of Arabian society. Second, the early history of Islam offers an example of the difficulty of maintaining control over the narrative. One of the important early difficulties that emerged following the death of Muhammad, was keeping the narrative from splintering even as multiple individuals sought to claim
the Prophet’s legacy. Lastly, we see the effects of the splintering of a narrative with the emergence of the “partisans of Ali” or Shi’a, a sect that established an alternative Islamic narrative. Where a society lacks narrative unity it is rare to find political unity.

The pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was a region without any single dominant power. Arabian society was multifaceted, with a significant Bedouin population surviving through herding, hunting, and raiding (before ghaza took on religious connotations, it described the raids carried out Arabian nomads), and a sedentary population living off some agriculture and trade. In the generation before Muhammad the Peninsula underwent significant change. Profits from trade increased in this era and as it did sedentism became more established, particularly in the city of Mecca, even as political anarchy increased. Raiding had always been important to the nomadic lifestyle but in the sixth century its frequency increased and it became larger in scale, more deadly, and more like warfare than the traditional raids. The warfare required larger concentrations of people, and the small tribes that had once been the norm gave way to large tribal confederacies linked together through manufactured ties. Mohammed Bayeh refers to this as “genealogical amnesia,” a process that made the assimilation of formerly distinct clans possible. These genealogies represented the Bedouin’s own narrative of legitimacy as they not only brought tribes together but also justified inequality within the group.

Although the Bedouin lifestyle was very different than that which was practiced in the towns, the nomadic ethos tended to permeate into the settled population creating a
settled Bedouin culture. One result of this was that the towns were organized along similar genealogical lines as that of the nomads, with authority similarly monopolized by particular clans within the larger tribe. The Quraysh tribe of Mecca was one such tribe and by the sixth century they had become the single most prominent tribe in western Arabia. Their authority was based on their domination of the lucrative trade of the Hejaz and backed up by a religious justification centered on the important shrine housed at the Ka’bah in Mecca. As a major pilgrimage site, the Ka’bah encouraged travel to Mecca four times a year, and where there were pilgrims trade followed. This was a key factor in the economic dominance of the Quraysh. Thus, by the seventh century the tribe had established a specific claim to authority based partly on success at trade, partly on a set of mostly fabricated genealogical connections that allowed them to constitute themselves as a tribe, and partly on their control of a pilgrimage site that may have been the most important on the entire Peninsula. Relationships amongst merchant communities, including that of Mecca, were marked by heated rivalries that often led to violence among allied Bedouin groups, but the significance that the Ka’bah held for tribes across the Peninsula meant that Mecca had to remain free of intertribal violence in order to allow the continuation of pilgrimages and the trade that accompanied them.

Out of the fractured world of Arabia arose a man named Muhammad, who would unite the Peninsula under a new set of divinely inspired ideas that sought to turn former combatants into brothers and, as a result, end the cycles of violence that had dominated intertribal relations for so long. Muhammad was born in Mecca around 570 C.E. into a
poorer branch of the Quraysh tribe. After forty relatively uneventful years Muhammad, while wandering in the desert, had a revelation and became convinced that he was the messenger of God with a special mission on Earth to spread the revealed Message. An individual claiming to have been contacted by the heavens is an unremarkable event historically, and one that has been claimed by countless people even up through our own day. What is remarkable is that at particular times, in particular places, and with particular messengers that message is accepted by a large enough group of people that it becomes the center of a new system of belief. Muhammad was just such a remarkable figure, and whether because of a personal charisma, a finely crafted message, or the specific context in which the message was relayed, he soon began to form a group of like-minded followers who accepted him as a prophet of Allah.

Figures such as Muhammad, who carry with them divinely-inspired messages concern us here because such claims represent an implicit or explicit challenge to the legitimacy of the current ruling group. In this case, the leading clans of the Quraysh tribe represented the group most threatened by Muhammad’s message. Their authority was based on their position as leading traders and merchants, but was just as much a function of their other role as protectors of Meccan sanctuary of the Ka’ba and it was this role that Muhammad’s revelation most threatened. There is an inherent danger to being the bearer of new ideas, since the act of creating the new implicitly serves as a critique of current ideas and, even more dangerously, a renunciation of old ideas. Thus, Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad’s eighth century biographer reported that the notables of the Quraysh were
disturbed enough by Muhammad’s refusal to yield to them, that they approached his uncle saying, “O Abu Talib, your nephew [Muhammad] has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life, and accused our forefathers of error; either you must stop him or you must let us get at him …”32 As Islam developed and gained followers it increasingly undermined the Quraysh’s own claim to authority, a situation that they could not allow to continue.

The world of the Quraysh was one that was dominated by tribal conflict and, in many ways, the Quraysh had benefited from this conflict. Muhammad’s new faith, however, sought to erase the distinctions between and among tribes while also serving as a break with the past. If successful, Muhammad’s ideas would break down existing tribal connections and replace them with a new tribal structure based not on genealogy but on a community of believers. In such a society, members of the elite Quraysh families would have no particular claim to authority. Muhammad’s goals were expressed in two important proclamations delivered to the people of Mecca following their defeat by the Islamic community. In the first message Muhammad announced that, “every claim of privilege or blood or property is abolished by me …” Similarly, his last message in Mecca and, in fact his final prophetic message altogether, presented the radical notion that, “every Muslim is a Muslim’s brother, and that all Muslims are brethren; fighting between them should be avoided, and the blood shed in pagan times should not be avenged.”33 Under Muhammad’s direction an Arabian society that had been marked by blood feuds, raiding, and cycles of violence was to be unified.
To a certain extent Muhammad was successful in these efforts, but even so, conflict did not disappear immediately. His first step was to relocate himself and his still relatively small number of followers the city of Medina where he had been assured of support and protection from the elites of the city. From Medina, Muhammad’s *Muhajirun* (emigrants) almost immediately began raiding the trade caravans of the Quraysh. In some ways this raiding was very much in line with Arab tradition. Having cut their ties with their former clans and tribes, the community had in effect established a new tribe, and the notion that one tribe could and should raid another was so well established that it required no additional justification. Muhammad, however, set about creating a new justification for the raiding that made reference to the new moral orientation of the Islamic Faith rather than the old traditions of the peninsula.

While Muslims attacking non-Muslims was not an inherently legitimate act, the case of the Quraysh was more complex. The Quraysh’s crime was not that they were not Muslim, but that they were actively impeding the progress of the divine order through their persecution of Muslims in Mecca, and their interference with the public practice of Islam. The raids were not therefore, indicative of yet another tribal dispute of a type that had been seen in Arabia *ad infinitum*, but part of a much larger struggle with far greater implications. In this struggle, one side carried a new revelation and a divine truth that everyone needed to hear; the other side sought to impede the progress of that revelation. As long as the Quraysh continued to place obstacles in the way of those who might otherwise have become Muslims, then Muhammad and his followers would continue to
fight and would continue to be justified in this struggle. In creating a justification for the raids Muhammad crafted an idea that not only legitimized the current actions of the Muslim community, but also subsequent actions. Additionally, Muhammad established that the legitimacy of the community’s actions was to be judged by a new set of standards rather than traditions connected with the pagan past. “The primacy of Islam over all old customs was asserted; in effect, no bond or tie of pagan society need hold, in the Islamic community, unless explicitly acknowledged anew within Islam.” Muhammad had tossed aside the old means for legitimization, and had created a new set of ideas upon which such matters could be judged.

The success of Muhammad’s ideology and the effectiveness of the Islamic faith as a tool of legitimization should not mask, however, the difficulties that would emerge in the years and centuries after Muhammad’s death, when succession would become a consistently contentious issue. As successful as Muhammad was in crafting a legitimizing ideology in his lifetime, he never constructed a means for transferring this legitimacy after his death. Thus from the moment of his death in 632, the community of Muslims that had gathered around Muhammad threatened to fracture. The issues involved were many. The first and most fundamental question was what kind of society should succeed the one built by Muhammad. While he was alive, it could be assumed that Muhammad was the best guide available – being God’s prophet – to determining the most righteous course of action. This worked well enough as long as Muhammad was alive, but also meant that the society operated with only the barest administrative
apparatus. Once the Prophet died, however, the community was left without any obvious means for holding the society together.

One possibility was that another prophet would emerge to pick up from where Muhammad had left off, both as a source of revelation and as the head of the community. If such a figure did not emerge, then the question became, what should be the nature of the successor? Muhammad’s authority came from the fact that he was a prophet of Allah and carrier of His final revelation. Any successor who was not also a prophet, however, would not have claim to the same spiritual authority, and if he didn’t, then on what could his authority be based? Another major problem arose around the issue of loyalty. Many of the tribal sheiks had pledged their obeisance to Muhammad because of his personal charisma and in recognition of the power he held, not, or not only, because of their deep commitment to Islam. With Muhammad dead many of these sheiks believed that their pledges of loyalty had ended, and some even renounced Islam all together. Clearly someone was needed to act as the center of the community.

Muhammad’s successor eventually arose from the group who had originally accompanied him from Mecca to Medina. These were his earliest converts, his closest followers, and over the years they had become further tied together through the exchange of marriage partners. Of this group his most trusted companions had been his father-in-law, Abu Bakr, who had also been one of his earliest converts, and Umar, who, like Abu Bakr, was an early convert. The task of these two men was to convince the Muslim Arabs that Islam was about more than an individual’s connection to God, it was a
compact that bound Muslims together for a common cause. The Prophet was gone but the community could continue under the guidance of people like them. They were the individuals who knew Muhammad best, and because of this knowledge could be best expected to lead the community as he would have done. Umar proclaimed his loyalty to Abu Bakr and the Medinan and Meccan communities soon joined him. This was a major step in allowing Muhammad’s legitimacy to extend beyond his life, but not the only task that had to be completed. A new narrative was emerging in the Peninsula but its success was not guaranteed.\textsuperscript{35}

Although there was much that was distinct about Muhammad’s revelation, he presented himself not just as the beginning of a new tradition, but as the culmination of an old tradition. Within the Islamic narrative emerged the idea that Muhammad was a prophet in a line that began with Adam and then continued through Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muhammad began to establish Islam’s connection to the Judeo-Christian tradition in his own lifetime – for many years Muslim’s faced Jerusalem when they prayed, for instance – but it was after his death that these connections became more explicit. Within the Qu’ran, for instance, it is stated that, “Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the house with this prayer …”\textsuperscript{36} It is a vague reference, but it was interpreted by Quranic commentators to mean that the Ka’bah had been created by the Patriarch and his son Ishmael under God’s orders, not erected as a pagan shrine as had been previously assumed. Once this was established, it was only left to connect Muhammad to these figures. The commentators, focusing as they did on a verse-by-verse reading of the
scripture, did not concern themselves with issues not specifically addressed in the text and made no further attempts to connect Abraham directly to Muhammad. Later historians, however, with more sources to work from created a continuous historical line between the two prophets. Just as tribal connections were created through fabricated genealogies in pre-Islamic times, genealogy was also crucial to establishing Muhammad’s prophetic legitimacy. By the eighth century: “The standard Life of Muhammad opens in fact with a genealogy that connects Muhammad, as the Gospels do Jesus, with the biblical Patriarch.”37 Within the newly constructed history, Muhammad was not simply the scion of a minor branch of the Quraysh tribe, but the descendent of Abraham – the father of Monotheism and founder of the Ka’bah.38

Muhammad’s status was thus elevated in the decades after his death, but when he died in 632 there was still some ambiguity regarding his significance. He was clearly an important figure – the prophet of Allah and bearer of revelation – but the Qu’ran only suggested that he was one of many prophets leaving open the possibility that other prophets might emerge. This is exactly what occurred. Amongst tribes outside Muhammad’s influence, but likely inspired by his example, prophets arose claiming that they too received messages from God, and their claims had been at least locally accepted.39

The existence of other prophets created an untenable situation for the leaders of the original Islamic community and particularly for the first caliph, Abu Bakr. Having secured at least some of Muhammad’s legitimacy, it was crucial that Abu Bakr – as well
as those who wished to succeed him – establish Muhammad as the only source of legitimacy. Caliphal authority was based on the notion that even though Muhammad was dead his narrative could continue through those who were closest to him, and thus best suited to offer guidance based on the patterns of life he established prior to his death. They were not prophets themselves but, as successors to the Prophet, they inherited his role as head of the community. This message, though, was considerably less persuasive as long as other prophets continued talk to God elsewhere on the Peninsula. After all, why follow the individual who knew a prophet, when you could follow someone who actually received messages from God. As long as other prophets existed or could potentially exist the Islamic narrative would be vulnerable. Under Abu Bakr and the second caliph Umar, therefore, all other prophets were declared false and a new doctrine regarding Muhammad was introduced. Muhammad was no longer presented as the bearer of a revelation but as the bearer of the revelation, and the final revelation at that. There could be no prophet after Muhammad; the unity of the narrative was thus maintained.

Even with the community united and rival prophets suppressed, the question still remained about the nature of authority to be held by the Prophet’s successors. During Abu Bakr’s short reign as head of the community he had gone by the title of caliph, the representative of or successor to Muhammad, but this had been an emergency status to deal with the immediate exigencies of a community suddenly bereft of its leader. Thus, when Abu Bakr died barely a year after emerging as Muhammad’s first caliph, it was left
to Umar to establish the contours of caliphal power. The problem was that the Quran provided for no government beyond that of the Prophet himself. Outside of the Prophet’s authority, individuals were responsible for their own connection to God and came together only for collective action in the service of God. In Islamic Arabia, the larger community of Muslims was important, but individual’s everyday lives continued to be influenced much more by their immediate family or even clan. This is much as it had been during pre-Islamic times. There were some issues, though, that transcended the interests of the individual, family, or clan, and affected the larger tribe; and it was when such issues arose that the tribal leader, or caliph in the case of the Islamic community, exercised the most authority as the one figure that could make decisions and settle disputes. Unlike a tribal leader, the caliph was expected to do this while remaining consistent with what Muhammad had revealed to be God’s will. Umar believed that he was well-suited to lead the community, and that the best way to establish his authority was as commander of the faithful (amir al-mu’minin) while the community was engaged in such “collective action”.

For the early Islamic community opportunities for collective action were limited. The key exception was activities connected to war and the expansion of the Dar al-Islam. Theoretically, as long as the community remained at peace Umar had little authority, but while it was at war he could claim a fairly wide range of responsibility. Umar expanded his authority, therefore, by directing the community to expand the Dar al-Islam outside
the Arabian Peninsula. The success of these forays created new challenges for those who wished to maintain a single Islamic narrative.

The authority of the caliph was both religious and military, but was also personal in that he had to be accepted by the community at Medina. The personal basis of power was fine as long as the community remained small, but untenable as the community grew beyond its Mecca/Medina roots in Arabia and eventually beyond Arabia itself. As a general rule in empires, the further one gets away from the imperial center (which Medina was quickly becoming) the less important the ruler becomes as an individual. The center instead becomes important more as an abstraction responsible for distribution of the spoils of conquest, and the transference of its legitimacy to those at the local level. Legitimization is often a reciprocal process and this is certainly true of this early period of Islamic expansion. The caliphs were chosen by the community in Medina and based on the authority granted them they could then confer legitimacy upon their commanders to lead armies and govern local areas. In turn those commanders sent back tribute from their victories to the caliph as a mark of their acceptance of caliphal authority.

Umar’s attempted to deal with the increasingly impersonal nature of rule within the expanding Islamic community by registering Muslims and providing each of them a share of the spoils of conquest. Despite such an effort, the issue only became more pronounced with time and it became harder to maintain unity within the now dispersed community. This was particularly true as the pace of conquests began to slow down and
with it, the scale of booty. With fewer conquests to occupy the time of Islamic elites and less wealth to go around, factionalism became a greater threat to Muslim unity.

A major source of tension was the reemergence of the Quraysh as a dominant participant in the venture of the Islamic Empire. With Arabs now settled all throughout the recently conquered domains, some ruling system had to be imposed on the new cities and towns that had arisen. As city dwellers with experience in the subtleties of town governance the Quraysh actually were a logical choice for many administrative posts, but it was a decision that engendered much hostility from local Arabs who resented the fact that these outsiders seemed to be profiting disproportionately from the empire. Umar’s successor, Uthman, was in part assassinated because of the degree to which members of the Quraysh, and particularly those from the Umayyad clan dominated him. Whereas Abu Bakr and Umar had arisen to the position of caliph with relatively little dispute it now became a much more contentious process to choose a successor. Uthman himself had been chosen partly because he was considered weak and would thus be less likely to impose his authority on the other stakeholders within the Islamic leadership. The unity that had been forged by Muhammad was rapidly breaking down under the force of separate regional, tribal, ethnic, and clan-based interests.

Within a state or imperial system, it is crucial for the ruler as individual or the ruling class as a whole to be the sole claimant of legitimacy. This is why the rise of a particular ruler has so often been accompanied by the slaughter of siblings and other family members who could potentially lay claim to the symbols of rule. The Islamic
Empire at this time was not ruled by a family but, as we have seen, by an individual accepted by the community at large and usually based on their relationship to the Prophet.\textsuperscript{42} This system quickly became untenable. First of all, the community became too large, and its interests too varied to ever reach a consensus on who should lead them. An additional problem also emerged as generations passed and those who knew the Prophet, or were even alive at the same time, diminished. What were to be the qualifications for the caliphal post if not one’s ability to decipher the will of Muhammad from personal experience? By 656, with the murder of Uthman all of these issues came to a head and for the first time since Muhammad had united the tribes of Arabia, massive infighting and factionalism prevailed.

When Muhammad had died many of the Bedouin tribes had attempted to renege on their role within the larger community, but the leadership itself had remained fairly united. Now, however, unity at the top had been severed and the ideal of a united community would never again be achieved. The greatest blow to Islamic unity was the rise to the caliphate of Ali and his eventual destruction at the hands of Muawiya. These events became the source of the major split within Islam as those who believed in Ali as the source of legitimacy styled themselves as the “partisans of Ali,” or Shi’a, while those who accepted the official line of caliphs after Muhammad came to be known as the Sunni. Although there were attempts in later years to heal this split, Muslims from this point on would be a community split by two opposing camps each making their own claims to legitimacy based on separate versions or visions of the story of Islam.
Even within the majority of the Islamic world that continued to fall under the rule of the caliphs, legitimacy had changed. While the caliphs up through Ali came to be known in the Sunni tradition as the *Rashidun*, or “rightly guided caliphs,” and thus carried a special prestige, those who followed had an authority more dependent on raw power rather than their connection to Muhammad, their piety, or their righteousness. To be caliph certainly remained a position of enormous prestige within the larger community but it also became a more nakedly political position and lost much of its spiritual backing. Nevertheless, the title of caliph was one that allowed a central narrative of Islam to be carried far into the future (as we have seen already with the Ottoman claim to the title in the sixteenth century) and even as the caliphs lost much of their political authority in later centuries the prestige of the caliphs, as successors to Muhammad, continued to be significant. This prestige did not always guarantee them political authority but did allow them to confer legitimacy to others, like the Seljuks, who had surpassed them in power and territory.

In the example of the emergence of an expansive Islamic society a number of my larger points regarding narrative and legitimacy were highlighted. First, we saw that the emergence of new narrative strands is not a benign process. When new stories are articulated they not only challenge the old stories but those who benefited from those stories. The Quraysh saw their claims to authority marginalized and eventually made irrelevant as a result of the Islamic challenge and it was only after they came to embrace the new story that they were able to rise back to prominence. Second, successful
legitimizing narratives cannot just describe the past, they must have the ability to extend into the future. Establishing Muhammad’s links to Abraham was an important element to the Islamic narrative but could only achieve lasting importance if the prestige such a genealogy conferred on Muhammad could be inherited, at least in part, by those who followed him. Third, the emergence of alternate prophets in the Arabian Peninsula as well as the eventual split between Sunni and Shi’a offered examples of the danger of narrative splintering. If elites wish to maintain exclusive authority over their society, then they must retain control of the narrative. The Quraysh lost control of their narrative and suffered as a result; within the Islamic community the splintering of the narrative into parallel lines was not disastrous but did create alternate notions of legitimacy that were the source of disputes for centuries afterwards.

Turning to the bigger picture, we have just examined a number of cases of societies that constructed their own narratives as a means of establishing the legitimacy of their rule. In each case we also saw that these narratives also included or were complemented by ideas that allowed them to justify expansion at the expense of others. The rulers of Sassanid Persia, for instance, based their legitimacy around their connection to the great temples of Ahura Mazda and divine origins. This narrative was told through the mechanism of increasingly ambitious genealogies that connected the current dynasty to historical and mythical heroes of ancient Persia. In addition to establishing Sassanid legitimacy, these narratives had the supplementary result of establishing Sassanid territorial claims based on the historical domains of their predecessors. In this example
we also saw the cultural specificity of such narratives. The Sassanids chose to begin their narrative at a point that provided them the best claim to territory. If they had presented themselves as entirely new their claims would have been limited, but given their claims to the Achaemenid line they were able to assert a much more expansive set of territorial demands.

The Chinese example gave us a picture of a state founded on a set of ideas that connected the current dynasty to those of the past, not so much in terms of ideology, but by a view of history emphasizing historical cycles. Within such a view the past literally served as predictor of the present as all dynasties were expected to progress through generally similar historical processes. All dynasties were destined to decline and be replaced at some point, but they were also assured by the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven that their rise to power was justified by the “revitalized moral virtue,” that they brought to the throne. This system connected all Chinese dynasties to those that came before them, and established a sense of continuity within a Chinese history marked by significant periods of interruption. Chinese civilization as marked partially by the moral virtue at its center, emanated outward and over time encompassed those societies surrounding the Chinese core. Through this process societies once defined as peripheral could eventually obtain the qualities of civilization and become part of China proper. Conquest was often vital to this process but in the case of Yunnan we saw that expansion was as much a consequence of assimilation.
Our tour of the world of the Turks revealed how a society can tap into preexisting narratives from outside their culture to construct new justifications for old behaviors. The Turks were a people newly arrived in West Asia, but through conflict and interaction with Islamic societies they adopted a new set of ideas that transformed their understanding of their traditional behaviors. The clearest example of this transformation came from the reinterpretation of traditional Turkic raids as ghazas fought specifically to defend or expand Islam. The Turkic Ottoman Empire adopted the notion of ghaza as their central justification but, this became problematic as their territory expanded from beyelet to world-empire and elite interests began to clash with those of the ghazis themselves. This is a reminder that while legitimizing narratives are generally constructed in the interests of an elite, it is not always easy for that elite to retain control of the story.

In the next chapter we turn to another example where expansive states legitimized their activities through narrative construction. In examining the narrative of the reconquista, or reconquest, established by Iberian Christians in the centuries following the Islamic conquest of the Peninsula we see a number of characteristics that tie the Spanish experience to other examples of narrative construction that have already been explored. Just as significantly, the Spanish example serves as a necessary prelude to my exploration of the Spanish experience with empire in the Americas. By first examining the case of the reconquest we can better understand why the habits, behaviors, and ideas it helped establish were so often referred to by Spaniards in the Americas. Even as the
reconquest served as probably the key reference point for Spaniards seeking to make
sense of their conquest and colonization of the New World, we will see how it was
ultimately poorly suited for such a task.
CHAPTER 3

The Reconquista: Spain’s Central Narrative

In this chapter I explore the history of the Spanish reconquest both as an idea and as an historical process. Within the context of the larger dissertation such an examination addresses two separate but related elements of the project. First, the history of the reconquest offers a clear example of the role ideology plays in the construction and legitimization of states, particularly ones that are expansive either in fact or in ambition. The Spanish Christian kingdoms that emerged in the north of the Peninsula by the ninth century, were essentially new constructions, yet the invention of the reconquista ideology allowed these states and their rulers to assert continuity with the Gothic rulers of the past. This ideology was crucial to the establishment of legitimacy for the new elite. In addition, the reconquest was based on the notion of Islamic usurpation of Christian territory and, consequently, the conquests carried out in the name of this new elite could be justified as the restoration of territory that rightfully belonged to them. As a result a
group of rootless elites became tied into a history and a story that connected them to both
their Gothic predecessors and to those who succeeded them.

As a reminder, legitimizing narratives are narratives that serve a political purpose
through their support of a ruling regime. Ideologies can be complex, but narratives
operate as intellectual ordering devices that take that complexity and impose upon it a
structure. At their best, such narratives offer a society an origin story that can become a
key element in the establishment of a collective identity. This identity, in turn, helps to
give meaning to the actions of elites by explaining why that society can, should, or did
act in a certain way. There is always going to be a certain amount of intellectual chaos,
but at the very least, legitimizing narratives offer a society a set of roots that help them
interpret their world in a particular fashion. For the Spanish, the narrative of the
reconquista offered such roots.

It was this rootedness that seventeenth century writer Lope de Vega emphasized
in his own understanding of Spanish history. For Vega the reign of a given monarch was
less consequential than the fact of “the continued expansion of the organism to bring
forth future kings.” Vega himself refers to succession to the throne of Castile as
“propagating the trunk of Pelayo,” the founder of the kingdom of Asturias. Although
there continued to be conflict in the Iberian Peninsula, among Christians as well as
between Christian and Moor, the construction of the reconquista ideology was
fundamental in transforming a hodgepodge of small, almost inconsequential Christian
polities into a few dynamic, culturally confident, expansive, and increasingly unified
kingdoms. We see, therefore, not just the process of narrative construction but also the vital role that successful narrative projects play in the foundation, survival, and expansion of states.

In addition to providing an example of the function of narrative construction, this chapter is also a prelude to its more complex sequel traced in Chapters 4 and 5. There, in part, I examine the continued importance that the reconquista ideology continued to have even as Spanish conquests crossed the sea into a new and strange land. The narrative ultimately failed to make sense of Spanish actions in the Americas, but nevertheless influenced the ways in which Spaniards behaved, understood their experiences, and articulated that understanding. The reconquista narrative could not make sense of the absolute novelty of the Americas but remained one of the key sources of Spanish self-conception. Whatever its failures in the Americas, the narrative had clearly become a pervasive influence in Spanish society by 1492. The rest of this chapter explores the ways in which this pervasiveness was engendered by examining the historical phenomenon of the reconquista and its transformation into the central narrative of Spanish history.

The story of the reconquest in Spain began with a conquest. Starting in 711 C.E. Muslim invaders from North Africa crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and, over the next half century, established Islamic rule over most of the Iberian Peninsula. For the next nearly eight hundred years Christian and Muslim kingdoms were to exist side by side on the Peninsula as adversaries, and sometimes even as allies. Beginning in the post-
conquest eighth century with only tiny strongholds in the mountainous north, Christian principalities formed and were able to begin a slow march south at the expense of various Muslim polities. This southward movement was eventually to climax in the capture of Granada, the last Muslim stronghold on the Peninsula, by the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492.

The reestablishment of Christian rule in Iberia has come to be titled the _reconquista_, or reconquest. As conceived by Medieval Spaniards, the reconquista was a centuries long struggle between the forces of Christendom – the inheritors of the political and religious legacy of the Goths – and those of the Islamic usurpers in which Christian armies steadily pushed to the south at the expense of various Islamic states. The actual process, however, was much more complex and multifaceted than this:

The Reconquest was a lengthy process and a continuous one in the sense that fighting rarely stopped for long, but it was not, as is often implied, a slow, steady, gradual one. The Christians did not advance steadily, step-by-step; they took great leaps forward, to the Duero, the Tagus, the Guadalquivir and the south coast, and after each leap they waited for centuries to consolidate their position before making the next one. Rather than gradual, the Reconquest was spasmodic.³

Just as an understanding of the reconquest as a slow, steady, and gradual process represents an oversimplification, it was also more complex than a simple matter of Christian versus Muslim. In fact the period was just as often marked by realpolitik with polities allying themselves with whomever could best serve their needs no matter if the
ally was Christian or Muslim. Indeed, perhaps the most famous figure of the reconquest, El Cid, rose to prominence fighting on behalf of Muslim rulers as well as Christian.

The reality of the historical situation, however, is of somewhat less importance than the way in which that reality was portrayed. As early as the ninth century, Spanish chroniclers began to construct a myth regarding the ancestry and destiny of the kings of Asturias. It was this myth that helped order the process of reconquest just as it was this myth that was passed down to the generations of Spaniards who would cross the Atlantic after 1492. What is most important about the reconquest for our purposes isn how it laid the groundwork for a Castilian society that would be well suited to the contingencies of conquest in the late 15th and 16th centuries. This chapter will be concerned with the reconquista and its legacies within imperial Spain but, in addition, will be about Spain as it was by that crucial year of 1492 when conquest ended on the Iberian Peninsula and began in a New World.

The reconquista can be divided into four main periods. The first period ran from 711 to 1085, a period that began with the Muslim conquest and ended with the capture of the city of Toledo by the Castilians. It was during this era that the rudiments of the reconquest ideology were first articulated by Spanish Christians. Such ideas began to have some influence on the conduct of intrastate relations even as they had yet to become pervasive across Spanish society. It was in the second period, from 1085 to 1369, that Christian armies were able to penetrate into Andalucia and subject the last Islamic kingdom of Granada to vassalage. The notion that reconquest should be the goal and
even obsession of all Christian princes became more widespread in this era and was influenced by the addition of a crusading mentality to the earlier reconquest ideology. From 1369 to 1482 a period of “cold war” developed, in which the frontier between Christian and Muslim remained more or less constant. These years saw warfare between kingdoms decrease in frequency, raiding across the frontiers increase in frequency, and a related diminution of the reconquest rhetoric. During this period the reconquest became more of a tradition than a practical political concern. Finally, the period from 1482 to 1492 marked the end of the reconquest, culminating with the defeat of the Granadan Nasrid Dynasty, and the extension of Christian rule over the entire Peninsula. During this final conflict, Ferdinand and Isabella were able to tap into the somewhat dormant ideology of reconquest as a means of animating, legitimizing, and, as I explain, financing their expansion.

According to legend, the reconquest of Spain began unremarkably enough with an uprising in the mountains of Asturias by one Pelayo, the son of a Visigothic duke. In such a rugged and mountainous region it was exceedingly difficult for the Muslim conquerors to maintain tight social control, even at the height of their powers. As a result, after a brief skirmish in which a Muslim force was driven back by Pelayo and his followers, the conquerors decided to abandon the region to the Christians. Given the poverty and remoteness of the region, the defeat seemed inconsequential: “What are thirty barbarians perched on a rock?” asked a contemporary Muslim chronicler, “They must inevitably die.” It is difficult to differentiate facts from myth in this story. Pelayo
does seem to have existed but, beyond that, it is nearly impossible to disentangle the historical figure from the centuries of myths built up around him.

From this inauspicious beginning, the Christians were able to expand their domain north to the coast, and east and west within the mountains of Asturias. Other princes soon followed Pelayo’s lead and by 914 the Christians held a sizable swath of land extending along the Rio Duero to Pamplona and from Pamplona to Barcelona (see map 3.1). The frontier between Christian and Muslim, however, was a precarious one. It was during this time that the Extramadura was first established. Since the thirteenth century Extramadura has referred to the region of Castile bordering Portugal and north of Andalucia, but historically it was a designation given to the sparsely populated tracts of land that separated Christian territory from Muslim. Without the strength to conquer and hold territory directly bordering Muslim kingdoms, Christian kings would instead depopulate new territories, creating a no-man’s land – a sort of demilitarized zone – between the belligerents, across which it would be harder to invade.
The absence of long-term border agreements can be traced to the ideology of the *reconquista*, which considered the Muslim occupation of the Peninsula to be illegitimate. Like the military aspects of the reconquest itself, the ideology behind it did not develop in a slow steady manner but in fits and starts across the centuries. Its conception, though, can be traced with relative confidence to the court of the Asturian kings in the ninth century and specifically to the reign of Alfonso III (848-910).
The political circumstances of Northern Spain in the ninth century were complex, with a myriad of counties, small principalities, and kingdoms tied together through a fluctuating set of alliances and rivalries both amongst themselves and the Islamic emirate, then Caliphate, of Cordoba that held the territory south of the River Duero. In such a climate, the ruler who could establish a clear claim to legitimacy would have a better chance of prolonging his dynastic line. During Alfonso III’s reign a concerted attempt was made to establish this legitimacy, and the means of doing so was by emphasizing the king as the true heir and successors to the Gothic rulers who had ruled prior to the Islamic invasions of the eighth century.

Key to the establishment of this new ideology was the changing nature of the relationship between Christians and Muslims in al-Andalus. Unlike the early Islamic conquests, which had mostly taken place in a region whose culture was familiar to Arabs, the conquest of Iberia established Arab rule over an essentially foreign culture. For the first century or so after 711, the new Islamic ruling class established its political and military dominance over the Peninsula even as Muslims remained culturally vulnerable. Early in the ninth century, muftis in Islamic Cordoba felt compelled to warn Muslims not to celebrate Christian holidays like Christmas. Churchmen could thus feel confident that while the forces of Islam may have proved militarily dominant, they remained culturally subordinate. Christian cultural preeminence was not to last. The change occurred over the course of the ninth century, as the Ummayad caliph of Cordoba began to transform his capital into a city that could compete in stature and prestige with the great Islamic
cities like Damascus and Baghdad. The result was an onslaught of high Islamic culture that threatened to overwhelm a surviving Latin culture that came to seem degenerate by comparison.

As a result of this cultural importation, a shift occurred that left Christians still politically and militarily subordinate but now also threatened by a culture and intellectual tradition that seemed more vibrant and attractive to many young Christians. By the mid-ninth century, priests were complaining that “all talented young Christians read and study the Arab books with enthusiasm … they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of their attention. They have forgotten their language.” This threat of Christian acculturation led some monks and priests in and around Cordoba to take up an increasingly intransigent attitude toward Cordoban authorities as well as their own ecclesiastical hierarchy, which had adopted a conciliatory line with the new ruling class.

In the mid-ninth century, this intransigence led a group of Christian monks and priests to seek out martyrdom through public and vocal insults of Muhammad and Islam; they became known as the Cordoban martyrs. The martyrs hoped that their actions would incite other Cordoban Christians to resist Islamic rule. Instead, they proved unpopular among their fellow Christians, who were generally content with their situation and were worried that such a radical movement would lead to a poisoning of the atmosphere. After 859, when one of its key propagandists was finally martyred, the martyr movement began to subside. Most Cordoban Christians would continue on the
path to acculturation and sometimes even conversion, while the most extreme of the community migrated north into Christian lands.

It was this migration that was to have a profound affect on the earliest iteration of the reconquista ideology. These *mozarab* priests arrived in the north with a distinct attitude towards the Muslims of al-Andalus forged through their experiences with the martyr movement. One of the goals of that movement had been to use violence to build a cultural wall between Muslims and Christians, a goal that had failed due to the active opposition of the Church hierarchy, including the archbishop, and the ambivalence of most of their fellow Christians. In the Christian kings of the north the mozarab priests, humbled by their experiences in Cordoba, would place their hope for deliverance from the followers of Muhammad.

There was thus a convergence in the interests of the Asturian kings, who needed to construct a legitimizing ideology, and the mozarab priests, who sought in these Christian kings powerful patrons who would share their hatred of accommodation with Islam and seek to eliminate it from the Peninsula. It was these mozarabs, therefore, who helped to forge a new identity for the kings of Asturias; an identity based on a conscious return to Visigothic traditions. Alfonso III, for instance, had himself anointed in the tradition of the Visigothic kings of old, and established in his capital of Oviedo the secular and ecclesiastical organization that had reigned in pre-Muslim Toledo.

This Neogothicism implied the inheritance of Visigothic authority over the whole Peninsula and, by the same token, the intent to recover Spain from its Muslim
conquerors. Here we see the fundamental fiction behind the idea of reconquest: that Christians were the true and natural rulers of the Iberian Peninsula. It was a dubious claim, given that, “the Visigoths had usurped the Romans, who in their turn had usurped the ancient Iberians, who had usurped who knows what early wandering band, and so on until the first humanoids came out of Africa.” Nevertheless, we see in this claim the beginnings of a new story in which the present would be linked to the past in such a way as to transform understandings of both times.

Specifically, the new ideology was first expressed in the form of three chronicles produced between 883 and 890. The Prophetic Chronicle was most likely produced in 883, making it possibly the first of the chronicles to emerge. It was a strange hodgepodge of information written in several different styles, but presented a relatively clear message concerning the imminent demise of Islamic rule and Alfonso III’s role in hastening it. As any good legitimizing narrative should, The Prophetic Chronicles explained contemporary circumstances through references to the past even as it reinterpreted the past according to the needs of the present. As was natural for Medieval Christians, the narrative was presented as essentially religious in nature and is based around reinterpretation of the prophecies of Ezekiel in such a way as to suggest that they predicted the Islamic conquests as well as the eventual Christian reconquest. According to the anonymous author, writing in 883, the prophecy predicted one hundred and seventy years of “Ishmaeli” domination which was due to be up the following year. With the end of Islamic rule coming, it was destined that Alfonso III, “will soon reign in all Spain.”
Clearly, these specific prophecies did not come to fruition. Little contained in the *Prophetic Chronicle* was to have direct influence on later eras, but, at the very least, it helped to establish a more ambitious goal for Christian sovereigns than simply survival.

At around the same time came the *Chronicle of Albelda*. It is this work that is usually pointed to as containing the clearest early statement of the ideology behind the reconquista. Within its text the author claims for the Asturian kings the title of, “the Visigothic Kings of Oviedo,” and goes on to state that “[the Saracens] take the kingdom of the Goths, which until today they still stubbornly possess in part; and against them the Christians do battle day and night, and constantly strive; until the divine fore-shadowing orders them to be cruelly expelled from there. Amen.” Whereas the *Prophetic Chronicle* had attempted to accomplish its aims through a clumsy and transparent reinterpretation of the Old Testament, the *Chronicle of Albelda* presented a clear argument for continuity between the rule of Gothic kings and that of the Asturians. To a greater extent than anything contained in the *Prophetic Chronicle*, the above statement set up the basic contours of the story. It began with the claim of a Gothic heritage that had been transferred to contemporary kings by those of old, and posited a constant struggle against Islam for the restoration of their territory.

The last important document of the time was the *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, a work that was done at the bidding of the titular king, with the clear intention of connecting his own reign to that of his Gothic predecessors. To give the work greater authority, the author claimed that it was a continuation of Saint Isidore of Seville’s *Origins of the*
It was in the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* that the story of Pelayo was recounted in the greatest detail. Whether or not actual events bore any resemblance to those told in the chronicle is less important than the fact that the story helped establish narrative strands that would be key to the story of reconquest. According to the narrative, Pelayo was sword-bearer to the Gothic kings Witiza and Roderick, but was of a different character than his morally depraved and sinful sovereigns. It was because of this behavior that had God had forsaken them by allowing their defeat at the hands of the Muslims. When Pelayo fled to the mountainous north and took up his resistance he represented both an end to the corruption and immorality of the previous Gothic dynasty and the beginning of a purer, more pious tradition.

Having retreated with his followers to caves in Mount Ateva, Pelayo found himself penned in by a hostile army of tens of thousands. Bishop Oppa, who had already agreed to collaborate with the new conquerors, was sent up the mountain to urge Pelayo to surrender, stating: “Heed my warning and recall your soul from this decision [to resist], so that you may take advantage of many good things and enjoy the partnership of the Chaldeans.” Pelayo response represents another of the key early statements of reconquest. He replied: “Christ is our hope that through this little mountain, which you see, the well-being of Spain and the army of the Gothic people will be restored.” In this short statement Pelayo articulated two of the key tenets of the reconquista: that the goal of the Gothic people was the restoration of their supremacy on the Peninsula and that this
goal would be achieved through Christ. Thus, by the end of the ninth century a new narrative thread had emerged in the Christian north.

Scholars, most famously Ramón Menéndez Pidal, long argued that once the basic ideology of the reconquest had been articulated, the elimination of Islamic rule in the Peninsula remained the main concern of Christian rulers up through 1492. However, there is little evidence to support this and, in fact, the available evidence suggests the opposite.¹⁵

R.A. Fletcher notes two pieces of evidence suggesting the waning significance of the reconquest ideology in the centuries after its construction. First, he observes that few copies of the three chronicles were produced over the course of the tenth century and no evidence exists of any copies being made in the century after 1040. While it is certainly possible that the absence of surviving copies is due to factors other than disinterest, other evidence seems to support a lack of attention on the part of Christian sovereigns to the supposed goals of the reconquest. Specifically, he cites the actual relationships between Christian and Muslim states and amongst Christian states. If the reconquista ideology had truly infiltrated Christian Iberian society, we would expect to find wars fought between Christian and Muslim states in which the aggressors came from Christian polities. However, the actual situation was far more complex. Through the twelfth century there were indeed successful Christian campaigns into Islamic territory, but there were also many wars fought between Christian states, and even significant numbers of battles in which Christians and Muslims fought side-by-side against other Christians.
While the ideology of the reconquest had not yet become as pervasive as it would in later centuries, Manuel Gonzalez Jimenez has suggested that the ideology did appear to have some tangible influence even at this early point. He notes that no permanent or long-lasting frontier agreements were ever reached between Christian and Muslim kingdoms; instead we find only short-term truces between such polities. This fact makes sense within an intellectual context that assumed that Christians maintained rightful authority over the entire Peninsula. If thus was the assumption, then all frontiers had to be regarded as impermanent since the very notion of Christian success meant doing away with Islamic rule throughout all of Spain. “Consequently, if the frontier was by definition impermanent, and if the Moor was the enemy . . . who had to be defeated and whose lands would sooner or later be reconquered, the society which had to undertake the task had to be . . . a society ‘organized for war.’”

Jimenez thus suggests that the reconquista affected the structure of Spanish society as well as intrastate relations even in the early stages if its history.

The reconquest represented more than simply an ideology, it was a story. It was a history that posited a rightful Gothic hegemony over the Peninsula, an Islamic usurpation of that authority, and a struggle whose import transcended the narrow political concerns of individual rulers and instead took on a significance associated with a larger more eternal struggle. Despite these ideological pretensions, the reconquista rarely acted as a guide for state actions. Instead, Christian princes followed policies that fit their interests,
with the reconquest serving as a convenient justification when those interests included expansion.

By 1085, when Christian armies of Alfonso took the city of Toledo – by far the greatest city they had yet captured – the political context of the Iberian Peninsula had changed considerably. The Duero River had once acted as border between the small and relatively weak Christian polities to its north and the powerful Caliphate of Cordoba dominating the area to its south. Where the Caliphate represented one of the great Islamic states in the world and attracted artists, scholars, great jurists, and poets from throughout the Dar al-Islam, the Christian north had been all but forgotten by the rest of Christendom. The momentum began to change, however, in the eleventh century. This century saw a succession struggle in the Caliphate of Cordoba that led to its fracturing into petty kingdoms, or taifas, (see map 3.2) that more or less mirrored its old administrative divisions. These smaller Islamic states found themselves suddenly vulnerable to the rising power and expanding ambitions of the emergent kingdom of Castile-Leon which took advantage of the situation to push south.
Up until this point the Christians had been content occupying the countryside and small towns, but in the ensuing years they began to focus more on the great centers of population, wealth, and power. Although successive invasions of Berbers from North Africa would check the southward march, by the end of the second period of reconquest, the Christian kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, and Portugal, had all but completed the reconquest of the Peninsula with only the emirate of Granada remaining under Muslim rule. Beyond the military gains of the Christians, there is another particularly notable feature of this second stage of the reconquest.

Ideologically, we find the reconquista ideology increasingly augmented by the
addition of a crusading mentality. The period saw Spain become reintegrated into the rest of Christendom, one result of which was that the papacy came, “to sanction the view that warfare against the Muslims in Spain partook of the same distinctive character as warfare against them in the Middle East.”18 Where formerly Christian Spaniards had fought Muslims more or less outside the view of the rest of Europe, now they found their struggle recognized by their fellow Christians and began to imagine their activities as part of a global conflict of immense importance rather than a series of minor border wars. In was thus during this second period of the reconquest, from 1085 to 1369, that Spaniards took the general narrative of the reconquista created during the earlier period, and increasingly view it through the lens of religious war. It was also this era in that we see the development of the particular skills, mentality, and self-conception of the conquistador, each of which played important roles in the conquest of the Americas.

Since the Moorish conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, Christian Spain had all but ceased to be part of Europe. This changed, however, in the eleventh century as contact across the Pyrenees became more frequent and knowledge of the reconquest was able to spread across Europe. From at least 1063, during the time of Alexander II, the papacy became increasingly interested in the Iberian Peninsula. As early as 1123, and definitively by the time of the Second Crusade (1146-1149), Spain was sanctioned as a theater of Crusade similar to that of the Holy Land.19 The Iberian Peninsula was thereby acknowledged as the western front of a general war between Christendom and Islam. As a result, what had been a regional struggle between opposing factions now came to be regarded as part of a much larger effort with world historical implications. Religious
arguments had already been present in the nascent *reconquista* ideology, but after the twelfth century the new “crusading ideal” would help to reinforce the political and ideological motives of the struggle with a much stronger religious justification.\(^{20}\)

While some point to the so-called “Barbastro Crusade” as the earliest example of the crusading spirit existing in the Iberian Peninsula, this is arguable.\(^{21}\) The first unambiguous reference to crusade in the Iberian Peninsula would have to wait until 1123 when pope Calixtus II issued a bull for a Catalan crusade in which he stated: “With apostolic authority and the power divinely bestowed upon us we graciously grant to all those fighting firmly on this expedition the same remission of sins we conceded to the defenders of the Eastern Church.”\(^{22}\) More interesting than the pope’s bull is the fact that, soon after it was issued, we begin to see Spanish Christians make references to this crusading impulse. Just a few months after its issuance, the archbishop of Compostela proclaimed a Spanish Crusade, “in accordance with the lord pope’s decree.” In the months and years that followed similar references appeared in decrees of bishops throughout the Peninsula and in a few cases churchmen accompanied their sovereigns into battle or even led their own campaigns against Muslims.\(^{23}\)

Such proclamations and even activities suggest a shift towards a spirit of crusade in Spain, but not necessarily a change in the ideology of reconquest. Many of these crusading churchmen were part of a sizable group of foreigners who came to fill significant numbers of high positions in the church hierarchy after the eleventh century. Their comments are essentially those of outsiders and thus, while they may demonstrate
the development of a crusading spirit in the era, they do not necessarily show the ways in which this spirit became intertwined with the preexisting, if latent, reconquest narrative. A better place to observe the emergence of a crusading reconquest ideology is in the rising prominence of Santiago (Saint James) as patron saint of Spain and also as the Matamoros, or Moor-slayer.

Legend had long claimed that the body of Santiago had miraculously washed ashore on the coast of Galicia, where it had been discovered and then interred in the cathedral at Compostela. Eventually, the idea emerged that it had been Santiago who had been responsible for first preaching the Gospel in Spain after traveling there from the Holy Land. Accounts of the battle Clavijo in 844 were the first to associate Santiago with the struggle against Islam. In this battle the heavily outnumbered forces of the king of Asturias defeated the forces of the Emir of Cordoba, but only after Santiago rode into battle on a white charger and helped drive off the infidel army. Similar stories were told of other battles, and were even transferred to the Americas where Santiago was said to have saved the Spanish of Cuzco from destruction at the hands of the army of Manco Inca.

While such stories may have appeared very early on it seems as if Santiago’s association with war against Islam only became firmly entrenched in the twelfth century. Thus the Portuguese king Afonso Henriques gave credit to Santiago for his victory at Aulic in 1139, and in 1140 Alfonso VII of Castile conquered Coria with the Saint’s help. The Santiago legend is a clear example of the developments taking place within
the reconquista narrative. The story as it existed in the twelfth century was local; it referenced people, places, and events that had little meaning for people outside of the Iberian Peninsula. The addition of Santiago added to the story a figure of great renown within Christendom, and because of his proselytization and internment in Spain one who was also somewhat of a “national” figure. He was able to therefore represent a larger struggle between Christians and Muslims (the crusades), and a more specific struggle for Spanish sovereigns to win back land that had been usurped from their ancestors (the reconquest). Conveniently, this new narrative was articulated over the course of the twelfth century, during which time the decline of Islamic unity made large-scale Christian advances possible for the first time. These conquests needed justification, and the reconquest narrative could provide just such a rationale.

Parallel to the ideological developments of the reconquest – which depicted war against Muslims and expansion into Islamic territory as natural and inherently just – we also find the emergence of a program of reconquest that established the social, political, and economic parameters of the expansionist policy. Although separate from the ideology, these elements were also a crucial part of the story of reconquest as understood by the conquistadors of the sixteenth century. They inherited from this period a specific notion of the relationship between sovereign and subjects and, perhaps even more importantly, they inherited a set of expectations. Conquest, as it emerged within the reconquest, allowed participants to serve their God and their king with the understanding that those who served well would be rewarded with land, wealth, and honor. A story
from the *Chronicle of James I, King of Aragon* demonstrates the difference between true service and the service of base interests.

James (r. 1218-1276) came to his title at a young age, and by the time he reached adulthood he was determined to make war on Moors. In 1226 he summoned his barons and knights to do service for him and accompany him in making war on the taifa of Valencia. At the appointed time, however, most of his barons failed to show. After waiting for three weeks, James finally signed a truce with the king of Valencia that would give James a fifth of the produce of Valencia and Murcia. Having made the best of a bad situation, James then began his journey back to Aragon. On the way, he encountered one of his barons riding in the opposite direction with sixty of his knights. When questioned this baron admitted that he was riding to Valencia to make war, and that the costs of his preparations made it impossible for him to turn back. James responded: “See what you are doing; you go against my sovereignty, and I certainly did not expect that of you. I therefore wish to know if you will give up your purpose for our prayers and commands.”

Conquest, although a legitimate activity to undertake against Muslims, still had to be carried out with the service of others in mind. This was a lesson that Hernan Cortés seems to have understood well; as during his conquest of Mexico he went to enormous lengths to present every action as being purely in the service of his God and his sovereign.

Before conquering Toledo, the modus operandi of the Spanish, upon taking Muslim territory, was to build up and populate certain defensive fortifications along the
frontier while depopulating much of the countryside. As they advanced they left behind them vast and sparsely populated swaths of land known as the Extremadura. The areas that were settled were largely done so through popular initiative, with the monarch sometimes aiding, and at other times simply giving their blessings to, the settlement plans of individual magnates, bishops, monasteries, and groups of organized free peasants.

The conquest of Toledo presented a new problem. Rather than a fortified area amid a depopulated landscape, Toledo was like a Christian Peninsula surrounded on three sides by Muslim territory, and in much too insecure a position to continue the former settlement policy. In order to protect Toledo then, Castile created a formal frontier system under much stronger central authority. The king directly involved himself in the “settling of colonists, the initial organization of lands, and the resolution of conflicts between settlers.” In addition, it was understood that occupying the land was not enough unless populations were established which would be capable of participating in both offensive and defensive warfare. To this end the crown went so far as to include clauses in town charters that encouraged the settlement of “assassins, adventurers and outlaws,” by offering them refuge and asylum from nearly every crime short of treason. Even those not from the criminal ranks were obligated to participate in offensive and defensive warfare. For the populations of these frontier towns, war was not simply one aspect of their lives but, through raids and plunder of Muslim lands, an essential part of their livelihood.
Thus in Castile, along the border separating Christendom from Islam, a society of frontier-warriors was formed. At about the same time that Osman was establishing his authority over Turkic peoples in Anatolia through his success as a ghazi leader, the Iberian peoples, both Christian and Muslim, were living a very similar lifestyle at the other end of the Mediterranean. In both areas, moreover, strong legitimizing narratives were able to take situations that were fluid, complex, and decentralized and impose an intellectual order on them.

By the end of the thirteenth century the pattern established with the settlement of Toledo and the surrounding area had been followed all across Spain. In each town settlers were introduced, bishoprics and councils were established, and fueros, or town charters, were granted. The twelfth and especially the thirteenth centuries were times of relatively rapid advance and, as the Christian population moved south, it forced a concurrent southward movement of Muslims into whatever Moorish kingdoms remained. By 1264 their last refuge was Granada. This is not to say that entire Muslim populations abandoned their homes and fled at the approach of Castilian armies. In fact, many stayed behind and lived in relative peace alongside Christians and Jews, but a majority did leave and as a result the population of Granada was swelled with Muslims from other regions of Spain. Thus the final stages of the reconquest were set.

Fueled by a reconquest ideology, now also imbued with the religious justification of a crusade, and aided by a well-established model for incorporating new territory, the Spanish had only Granada standing between them and complete Christian domination of
the Peninsula. It is here that we see a major distinction between the narrative of reconquista Spain and those of the Ottomans or the Chinese. Whereas the Chinese notion of the Mandate of Heaven was eternal, and in fact posited a cyclical vision of history, and the Ottomans – absent the total conquest of Christian Europe – would always have more enemies to fight across their frontier, the Spanish reconquista was a narrative that theoretically had a conclusion. In fact, it required a conclusion. By the 13th century Granada represented the last chapter, but it would take two more centuries for that chapter to be written. Before discussing this final stage, we must first briefly describe the relatively uneventful (in terms of the reconquest) period stretching from 1369 to 1482 (see map 3.3).
The third stage of the reconquest was a time of relatively short duration but significant import. During this era, the progress of the reconquista, in terms of conquest as well as in terms of the ideology, ground to a halt. With little territory left in the hands of Islamic rulers, reconquest simply took on less urgency for the kingdom of Castile, which was now the largest and most populous Christian polity on the Peninsula. Additionally, the political situation in Castile was too unsettled, for much of the period, to permit the mounting of the kind of large-scale campaign necessary to complete the reconquest. Castilian sovereigns, instead, seemed content to collect tribute from Granada, while interfering in its domestic politics only on rare occasions.

In this period “the rulers of Castile gave the reconquest a very low priority and reduced it from the sphere of practical politics to that of a literary or diplomatic convention, a useful excuse for evading papal demands and a tourist attraction for wandering knights . . . who wanted something more exotic than the tourneys at Windsor and less dangerous than the Balkan Crusades.”28 The reconquista had not disappeared, but the ideas behind it seemed to have taken on a reduced importance for much of the fifteenth century. The actions of Juan II of Castile offer a good example of the low priority the reconquest received. In 1431 Juan invaded Granada and routed the Granadan army but instead of pushing the attack further, he overthrew the old king and established a new one more to his liking. He most likely could have taken much of Granada at that point and put considerable pressure on the city of Granada, but he instead restored Granada’s borders to their previous shape.
Juan’s disinterest in conquest was indicative of crown policy throughout the era, but his original act of aggressiveness was not. Spanish sovereigns rarely led invasions of that nature and, more generally, were seldom even directly involved with border issues. The relative absence of crown activity did not mean that the Granadan frontier was entirely peaceful but, where violence did occur, it involved entirely local concerns:

... peace and war were not matters of state, that were primarily the concern of monarchs. There were issues that were particular to each frontier zone, that would be resolved by the interested parties on both sides, according to their own private interests, and without taking any account of the general situation or of the agreements made by the sovereign rulers. Everyone made his own peace or his own war at his own pleasure.29

To a certain extent, the reconquista had always been a convenient justification for pursuing one’s own interests. Descriptions like that above suggest, however, that participants were pursuing their interests with little of the ideological underpinning that buttressed similar activities in earlier eras. One explanation for this may relate to the limited aims of such violence. When a desire for conquest and settlement were the driving issues in Christian wars against Muslims, it was necessary for prospective conquerors to receive sanction from the crown. In order to get this they had to be able to present their case to the crown within the language of reconquest and crusade. The goals of fifteenth-century violence on the Granadan frontier, by contrast, were so limited and so local in character, that no correspondence with higher authorities was deemed necessary. In one case conflict emerged across the frontier, because two Christian thieves stole two
ploughs and a hoe from a Muslim town; in another, the Muslim warlords of Guadiz and Baza laid siege to the Christian city of Huelma because that city’s alcalde had mistreated several Muslims in his jurisdiction. These issues may have been of vital importance to the people residing in the effected towns, but were not of much interest to the emir of Granada, and of even less interest to the crown of Castile. These kind of small-scale, local conflicts were not amenable to ideological justification.

The reconquista ideology did not disappear in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; the narrative did not come to an end, nor did Spanish self-conception lose its association with the reconquest. However, the ideology did seem to take on less import for a time. With little danger of a Muslim counterattack, the Castilian crown (the only Christian kingdom still engaged in reconquest after the thirteenth century) simply paid less attention to the reconquest. It continued to be an important subject of popular culture, but had lost its immediacy, as it became more something of the past than a contemporary concern. In the late-fifteenth century, the reconquest would undergo a resurgence as a result of the efforts of a ambitious new queen and her equally remarkable husband.

When Isabella and Ferdinand married in October of 1469, Spain was anything but a unified polity. At that time it was divided into the two kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, and the two smaller polities – Navarre in the north (essentially a client state of the French king) and the aforementioned emirate of Granada in the south. Castile was the largest and most powerful of these states, occupying about sixty percent of the total area
of the Iberian Peninsula and encompassing around eight of the eleven million inhabitants. Castile became even stronger through the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. The kingdom of Aragon had traditionally been a rival to Castile but, with the marriage of the two monarchs, the territories were drawn into an unequal partnership that informally established Castilian dominance. Partnership is really a more apt description of the marriage than the frequently used “union of the crowns,” which is a little misleading. In reality the union was “personal, not institutional; each kingdom preserved its identity and its laws.” If the marriage of the two monarchs did not create an institutionally unified Spain, then their actions after rising to the thrones of their respective kingdoms did at least lay the groundwork of unity for their successors to build upon.

Talking about a unified or even a unifying Spain during the rule of the Catholic Monarchs is a complex matter. As I mentioned above, Spain was not unified but remained Castile and Aragon – or more specifically Castile, Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia, the latter three being the constituent states of the kingdom of Aragon – each with its own traditions, laws, and languages. We can speak more realistically, rather, of a centralizing project within Castile itself. As it worked out, increasingly, it was Castilian traditions that came to represent what it meant to be Spanish.

Castile at the time of Ferdinand and Isabella’s ascension, was a rather typical example of a feudal state. Power and wealth was held not by the monarchs, but by various local elites. It is estimated that the aristocracy of Castile, including higher
ecclesiastics, gentry, and the urban patriciate, formed less than two percent of the total population but controlled from 95 to 97% of Castilian land. Against this powerful landed class the Castilian monarchy had little influence. In order to remedy the situation, two main strategies were employed. The first, established in 1476, was the institution of *hermandades*. These brotherhoods combined the functions of a police force and judicial tribunal and thus were able to bring a semblance of order to the countryside and towns of Castile. Even more important than their function was the manner in which its members were recruited. Every town and village in Castile was required to contribute a quota of soldiers to staff the *hermandades*. In this way the crown created for itself solid power bases within local Castilian communities which could counterbalance the political and military authority of the feudal lords. “Under the pretext of tackling crime, Ferdinand and Isabella thus succeeded in establishing what was effectively a national Castilian army, which overrode the fragmentation of local jurisdiction in the kingdom. When war against the Islamic Iberian state of Granada began, therefore, a large number of fighting men were able to be called up from Andalusian *hermandades*. 

Besides the feudal lords, another major limit to monarchical power came in the form of the *cortes*, which was essentially a parliamentary body with authority over granting monetary subsidies to the crown. To a certain extent the crown was able to supercede this restriction by finding other sources of funding, but the cortes remained an impediment to the establishment of a strong centralized state. In order to gain some manner of control over the functioning of the cortes, the monarchs established the
institution of the corregidor. Corregidores were representatives of the crown who were assigned to every municipality in Castile to oversee the functioning of the local councils. With the power of the aristocracy somewhat neutralized by other measures, representatives from the towns and villages had a more difficult time finding aristocratic support when opposing the royal will. As a result, corregidores were better able to influence the running of these municipal councils, allowing them to also influence the selection of representatives to be sent to the cortes.36

One should not overemphasize the success of these measures in creating a centralized and unified Castilian state. Much had been done to reduce the instability that had ruled Castile for much of the 15th century, but much more remained to be done. At the very minimum, however, Ferdinand and Isabella provided conditions necessary for order and unity. More important than this even, was the fact that the institution of order helped to reinvigorate the ideology of the reconquest.

For centuries the crown of Castile had been either unable or unwilling to carry the reconquista on to its end. Ferdinand and Isabella, on the other hand, invaded the sultanate almost as soon as they had established the fiscal and military means necessary for such a venture. Expansion, however, requires ideas as much as it is requires materials. Thus the link made between the fifteenth century war against Granada and the reconquista of earlier centuries was one that was consciously pushed by the Catholic Monarchs who had much to gain by making this association.37 First, it offered them justification. Although their predecessors had been content to maintain the status quo vis-
à-vis Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella could reach back to a narrative that denied that Muslims had any right to land in the Peninsula and must therefore be driven out entirely. Such a justification had the additional benefit of winning the support of the Church, which offered more than symbolic benefits. Papal bulls of cruzada confirmed the war as a crusade, thus giving special spiritual favors to those who contributed to or took part in it. More importantly for Ferdinand and Isabella was that the bulls were accompanied by grants of one-tenth of Spain’s considerable church revenues in addition to a crusade tax. Without this additional source of revenue it is doubtful that the monarchs would have been able to raise enough money to carry the war to its completion.

By the time of Ferdinand and Isabella an ideology of reconquest had existed for centuries, yet there was little that was consistent or stable about it through these years. It took on different elements at different times, was prosecuted in various ways by various rulers, and promoted views of the enemy that were more complex than many would assume. To the extent that the reconquista constitutes the central narrative of Spanish history, it is largely because of events that occurred during Ferdinand and Isabella’s era and the two sovereigns’ particular approach to carrying out their aims. The narrative that emerged from this era, therefore, was fused to their conception of their own authority and sense of legitimacy. This self-conception centered on the title granted them in 1492 by pope Alexander VI: los reyes católicos. The title served to justify their actions, both in the past and those to come, by suggesting that they, above other monarchs, were God’s agents on Earth. The reconquest narrative stretched backed through generations of their
predecessors, but that title along with their final victory over Granada, meant that the
to conclude that the reconquista ideology was reborn even as it reached its culmination.

Within Ferdinand and Isabella’s reconquista, two elements would be particularly
important for the ideological debates that would emerge in relation to the American empire. First was the intimate connection established between conquest and religion. In a more profound manner than ever before, this last stage of the reconquest was conceptualized as more than a local contest between rival ruling houses, but part of a universal struggle whose ultimate goal was the extension of the boundaries of Christendom.

For Iberian Christians accustomed to conflict between Christians and Muslims, war was something inextricably tied to and justified by religion. This reality is demonstrated in a passage in the fifteenth-century Portuguese Chronicles of Azurara:

You ought not to refuse war against the Infidels for fear lest it might be favourable to the King of Castile; since even if he were our greatest enemy he would be so only by accident (being a Christian like ourselves), whereas the [Muslims] are our enemies by nature.38

This idea that one has “enemies by nature” was an obviously compelling one when considered within the context of the Iberian Peninsula, but was ill suited for the very different reality encountered by the Spanish in the Americas.

The second element of Ferdinand and Isabella’s conception of the reconquista that would leave an important legacy, were their efforts to centralize the act of conquest under their authority. For centuries the reconquista was carried out largely on private initiative
often, but not always, with some kind of official sanction. Even where there were lulls in warfare between the adversaries, raiding into and across border areas was relatively common. Even where conquest of territory was the end result, the occupation and settlement of the land was rarely done under the auspices of the central monarchy. Indeed, as the territory now known as Andalucia was brought under Spanish Christian control, the greatest beneficiaries of this expansion were a small group of nobles who were able to carve out massive domains for themselves. Even centuries later the dominance of a few families over the majority of Andalusian territory continued to vex Spanish authorities.

It was because of this history that when the Catholic Monarchs made the decision to proceed against Granada they wanted to be sure that they would not reproduce the Andalusian outcome in a new location. For this reason, the conquest and resettlement of the territory was to be centralized to the extent possible for what was still a Medieval state. The particulars of this story are not important for our purposes. What is important is the legacy that this attempt at centralization had for the American enterprise. While it is true that individual initiative was responsible for the majority of the most spectacular and audacious acts of conquest in the Americas, it became clear to successive Spanish monarchs that this was not the most desirable state of affairs. Thus even as former conquistadors like Cortés attempted to establish themselves as a new American nobility, the Spanish crown worked to reign in their authority and establish central control over many aspects of American society and governance.
This is the crucial context for understanding the intellectual clashes that marked the Spanish efforts to construct a legitimizing narrative for their American territories. While the reconquista was an important legacy both for the conquistadors in the Americas and the crown and its court in Spain, the two sides understood that legacy in very different terms. The conquistadors saw themselves as heirs to the thirteenth-century conquerors of Andalucia; loyal to the crown in general, but nevertheless independent and filled with ambition, a fighting spirit, and a belief in the innate righteousness of what they were doing. Given the risks involved and the concomitant potential for great personal sacrifice, these men believed their reward should be comparatively large. For Ferdinand, Isabella, and their successors, by contrast, while America may have been seized through individual initiative and without the aid of formal Spanish armies, they otherwise saw Granada as the model: while the conquistadors were certainly deserving of rewards, ultimately the conquest was the crown’s. These two competing versions of the same narrative had consequences. Ultimately, the narratives that a society uses to legitimize conquest help construct the imperial vision that follows the conquest period. Granada offers an illustrative example of this.

For Ferdinand and Isabella and certainly some of their predecessors, a key aspect of the ideology of reconquista was its claim to a historical Spanish unity. Despite Granada’s roughly seven hundred and eighty year history as an Islamic territory—a period in which a new society was built, complete with stunning architectural monuments, a thriving commercial economy, and bustling urban centers—it was to be
treated as if it all that time it had been simply occupied by mere interlopers. As such, Granada was not slowly reintegrated administratively but suddenly and dramatically given a position of primacy as the administrative center of southern Spain.

Granada represented more to Ferdinand and Isabella than just the last in a centuries-long series of conquests. From the moment of its capitulation it achieved a status beyond many of the surrounding provinces. Its officials were given titles of honor much greater than those with similar duties in other regions; it was given a house of finance, joining Toledo, Burgos, Seville, Segovia, Cuenca, and La Coruña (all six of these cities were crucial to the Castilian economy) as the only cities so endowed; and in 1502 the seat of the Chancillería was moved from Ciudad Real to the city of Granada, reflecting its ascension to a dominant status in the south of Spain. The province was not, the monarchs seemed to be saying, a conquered territory to be ruled but a reconquered territory that with state help could reassume its rightful place within Christian Spain. This was part of the legacy of the reconquista ideology for post-conquest Granada. It would not be enough to rule Granada in the decentralized, hands-off manner that predominated in other Spanish territories in Europe and the Mediterranean. If Granada was indeed to achieve the status envisioned for it by authorities it would require a degree of state intervention that was previously unprecedented.

Thus, much of the discussion and debate about post-conquest Granada was based on the fiction that the territory was somehow naturally and historically part of a Christian
Spain and policy was often imposed to support this fiction. Granada, however, was not like the rest of Spain. The destruction of Nasrid rule was necessarily only the first small step in a much larger process of transforming the formerly Islamic stronghold into a Christian territory embedded with the traditions, culture, and institutions that held sway in the rest of Castile. While the conquest itself was obviously crucial, “the creation of Christian Granada was not an event, but rather an historical process – and a gradual and incomplete one at that.”

To affect this transformation, Spanish monarchs laid claim to a higher degree of authority than that which they exercised in most of the rest of their domains but, ultimately, they were not working on a blank canvas upon which any image they wished could be painted.

It was not enough simply to introduce some new institutions, a few crown officials, and invite in any Christian migrants who wished to relocate. Granada was already home to hundreds of thousands of people who were a part of a vibrant culture, had well-established economic and political traditions, and lived in cities and towns already filled with homes, businesses, mosques, and schools. Centuries of history could not be wiped out all at once; instead the new Granada had to be constructed on top of the old. To this degree, the creation of Christian Granada had to coincide with the gradual, and eventually complete, disappearance of the Muslim society that predated Spanish conquest.

In the end, this was the most challenging aspect of the Spanish imperial vision imposed by the reconquista narrative. They were able to achieve relative success in
imposing a new institutional and administrative framework over the territory; and they were able to encourage large numbers of immigrants to seek out better opportunities in the new southern territory and thus alter the basic demography of Granada. But what they could not do was transform the conquered population into the kind of population they envisioned. This was true in the short term, where the first decade of Christian rule would end with a major revolt, but also in the long term because of the impatience of religious and secular authorities with incremental change. The narrative of the reconquest, the notion of Islamic usurpation rather than rule, the existence of an archdiocese in absentia – all helped to impose a certain vision of what Granada was and should be, and this vision was a great distance from reality. The approach to Granada assumed that pre-conquest Gothic traditions had survived through the time of the Nasrid emirate, and that therefore a Christian society could be recuperated rather than constructed in Granada. The territory had not been acquired as Spain would later acquire Mexico or Peru, it was recovered and had to be quickly castilianized (castellanizado) in order to retake its place within Christian Spain.41

The problem was that Granada was not simply a Christian territory that had been momentarily been held by Muslim rulers, but a conquered territory, an imperial domain inhabited by potentially hostile population who remained insufficiently pacified. Thus, while castilianization was the goal in theory, the actual situation called for an administrative apparatus more suited to the exigencies of ruling a conquered territory. As much as the state wanted to believe that Granada could be easily and unproblematically
reincorporated into Christian Spain, the institutions designed to rule the region bore little resemblance to those that were prevalent in the rest of Castile.

The imperial vision of Granada was at once often irrelevant to the day-to-day lives of Granada’s Moriscos and repobladores and enormously influential in pushing the long term trends of secular and spiritual rule in the territory in an ever more intransigent direction. The central narrative of the conquest was therefore something that helped shape, influence, and drive future events in Granada.

In the next chapter I turn to the Spanish activities in the Americas and describe a situation that demonstrated a decided lack of imperial vision, or, at the very least, an inconsistent one. At its most effective, the narrative of reconquest imposed a meaning onto Spanish expansion, while also influencing the course of that expansion. In the Americas, there was no overarching narrative that could make sense of the experience of overseas empire. Lacking such an ordering device, individuals would use the experience of conquest, whether their own or that of others, to craft their own set of meanings, their own sense of justification and legitimacy, their own set of narratives.
CHAPTER 4
Of Conquests and Conversions:
The Narratives of Bartolome de Las Casas and Hernan Cortés

As I described in the previous chapter, the process of conquering, occupying, colonizing, and governing new territories was not a new one for Christians of the Iberian Peninsula and, in fact, was a process undertaken many times across the history of the reconquest. Conquest held a special place for the Spanish. In a society that – like most at the time – was marked by enormous status and wealth distinctions and very little chance for social mobility, participation in campaigns of conquest offered one of the few opportunities to improve one’s situation. Many of these ventures tended to be decentralized, carried out with crown sanction, although sometimes only retroactively, but generally without men, materials, or money coming from the monarch. This meant that participants subjected themselves to significant financial risk, to say nothing of the risk to their persons, when they undertook such campaigns. But in doing so, they gave themselves the opportunity for significant rewards:
“The participants each gained title to some of the territory and also immediate political authority over the conquered population … In addition, the victors expected to receive as tribute (a privilege that could be inherited by their descendants) all or part of the tax that the conquered now owed to the crown.”

This was a system that worked well within the context of the reconquest but also left behind some problematic legacies for the Spanish state.

The reconquest may have ended with the capitulation of Granada in 1492 but it left behind significant legacies that Spaniards would carry with them across the Atlantic in that same year. Chief among these legacies was a narrative tradition that elucidated a vision of Spanish history. It helped them to define themselves and their enemies and also established a basis for just wars against enemies of the faith, instilling within them a sense of religious triumphalism. As Spaniards established themselves in the New World in ever-greater numbers after 1492, they and their countrymen back home would seek to understand their new situation through reference to the old. Narratives that made sense of their activities on one side of the Atlantic, however, turned out to be ill suited for explaining and justifying actions taken on the other side.

During the reconquest, Spaniards generally viewed the territory of the Iberian Peninsula as inherently Christian but at an earlier point subject to usurpation rather than conquest by the armies of the infidel invaders. This basic narrative structure meant that on the peninsula Iberian monarchs, and even private individuals, were able to prosecute wars against Muslim forces on the peninsula without having to construct elaborate
justifications for each individual conquest. This was not the case, however, when the Spanish expanded across the Atlantic.

Thinking beyond Spain, we have seen how other societies have dealt with the novelty of expansion. In each case the society in question used narratives to make the unfamiliar seem familiar. The Sassanid Persians sought to sweep away the decaying edifice of the Parthian Empire and establish themselves as the founders of a new regime. To accomplish this goal they emphasized their connection to historical and mythical figures of the past and claimed that they were engaged not in conquest of new territory but in reconquest of the territory of their Achaemenid ancestors. The Chinese incorporated Yunnan into their territory through a long historical process. Based on the idea of a Chinese civilization that radiated outward from an imperial center, expansion into Yunnan could be understood as part of a general process in which foreign barbarians received the influence of Chinese civilization and as a result became increasingly assimilated. At a certain point these peripheral groups ceased to be peripheral and became part of the center. Theoretically, this meant that even though conquest was not built into the Chinese societal framework like it was for the Spanish, expansion could occur but only after regions had acquired the appropriate level of cultural affinity. In West Asia and Anatolia we have seen the manner in which relatively newly arrived Turkic groups had been able to adapt their own particular narrative traditions into a new cultural and historical milieu, and also make use of Islamic concepts. For example, the concept of ghaza, was adopted to justify in new terms activities that predated the Turks
conversion. Lastly, the Arabs of early Islam were the founders of an entirely new narrative tradition based on the revelations of Muhammad as well as his behavior as head of the new Islamic community. This represented a rare case where the narrative took that which was familiar, the political and social relations of the Arabian Peninsula, and transformed them in such a way that his followers could feel at once a continuity with the past as well as sense that they were taking part in a revolutionary new idea.

The Spanish found themselves, however, in a much more complex situation than any of these societies. The scale of unfamiliarity, the suddenness with which territories were claimed, and the private nature of the conquests, among other things, produced a situation that was extremely difficult to assimilate into preexisting ideas and in which there was too little time to construct coherent new narratives of legitimacy. Simply put, there had never been anything quite like the Spanish conquests in the Americas and the result was the narrative chaos that I introduce below.

The most analogous situation for the Spanish had been their attempts at expansion into the Canary Islands. This was a process that began in the fourteenth century but was not completed, for various logistical and financial reasons, until the sixteenth century. Like the Americas, the Canary Islands were not inhabited by Muslims and therefore did not quite fit into the reconquest narrative. However, Castilian rulers did attempt to use at least one element of the narrative to justify their conquest, namely, the notion of the Gothic heritage of Spanish kings. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the period of Visigothic rule, existing as it did in the far distant past, had achieved a near mythic status
that allowed its continuing use as an historical justification for a variety of actions. Thus in 1345 the king of Castile “staked a claim of his own to the [Canary Islands] on the spurious grounds that the islands, with much of the African mainland, had belonged to his remote Visigothic predecessors, ‘and that the kingdoms of Africa are of our conquest.’”

Interestingly – and as I explore briefly in the next chapter – one hundred years later a similar, although even more implausible, argument about Gothic precedence would be made to justify the conquest of Peru.

Although the Canary Islands represent a more unfamiliar situation than the others, in each of the above cases we see conquests, or at least stated desires for conquest, that take place within the bounds of more or less recognizable sets of circumstances. The question for this chapter, however, is what happens when the extension of legitimacy does not occur within a region of known political rivalries and competing territorial claims but in a political and cultural milieu of unprecedented novelty? For thousands of years empires had emerged, expanded, and eventually succumbed to their own set of pressures but never before had a set of imperial conquests inspired the kind of soul-searching debates amongst the conquerors as those that would emerge with the Spanish conquests in the Americas. Because of the uniqueness of the encounter between Spaniards and Indians it could not be contained nor made sense of within any preexisting narrative tradition and instead the conquests were to inspire a flurry of narrative constructions all seeking to understand the events of 1492 and beyond in their own particular way.
Just as the reconquest had entailed a religious mission to extend the borders of Christendom and a military mission to defeat and occupy (or rather reoccupy according to reconquest logic) territory held by Muslims, so to was expansion in the Americas initially envisioned along these same lines. They were not comparable conquests, however. Within the Iberian context, the religious and military elements of the reconquest were inseparable since the financial incentives of taking part in conquest encouraged individuals to take part in such actions and also claim to be serving their faith. However, this was not the case in the Americas. One could claim the traditional “right of conquest” based on a reconquest tradition within which material gain was the reward for successful conquerors. Such rewards, however, were best achieved through the exploitation of the conquered population thus making it difficult to also present the empire as part of a moral mission. Conversely, one could argue for legitimacy on the moral grounds that the empire existed for the purpose of saving souls through conversion and civilization. Doing this, however, made it difficult to justify exploitation of the very people who were supposed to be saved. Early on in the history of Spanish colonization, these inherent contradictions were overlooked or ignored but as soon as critiques were leveled the once unified narrative fractured in multiple directions. Attempts were made by various figures to reconcile this narrative but such attempts were ultimately unsuccessful.

For the remainder of this chapter I describe that narrative fracturing and the strands that emerged from it. Although it is an oversimplification to imagine that only
two possible narratives emerged at this point we can nevertheless imagine two general narrative threads within which one can find some diversity. The first of these threads originated with the original critique leveled against Spanish rule on the island of Hispaniola; this narrative was based on a Christian historical narrative that saw the conversion of Indians as a divinely ordained mission but one that was being undermined by rapacious colonists who only saw Indians as a resource to be exploited. Although he was not the originator of this narrative, the great Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas was most responsible for developing its logic. The second narrative to emerge was based on a conquistador class that sought to present its own activities as being equivalent to that of their predecessors from reconquista-era Spain. This narrative often made reference to a religious argument but its primary goal was to make the case for the political and economic interests of the conquistador class. Hernan Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, was the figure that became most associated with the conquistador ideal and his account of the Spanish advance into Mexico was a marvel of narrative construction. My examination of these narratives will show the diversity of personages, perspectives, and interest groups represented through this discourse over legitimacy, while also showing to what degree the Spanish crown failed to construct and promulgate a vision of empire across its territories and populace.

Perhaps no set of conquests has ever been subjected to such a long and unresolved discourse over legitimacy as that which accompanied the Spanish conquests in the Americas in the years after 1492. From almost the minute Columbus returned from his
initial voyage, until at least 1573, questions emerged centering on the question of Spain’s imperial legitimacy. The debate certainly took in a wide spectrum of opinions, ranging from those who were unequivocal in their belief that the Spanish venture in the Indies was inherently unjust and thus illegitimate, to the opposite extreme arch-imperialists who believed that the conquest was inherently just.

The extremity of these views is notable since in both cases the beliefs were based on philosophical ruminations rather than practical concerns (although certain religious had experience in the Americas and were genuinely sickened by the iniquities they witnessed, many others wrote from Spain and without any, or at least limited, personal experience of conditions in the Indies). For others involved in the debate, however, the sort of abstract philosophical ruminations carried out by those in Spain seemed trivial when compared to the desire to protect their own interests. These interests could range from monetary, to political, to religious and usually required settling on a position somewhere between the two extremes.

A factor, although one not necessarily unique to the Spanish Empire, that complicated the attempt to establish a dominant narrative of conquest was the extent to which it was carried out through the auspices of private individuals rather than direct crown involvement. As Henry Kamen has noted: “Not a single Spanish army was expended on ‘conquest’. When Spaniards established control, they did so through the sporadic efforts of a small group of adventurers whom the crown later attempted to bring under its control. These men, who proudly assumed the description of ‘conquistadors’,
were often not even soldiers.” This fact explains much about the subsequent history of the Spanish Empire and in particular it illuminates several key aspects of the discourse of legitimacy that concerns us here.

First, it helps to explain the proliferation of narratives that emerged throughout the empire. The conquistadors saw themselves as heirs to the reconquista tradition and sought to win fame and fortune through victories over heathen *indios*, just as their predecessors had once done in their battles against Muslim infidels. However, centralizing states could not permit such adventurism. Ferdinand and Isabella had eventually centralized the reconquest in its final phase, the Ottomans eventually had to rein in their ghazis, and so to would later Spanish monarchs seek to establish their authority at the expense of the conquistadors. Even if such a centralizing impulse not been in effect, the fact remained that the New World was not the Old, Indians were not Moors, and many of the clergy who advised the crown felt squeamish about their countrymen’s activities on the other side of the ocean, arguing that conquistadors had no inherent right to simply show up, take what they wanted, and call it conquest. Thus, part of the crown effort to bring their American subjects under their control was forcing them to construct arguments for the legitimacy of their actions that went beyond the old world notion of “the right of conquest”.

Another consequence of the private nature of the Spanish conquest of the Americas was that it created a complex relationship between conquistadors and crown. Although the conquests were the result of their daring, personal sacrifice, and often
substantial monetary investment, they remained dependent on the crown. The king was the only authority who could grant them the titles, rights, and privileges they sought. In return for such grants, conquistadors were generally prepared to recognize the crown’s ultimate sovereignty and willing, although sometimes reluctant, to send the traditional “royal fifth” back across the Atlantic. As part of this arrangement, though, they expected to be given substantial autonomy over affairs in lands that they had won for their sovereign. Forfeiting sovereignty in this manner was, however, not the trend in Spanish imperial society. Since the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, the monarchy had undergone slow process of state centralization that included reducing the authority of the aristocracy. Although the Spanish crown had access to substantially more authority by 1500 than it did a century earlier, these efforts had not been completely effective. Given this context, successive Spanish monarchs were loathe to preside over the creation of an entirely new aristocracy on the other side of the Atlantic.

It was in the interests of the crown to slowly reduce the prominence of the conquistador class while increasing the role of loyal peninsular bureaucrats who would be more likely to carry out the policies of the crown. Thus, conquistadors or their heirs, who had become dependent upon their encomienda rights for their livelihood, increasingly felt the need to lobby the crown or its representatives and make their case for the continuance of such grants based on their vital contribution to the cause of Spanish American empire. As a result, Spanish archives are littered with individual accounts of the conquest period written by Spaniards, Indians, and mestizos, all of whom wished to get across the
importance of their contributions and the paucity of their rewards. One such letter, written to King Philip II in February 1570 by the conquistador Lope de Pilar, complains about the extravagance displayed by the new viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo. Pilar was incensed that Toledo should live in such comfort while the conquistadors and their heirs fell into an increasingly sorry state of affairs arguing that Toledo’s extravagance, “results in the suffering of more deserving people who with their lances gave him the plazas he now rules.” This was a thought that would have been echoed by many of Pilar’s peers.

The Spanish Empire was certainly not the first imperial formation to be marked by disputes between competing interest groups. However, the decentralized nature of the conquests meant that to an even greater degree than prior imperial expansions, there existed a group of people who could claim to have played the dominant role in carrying out the conquests and a state in whose interest it was to increasingly limit the access of that group and their descendants to the sources of wealth made accessible by their actions. As the crown became increasingly successful at marginalizing the conquistador class, there emerged a concurrent need for that class to construct arguments for their own relevance. The result was a proliferation of narratives.

The lack of direct state involvement in the various conquests in the western hemisphere was also significant for the indigenous peoples own conceptualization of their role in the Spanish enterprise. Because of the private nature of the conquests, the scale of operations – at least when only Spanish involvement is taken into account –
always remained small. Thus, in the two most famous examples, Hernan Cortés began his campaign against the empire of the Mexica with only nine hundred Spanish participants by the end, while Francisco Pizarro led a campaign into the heart of the Inca Empire of Peru with only one hundred and sixty-eight followers. The ramifications of this fact for the indigenous people of the region were significant.

Because so few Spaniard resided in the Americas, what we usually refer to as “Spanish” conquests were actually only made possible through the significant participation of indigenous groups. To use the example of Mexico once again, in the final assault on the Mexica capital of Tenochtitlan a force of perhaps 300,000 indigenous warriors and auxiliary personnel accompanied Cortés and his men. Within the Mexica and Inca states, well prior to the arrival of the Spanish, there existed longstanding grievances with and antipathy towards the ruling ethnic groups. As it became clear that the Spanish were opponents of the ruling regimes, they found many allies who were more than willing to participate in the overthrow of their oppressors. The lack of Spanish manpower had an additional consequence since it meant that huge portions of territory in the Americas were never subject to any formal conquest. For instance, between the town of Cajamarca and the great Incan capital of Cuzco there existed a great many towns and communities, but during Pizarro’s march from the former to the latter he left these settlements virtually unmolested. For significant numbers of Andean peoples, therefore, the conquest never happened; not only had they never been defeated by Spanish forces but in many cases hostilities never occurred between the groups.
Whether allied with the Spanish or ignored, countless indigenous people found, to their surprise, that within a generation or two of the Spanish arrival they had come to be treated as conquered peoples. Much like the conquistadors, therefore, descendants of the old indigenous elites who had either participated in the conquest or at least agreed to subject themselves to Spanish sovereignty, increasingly felt the need to argue for the continuation of their special rights and privileges within the ruling system, while others had to argue against the legitimacy of the “conquest” itself. Again, like the conquistadors, these arguments often took the form of narratives.

Finally, the distance between Spain and its empire encouraged imperial subjects to produce their own narratives. The ocean that separated the crown from its colonies encouraged the notion of a sovereign with limited connection the day-to-day realities of life within its American Empire. Many people, therefore, wrote their stories to the crown in the form of appeals for redress. The Archive of the Indies in Seville is full of such stories. One from a Juan Griego of Cuzco detailed the nepotism, corruption, and cruelty of the corregidor and his son. According to Griego, the king had an obligation to ensure justice for the natives and the poor. Another detailed the great service that the recently deceased Pedro de Vega had provided his king and asks for remuneration for Vega’s son. The letter writer appealed to the real conciencia, the royal conscience, to do the right thing. Those who objected to any element of Spanish rule appealed to the “merced real” or royal benevolence of the monarch to provide justice, redress, or rewards.
The figure of the monarch thus existed in a somewhat contradictory state as both the unquestioned sovereign over the territory but, at the same time, one who was rarely seen as responsible for any of the injustices, cruelties, bad policies, or unscrupulous officials that abounded throughout the empire. Since the crown existed in such a state, one could critique any element of Spanish rule without actually criticizing the crown itself. The assumption was always that if wrongs were being committed it was only because the crown was ignorant of the facts on the ground. The best way to set things right, therefore, was to relieve the monarch of his ignorance through descriptions, often in narrative form, of the issues that needed to be addressed. While there were times of actual insurrection against the crown’s rule – most notably in Peru in the 1540’s – for the most part the crown was understood to be, at least in theory, as a benevolent and objective observer always ready to recognize the errors of its subjects and subordinates and set them right.

What ultimately made the Spanish Empire in the Americas such a unique case, however, was not the decentralized nature of its origins, nor some special quirk of Spanish culture or character. Instead, it was the profound unfamiliarity of their situation. No matter how many times they sought to appeal to the narratives that made sense of their old world, they found them unable to render familiar that which had been alien.

For all of the reasons listed above the Spanish Empire likely produced – in addition to gold, silver, hides, dyes, and other commodities – hundreds of narratives of the conquest. Rather than attempt to examine all of these narratives, in the rest of this
chapter I will focus on a few representative and relatively well-known narratives produced over the course of the first one hundred years of the Spanish presence in the Americas. My examination of these narratives demonstrates the diversity of personages, perspectives, and interest groups represented through this discourse over legitimacy, while also showing the degree to which the Spanish crown had failed to construct and promulgate a vision of empire across its territories and populace. The four authors I discuss in this chapter and the next each constructed narratives of conquest that revealed the particular concerns of the specific segments of the populace that they represented.

The great Dominican, and former bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas became famous as the “defender of the Indians.” As the most vocal critic of the Spanish enterprise, Las Casas was more responsible than anyone for articulating a religious and moral critique of the empire. Initially a supporter of the empire as an abstract concept, if not its form, he became more radical over the course of his life. By his last years he pleaded with king Philip II to save his soul and save Spain from God’s wrath by retruning Peru to its indigenous rulers. The conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortés, achieved widespread fame and wealth for an undertaking that began as an act of blatant insubordination. As such Cortés represents the conquistador class, a group that was willing to subject themselves to their superiors only when it did not impede their own search for wealth and power. In the chapter that follows I examine the work of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa and Titu Cusi Ypanqui. Before examining theses narrative I must first say a word about the nature of information flow in the Spanish Empire.
Before turning to the narrative constructed by Cortés and those constructed around Cortés let us first examine the Spanish state’s attempts to control the dissemination of such narratives.

Spain in the sixteenth century was a place where the flow of information was heavily restricted. Particular emphasis was placed on controlling depictions of the American Empire and as a result, of all the works produced in or about the Americas in this century a majority was denied a license for publication during their author’s lifetime. Indeed, some of the most important sources contemporary scholars use to understand the era were only officially published in the last few centuries. In the Chapter 2 we saw how important it was for the central authorities in early Islam to gain and maintain control over the narrative. Ultimately they were not able to do so and Islam fractured along alternate narrative strands as multiple traditions arose. The Spanish state had a similar desire to control their imperial narrative but had the additional challenge created by the distance between periphery and center of the empire. It also faced a challenge in the form of a reconquest genre of document known as the probanza de mérito (proof of merit), which were written to inform the sovereign of events in newly conquered territories and as petitions for rewards. This tradition reached even greater prominence in the New World than it had in the Old, resulting in thousands of such narratives being produced and carried across the Atlantic with the hope that they would be read by the monarch. Most of these were never read by more than a few individuals,
but a few emerged within colonial period histories or received publication in their own right.

To control the dissemination of such narratives three strategies were employed. The first was to establish tight control over the licensing of books. Beginning in 1502, all books concerning the Americas had to be reviewed by secular and ecclesiastical authorities before receiving license for publication. This law was tightened in 1556 and again in 1558 to cover more books and to impose harsher penalties, including the death penalty on transgressors. The second strategy involved limiting physical access to printing presses themselves, especially in America, and thus maintain close to a monopoly on printing. By 1500 there were twenty-three presses operating throughout Spain but it would take nearly three hundred years for a similar number to come into operation in the whole of the American empire. The third strategy was to centralize the construction of narratives through the position of royal chronicler, established in 1532 and 1571 with the goal of controlling the dissemination of knowledge concerning the conquest. None of these strategies proved wholly effective and narratives continued to proliferate throughout the sixteenth century and beyond but they did produce a situation in which significant hurdles did exist for the wide-scale circulation of information. Indeed, all four authors I examine faced at least some limits on the publication of their writing. This particularly became the case under Philip II. Ideally, those at the center of power would have the ability to disseminate information, to put across or extend a grand narrative that others could then adapt to, but lacking a clear understanding of where
the New World fit into its traditional narrative structure the state found itself unable to do so. Rather than helping to construct an officially approved narrative the policies of the Spanish state were only able to restrict the free flow of information.

Even as the state had some success restricting the dissemination of information what they could not do was inhibit the construction of the narratives themselves. These narratives were created not because conquistadors liked to write but because the nature of their activities compelled them to write. Conquistadors wrote up thousands of probanzas, cartas, relaciones, and cartas de relacion in order to present to their superiors, and to later generations, a particular type of story that emphasized Spanish victories, heroism, loyalty, and piousness. They had to emphasize these qualities, however, because so much of what they did was marked by failure and transgression:

Less than heroic actions underlie and even enable the eventual victories. Of course, the whole Discovery and Conquest rests on Columbus’s original miscalculations. However, let us not forget, to mention but a few egregious examples, that Columbus was later sent back to Spain in chains; that the conquest of Mexico issued from Hernan Cortés’s disobedience of Diego Velázquez; that Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s peregrinations of discovery across the North American southwest to Mexico were occasioned by shipwreck and deaths of his companions. Disobedience of superiors, cruelty to the native populations, self-interest, failed attempts at religious conversion, incomprehension of the New World, and so on … Failures required justification, trespasses reparation, errors and confusions explanation, iniquities redressing.\(^{11}\)
On the one hand, the sheer number of such narratives produced suggests that the crown retained a stronghold over its subjects who, in many cases, were operating in locations where royal authority was almost entirely theoretical yet continued to operate more or less within its strictures. On the other hand, these narratives were mostly produced after the fact to justify activities that the crown itself would likely have opposed if given the chance (i.e. Cortés’ act of insubordination or Pizarro’s act of regicide). Expeditions during the reconquest were also sometimes sanctioned post-facto but in those cases there was general agreement as to the justification for conquest whereas in the Americas each expedition constructed their own justification. The narratives were produced to argue for the specific interests of individual conquistadors and these interests did not always match those of the crown or the church. The result was narrative confusion. This confusion began early in the history of the Spanish Empire with the emergence of a religious critique that helped undermine the original imperial narrative.

To the extent that there existed a dominant narrative to explain the Spanish American enterprise, it was a religious one. This was certainly understandable given that in 1494 Ferdinand and Isabella received the title of Catholic Monarchs (los reyes catolicos) from Pope Alexander VI, a title that became an important part of their own self-conception while also being passed down to their successors. However, while the pairing of religion and conquest worked well in the context of the reconquista it was a bit more problematic in relation to the Americas.
Beginning with Columbus’s first voyage in 1492, the Spanish project in the Indies had been portrayed as a search for souls as much as a search for wealth. For Columbus, and certainly others as well, even the search for wealth had religious connotations. It was the Admiral’s great hope that in giving his sovereigns access to new wealth he would also be providing them with the means to carry out the reconquest of the Holy Land from the infidels: “He begged the most serene queen, Doña Isabella, to make a vow to spend all the riches which came to the sovereigns through his discovery to win the land and the Holy House of Jerusalem; and so the Queen did …”\(^{12}\) According to Las Casas account of Columbus’s journals, he recorded on December 26, 1492 that:

… he hopes to God that on his return, which he intends to make from Castile, there would be found a cask of gold, which those whom he left behind would have obtained by barter, and that they would have found the mine of gold and the spicery, and that in so great quantity that the Sovereigns within three years would undertake and prepare to go and conquer the Holy Sepulchre, ‘for so’ says he, ‘I declared to Your Highnesses that all the gain of this my enterprise should be spent in the conquest of Jerusalem.”\(^{13}\)

These statements attributed to Columbus suggest that from the start the New World, as it would eventually become known, was viewed as important insofar as its land and wealth supported Spanish aspirations in the Old.

For Isabella the hope may have been that its riches would provide the means with which “to regain the Holy Sepulchre,” while for Charles V (r. 1517-1556) its resources were key to his aim to recreate a Universal Monarchy, and Philip II (r. 1556-1598) saw in
the wealth of the New World an opportunity to maintain his hold over the European
territories gained by his predecessors. Whatever the specific aim of Spanish monarchs
and their advisors, the dependence on American revenues created a pernicious situation
in which fiscal realities in Europe continually outweighed moral considerations in
America. As a result, pious thoughts of righteous crusades and saving souls were always
in danger of being drowned out by a reality marked by massacres and slave raiding. The
great contradiction at the heart of the American enterprise was that while the best
justification for Spanish dominance of the Indies was a religious one, the easiest route
towards to the wealth that filled the royal treasury and drove colonists to leave their
homes and sail across the Atlantic, was through the exploitation of the indigenous
populations. Men like Las Casas viewed indigenous people as gentle primitive creatures
who had yet to be blessed with the word of God, while conquistadors and other colonists
were more likely to portray the Indians as their key sources of wealth. The crown,
however, was in a more difficult position. Its ideal position was a mixture of the views of
the priests and the conquistadors, but this was untenable. Nevertheless, these two views
of the Indians, as gentle creatures to be converted and as economic resources to be
exploited, existed side-by-side with little difficulty for the first few decades of Spanish
rule in the Indies.

For many from the Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian, and other of Europe’s
elite religious orders, the discovery of the Americas and the people who resided there was
viewed as a rare opportunity: a chance to create a new Christian society free from the
heresies, sinfulness, hypocrisy, and greed that had sullied European Christendom. A small but vocal group of religious was therefore horrified to find this dream being corrupted by the avariciousness of officials, colonists, and priests alike. Although he would eventually become its most prominent member, the initial Dominican critics arose before Las Casas took the vows himself. It would instead take a gradual conversion for Las Casas to adopt the views that would make him famous.

In the original narrative that justified Spanish rule in the Indies, the Indians themselves hardly even entered into the equation and instead the key events surrounded the formation of the papacy. According to the Petrine Doctrine, developed over the first few centuries of the Christian era, Rome’s primacy within Christendom was due to the Roman church’s link to Saint Peter. This belief was articulated most clearly by the fifth century pope Leo I, and was based on two key assumptions. First, that Peter was closer to Christ than the other apostles and had been given special authority because of this relationship. This idea was based on Matthew 16:16-19 which recounted Jesus as having said:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Commenting upon this passage, Leo I wrote: "Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . has placed the principal charge on the blessed Peter, chief of all the apostles.” This reading would have
little value, however, without a second key assumption that that which was true of Peter was also true of his successors.

The notion of Peter’s authority being inheritable was an important one since Peter had founded the Church in Rome and been its first bishop meaning therefore that the bishops who succeeded him also inherited Peter’s special authority. By Leo’s time, this belief had led to the papacy’s assertion of its own universal jurisdiction. While other Christian prelates found much to dispute within this contention, for the most part European Christians accepted the special authority of the papacy. Where disputes did exist it was over what realms this jurisdiction lay. Popes generally claimed that their authority was both temporal and spiritual, while secular rulers were generally unwilling to concede too much of their political autonomy. The issue had never been definitively settled, but in Spain, at least, the Catholic Monarchs were able to carve out significant authority over the Spanish Church both before and after the conquest of Granada. When it served their purposes, however, Spanish monarchs were quite willing to accept that the pope’s authority went beyond the spiritual realm and even beyond Christendom.

With Columbus’s discoveries it became imperative for the Spanish to both construct a legitimate claim to the new lands and position themselves in relation to the rival Portuguese. Pope Alexander VI, a native of Valencia and acquaintance of King Ferdinand, provided the Spanish with everything they needed. On May 3rd and 4th, 1493 through a set of three papal bulls, collectively known as the Bulls of Donation, Alexander articulated a set of provisions that were highly favorable to the Spanish. Given that it
was the Catholic Monarchs purpose, “to bring under your sway the said mainlands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith,”

Alexander was willing to give the Spanish venture the papal seal of approval. In the bull *inter caetera*, the last of the three Bulls of Donation, Alexander stated that:

… we, of our own accord, not at your instance nor the request of anyone else in your regard, but of our own sole largess and certain knowledge and out of the fullness of our apostolic power, *by the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicarship of Jesus Christ, which we hold on earth* … give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered. [italics mine]¹⁵

While clearly, the actual grant to the lands in question was key, also significant in this bull was Alexander’s claim that the authority to grant such concessions was inherent in his position as heir to Peter and Christ’s vicar on earth. This may have been specious reasoning but Spanish authorities were more than happy to use it as the key legal basis for their control of American territory. However, while most Spanish jurists and theologians focused on the geographic dimensions of the bull, Las Casas and some of his brethren were to make the conditions of the grant their focus:

[W]e exhort you very earnestly in the Lord and by your reception of holy baptism, whereby you are bound to our apostolic commands, and by the bowels of the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, enjoin strictly, that inasmuch as with eager zeal for the true faith you design to equip and
despatch this expedition, you purpose also, as is your duty, to lead the peoples dwelling in those islands and countries to embrace the Christian religion; nor at any time let dangers or hardships deter you therefrom, with the stout hope and trust in your hearts that Almighty God will further your undertakings.\textsuperscript{16}

The Bulls of Donation implicitly placed the discovery of the Americas within a Christian narrative that stretched back to Christ himself. Not all Spaniards, however, understood the Bulls of Donation in the same way. In particular, tension would emerge between encomenderos, who interpreted the grant as giving them license to profit from Indians, and members of the Dominican Order, who saw it as an exhortation to convert them.

The view of the Dominicans was first publicly articulated on the island of Hispaniola in 1511. In that year, the great Dominican, Fray Antonio de Montesinos, newly arrived in the Indies, berated the Spanish settlers of the island in a fiery sermon that took them to task for their inhumane and unchristian treatment of the Indians. Las Casas offers the fullest account of the sermon and the vents that surrounded it. For him, Montesinos’s words marked a beginning. It was an event that influenced his own conversion as well as one that began a debate in which he would later become the most prominent participant. For our purposes, the sermon serves a different purpose. It is the clearest early example demonstrating that understandings of what could have been the central narrative of Spanish in the Americas had begun to diverge in fundamental ways.
On what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these peoples, who dwelt quietly and peacefully on their own land? Wars in which you have destroyed such infinite numbers of them by homicides and slaughters never before heard of?¹⁷

In the aftermath of the sermon the Admiral, Diego Columbus, would answer this query with his own question. According to Las Casas:

[Columbus] asks why that father had dared preach things in such disservice to the king and so harmful to that whole land affirming that they could not possess Indians after the king, the lord of all the Indies, gave them to them – especially since the Spaniards had won those islands with great hardships and had subjugated the pagans who held them.¹⁸

For men like Columbus and the encomenderos of Hispaniola the key element of the Bulls of Donation had been the grant itself. Once papal imprimatur had been given to Spanish claims in the Indies authority had shifted to secular rulers and as “Lord of all the Indies” the king had every right to use the authority granted to him to in turn grant Indian labor to Spanish colonists. After all, the Spanish had undergone “great hardships” to secure the lands and it was the kings right to reward them for their service and sacrifice.

The Dominicans understood the issue differently. The king may very well have been Lord of all the Indies, but this alone was not enough to justify the manner in which Indians were being treated. Montesinos was not simply talking about the right to rule, about abstract political theories, he was lobbying for the very souls of the Spanish which had been put in jeopardy as a result of their behavior towards and treatment of the Indians. Whether or not they had the political right to behave as they were was
secondary to the fate of their souls. If they did not acknowledge and correct their sins then they “could no more be saved than the Moors or the Turks who lack the faith of Jesus Christ and do not desire it.” The Dominican argument had political as well as spiritual implications based on a reading of the Bulls of Donation that was different from that of other Spaniards. As they saw it, the Bulls did not simply confer land to the Spanish crown, they were instead represented a conditional grant based on the real missionary efforts on the part of the Spanish. The Spanish, according to the Dominicans, were failing to live up to these conditions:

What care do you take that [the Indians] should be instructed in religion, so that they may know their God and creator, may be baptized, may hear Mass, and may keep Sundays and feast days?20

He concluded with the most famous and oft-quoted portion of the sermon:

Are these not men? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourselves? Don’t you understand this? Don’t you feel this? Why are you sleeping in such a profound and lethargic slumber?21

The implications of Montesinos’s argument are clear. The only way that colonists could justify their lack of concern over Indian souls was by assigning them to a category of subhumans that lacked the rationality to truly become Christian. Montesinos raised this point in order to highlight the extremism of the position but humanity of the Indians, or lack thereof, was a key element of the debate to follow.
So although there had been rumbles of discontent over the Spanish conduct towards their Indian subjects prior to this time, it was with Montesinos’s sermon – and the outraged reaction of the Spanish settlers – that we see a clear response on the part of officials in Spain in the form of two documents that sought to more clearly articulate an argument for Spanish legitimacy: the Laws of Burgos and the requerimiento.

The Dominican critique of Spanish behavior in Hispaniola was to have immediate consequences. Most Spanish policymakers remained shielded from the brutal reality of colonialism by their sheer distance from the situation and by Spanish colonists themselves who were not inclined to critique a labor regime that provided them with their easiest economic opportunities. While some colonists had questioned Spanish treatment of the Indians since the beginning, there had been no systematic attempt on the part of the crown to regulate the behavior of colonists, and particularly their behavior towards Indians, until the Laws of Burgos were promulgated in 1512. These laws are typically seen as having been put forth in reaction to the furor that surrounded Montesinos’s accusatory sermons. However, the history of Spanish activities in Granada suggest that the Laws of Burgos may have been less reactive in character than usually portrayed by historians.

A year before the Laws of Burgos, Ferdinand and Isabella’s daughter, Queen Juana (1479-1555), put forth a series of new laws and regulations aimed at the Morisco population of her Granadan territory. Like those later aimed at the New World, these seemed to have two aims: to regulate the behavior of Spanish repobladores towards the
morisco population and to do away with the social and cultural impediments to conversion. In both Granada and the Caribbean the Spanish were dealing with populations who had proved recalcitrant particularly when it came to accepting the faith of their conquerors and in both places the solution was at least partly sought in the homes of their new subjects. Morisco and Indian homes were seen as places free from supervision and thus potentially where “because of the distance and their own evil inclinations, they immediately forget what they have been taught and go back to their customary idleness and vice.”

Although the papal grants still represented the key basis for Spain’s claims in the New World – the clearest articulation of such an argument would come from Juan López de Palacios Rubios’s requerimiento whose creation was part of the same process that saw the drafting of the Laws of Burgos – the text of the laws do not reference special responsibilities on the part of the Spanish in return for such a grant, but rather royal intent. In an addendum to the laws, attributed to Queen Juana and representing also the person of her father, King Ferdinand, the queen states that, “it has always been our intent, desire, and will, to have greater regard for the salvation of souls and the indoctrination and good treatment of the said Indians than for any other consideration.”

Interestingly, if not surprisingly, within the text of the Laws of Burgos no effort was made to connect the bad behavior of the colonists to any larger discussion of Spanish legitimacy. If, in fact, the pope had granted the lands of the Indies to the Spanish with the understanding that their purpose and duty was for the conversion of its inhabitants, then seemingly the failure of such efforts, and this failure can be inferred
from much of the text of the laws, could be taken to have broad repercussions for the Spanish claims to legitimacy.

Influenced partly by Dominican critiques of Spanish rule and by a need to regulate conquests to a greater extent than had been done previously the great jurist Juan López de Palacios Rubios created the infamous document known as the *requerimiento*. The requerimiento represent either the apex of the Spanish legalist tradition or the one of the most cynical legal documents ever created. Leaving aside the faultiness of its logic, the requerimiento serves as a near perfect example of the Spanish attempt to take something which existed outside of the Spanish or even Christian narrative tradition and force it into a structure whose logic may have been questionable but still contained themes, characters, and events that were wholly familiar. The narrative, in fact, begins not with Columbus or any other contemporaries, but at the beginning of humanity:

[T]he Lord our God, Living and Eternal, created the Heaven and the Earth, and one man and one woman, of whom you and we, all the men of the world at the time, were and are descendants, and all those who came after and before us. But, on account of the multitude which has sprung from this man and woman in the five thousand years since the world was created, it was necessary that some men should go one way and some another, and that they should be divided into many kingdoms and provinces, for in one alone they could not be sustained.24

The text therefore begins by establishing the unity of creation; despite any physical and spiritual differences Indians and Spaniards are the result of the same source, the same
Creation, and the same two progenitors. Up to this point there is little that a sixteenth century Christian would find controversial in the document. However, it continues:

Of all these nations God our Lord gave charge to one man, called St. Peter, that he should be Lord and Superior of all the men in the world, that all should obey him, and that he should be the head of the whole human race, wherever men should live, and under whatever law, sect, or belief they should be; and he gave him the world for his kingdom and jurisdiction.

And he … permitted him to have his seat in any other part of the world, and to judge and govern all Christians, Moors, Jews, Gentiles, and all other sects … The men who lived in that time obeyed that St. Peter, and took him for Lord, King, and Superior of the universe; so also they have regarded the others who after him have been elected to the pontificate, and so has it been continued even till now, and will continue till the end of the world.

One of these Pontiffs, who succeeded that St. Peter as Lord of the world, in the dignity and seat which I have before mentioned, made donation of these isles and Tierra-firme to the aforesaid King and Queen and to their successors, our lords, with all that there are in these territories, as is contained in certain writings which passed upon the subject as aforesaid, which you can see if you wish.25

Only a sovereign who had benefited from such a donation would be willing to accept the logic of the above. Even prior to the Reformation there were few Christians who would accept that the Pope had been granted the world as his jurisdiction or that the powers he inherited from Saint Peter gave him the right to grant to a European monarch faraway lands ruled by non-Christians. Nevertheless, based on this narrative the Spanish claimed
that all heathens they encountered had to, “acknowledge the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world, and the high priest called Pope, and in his name the King and Queen Doña Juana our lords, in his place, as superiors and lords and kings of these islands and this Tierra-firme by virtue of the said donation, and that you consent and give place that these religious fathers should declare and preach to you the aforesaid.” If they did so then they would be received with love and charity and allowed to continue to live in freedom. However, the consequences of refusal were to be extreme:

But, if you do not do this, and maliciously make delay in it, I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country, and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as their Highnesses may command; and we shall take away your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey, and refuse to receive their lord, and resist and contradict him; and we protest that the deaths and losses which shall accrue from this are your fault, and not that of their Highnesses, or ours, nor of these cavaliers who come with us.

It is a chilling passage that led the scholar Tzvetan Todorov to refer to the text as, “a curious example of an attempt to give legal basis to the fulfillment of desires.” By this time it had become clear that attempts to make sense of Spanish actions through reference to the Bulls of Donation were not viable – Montesinos and the Dominicans had made sure of this – and so a different strategy had to be employed. The requerimiento is thus a
sort of reverse-engineered legal document; one that begins with a set of desires and then crafts a narrative to provide a post-facto justification for past activities and a preemptive rationale for the use of violence in future conquests. Such a strategy is almost guaranteed to produce some absurdities.

For the Spanish of the reconquest era there existed a general “right to conquest” in regard to Islamic territory. While there were certainly maneuvers that had to be undertaken in order for such conquests to receive legal backing, the issues were less about providing a justification for acts of conquest than assuring that a proper relationship existed between crown and conquerors. The issue in the Americas though was different. Wars against Muslims may have inherently fallen into the category of a “just war” but attempts to import this idea to the Indies and apply it to the conquest of Indian land was complicated by the fact that there existed no longstanding notion of antipathy between Christians and Indians and lacking such antipathy it was difficult to justify the violence perpetrated against them. Las Casas addressed this very point in a 1542 memorandum:

… [T]his term ‘conquest’ is tyrannical, Mohammedan, abusive, improper, and infernal. A conquest can be conducted only against Moors from Africa, Turks and heretics who seize our lands, persecute Christians and work for the destruction of our faith.29

The goal of the requerimiento, therefore, was to establish the conditions within which acts of violence – even when committed against those who were neither Moors, nor Turks, nor heretics – could be considered as part of a just war. Within the narrative of the
requerimiento a reality was constructed in which the leader of a single religious community became “head of the whole human race.”30 This leader could grant well-populated territories he had never seen to a country that did not occupy them; indigenous inhabitants who had been enslaved, massacred, raped, or otherwise brutally treated were said to have become Christians, “of their own free will, without any reward or condition;”31 those who destroyed, killed, enslaved, and conquered served the cause of “love and charity”32 and those who were subject to invasion and enslavement were wholly responsible for their own destruction.

The sermon of Montesinos and the establishment of the requerimiento were both formative events in the spiritual development of Bartolomé de las Casas. Accompanied by his father, the future bishop had sailed with Nicolás de Ovando to Hispaniola in 1502 as part of the largest fleet to yet leave Spain for the West Indies. His activities while living on Hispaniola can only be guessed at but it at least seems likely that he took part in some mining, had some agricultural concerns, and it is very probable that he held some number of Indians as part of his encomienda.33 What is certain is that sometime before 1510 Las Casas was ordained as member of the secular clergy and in that year presided over his first mass in the town of Concepción de la Vega.

Despite the furor on Hispaniola, however, Las Casas’s views were not immediately altered. The clearest indication of this is that he continued to maintain his encomienda, an institution that he would eventually come to believe was the source of much of the evils committed in the Indies. It was only after he took part in the Spanish
conquest of Cuba and witnessed the many cruelties and wanton acts of violence that accompanied the subjugation of the island that Las Casas had his conversion.

In 1514, while reading through *Ecclesiasticus* 34: 21-2 Las Casas was struck by a passage that read: “The bread of the needy is their life, he that defraudeth him thereof is a man of blood. He that taketh away his neighbor’s living slayeth him and he that defraudeth the labourer of his hire is a bloodshedder.” The passage brought him back to the words of Montesinos whose full implications now became clear to him. Inspired by Montesinos, his readings on natural and divine law, and his reflections on events he had witnesses while residing in the Indies, “he decided for himself, convinced by truth, that everything done to the Indians in these Indies was unjust and tyrannical.” The next passage Las Casas wrote represents one of the clearest statements about the manner in which one’s worldview affects the way on which one processes information:

> He found that all he read tended to confirm [his view of Spanish injustice and tyranny], and he was accustomed to assert that, from the first hour when he began to dispel the darkness of that ignorance, he never read a book in Latin or Spanish – and there were an infinite number in forty-four years – in which he didn’t find either an argument or a text to prove and corroborate the justice of these Indian peoples and to condemn the injustices, wrongs, and injuries done them. 

Once he had established his commitment to Indian justice and began to construct his own narrative of the Spanish conquest, everything he read or re-read subsequently began to fit easily into that narrative. The facts had not changed but his means of interpreting those facts had been radically altered. For Hayden White, any narrative constructed by humans
is created in such a way as to fit into one of a few select literary tropes; for Las Casas the history of the Indies was to be written as a tragedy.\textsuperscript{36}

At the center of Las Casas tragic take on this history was the contradiction between the marvelous potential represented by the Indies and the harm that had been done to her by the actions of men. God had given the Spanish access to the Indies as part of his Divine plan, yet humans, to whom he had given the capacity for free will, put their own enrichment above service to their God. In the bishop’s \textit{Historia de las Indias} Columbus emerges as a key part of God’s plan, predestined to “give tidings of Christ and to bring these countless races, forgotten for so many centuries, to worship Him.” Las Casas continued his story:

The time of God’s merciful wonders having now arrived, when in these parts of the earth (the seed or word of life once sown) there was to be gathered the abundant harvest of the predestined …, the Divine Master chose, among the sons of Adam …, that great and illustrious Columbus … to be entrusted with one of the eminent achievements which He sought to bring about in the present century.\textsuperscript{37}

Yet, once the pieces had been divinely ordered it was left to humans to carry out the divine plan and it was here that trouble emerged. Most of the ink Las Casas spilled over the course of his life was devoted to chronicling the Spanish errors that had wrecked and were continuing to wreck the land that Columbus had delivered to the crown.

Given Las Casas depiction of Columbus as chosen by “the Divine Master’, he had no difficulty accepting that the grant of such lands to the Spanish fell within papal
jurisdiction. He strenuously objected, however, to the notion that such a grant provided them with carte blanche to exploit the people and resources of the land however they saw fit. Instead, it was Las Casas view that the express purpose of the papal grant had been for the Christianization of the inhabitants of the New World and therefore failure to pursue this duty with enough “eager zeal for the true faith” was cause for the forfeiture of such rights.

Las Casas never went so far as to call Spanish dominion in the Indies inherently illegitimate, rather he felt that the Bulls of Donation could only truly establish Spanish legitimacy if matched by proper action on the part of the individual colonists, colonial officials, and the various institutions of governance in Spain, including the crown itself. This put him at odds with many of his countrymen who saw the Bulls as a donation not a contract that could be revoked if certain terms were not met. They believed that the pope had granted dominion to the Catholic Monarchs and they could therefore make use of the land, resources, and people of those islands as they wished. Given this view it is understandable why Diego Columbus (son of the navigator and governor, then viceroy, of the Indies, 1509-1518) felt that Montesinos critique of Spanish behavior constituted “disservice to the king” and “harmful to that whole land.” So while Las Casas never took the extreme position that Charles I or his heir Philip II should abandon their holdings in America – far from it, he refers to the kingdoms of the Americas as having been “granted and entrusted by God and His Church to the Spanish Crown”38 – he did publicly advocate the still relatively extreme position that as long as Spanish colonists continued to behave
in such an unchristian manner, the Indians would be better off never having heard the
Word of God than being introduced to it by such rapacious and malevolent men. In his
view, the conquest may have prevented the deaths of a few who may have been subject to
sacrifice and cannibalism, acts that were considered to be particularly barbaric by
European standards, but in doing so the Spanish had to, “move against an immense
multitude of persons, including the innocent, and destroy whole kingdoms, and implant a
hatred for the Christian religion in their souls, so that they will never want to hear the
name or teaching of Christ for all eternity. All this is surely contrary to the purpose
intended by God and our mother the Church.”

It was not simply that the Spanish were failing to live up to the promise of the
Bulls of Donation, it was that they were actively harming the cause. So while the Bulls
of Donation and the requerimiento are similar in that they begin from the same
supposition – that Peter was the rock upon which the Church was built, he had passed his
authority to the popes who succeeded him, and the last of these popes had granted
territories in the Americas to the sovereigns of Spain – they differ in the lack of
conditionality in the requerimiento. The onus of actions in the papal Bulls is on the
Spanish who must focus their efforts on, “[leading] the peoples dwelling in those islands
and countries to embrace the Christian religion.” The requerimiento, on the other hand,
put the focus on the Indians who, according to its terms, had to surrender their
sovereignty to faraway monarchs based on the grant of another unseen and unknown
individual while the Spanish become mere tools with which God’s wrath could be
applied towards those who refused the injunction of His servants. According to Las Casas, such views were indefensible and, in fact, took what was a Holy narrative and turned it into something twisted and ugly:

It is though the Son of God who gave His life for every living soul, when He instructed His followers with the words: ‘Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,’ intended heathens, living in peace and tranquility in their own lands, to be confronted with a demand that they convert on the spot, without their ever hearing the Word or having Christian doctrine explained to them; and that, should they show any reluctance to do so and to swear allegiance to a king they have never heard of nor clapped eyes on, and whose subjects and ambassadors prove to be cruel, pitiless and bloodthirsty tyrants, they should immediately surrender all worldly goods and lose rights to their land, their freedom, their womenfolk, their children, and their lives. Such a notion is absurd as it is stupid and should be treated with the disrespect, scorn and contempt it so amply deserves.41

Given his acceptance of the logic of the Bulls of Donation and his hostility to the general attitude of most colonists and officials as represented in the requerimiento, Las Casas’s project was to be twofold and involve both direct action as well as a more intellectual approach. First, he sought to create, on a modest scale, the kind of Christian community that he envisioned for all the Indies. He made two attempts in this regard – first at Cumaná on the coast of Venezuela and then in a community Las Casas called Verapaz in modern-day Honduras – both of which failed mostly due, according to him, to local people’s inability to see “that there is a distinction between monks on the one hand and the Spanish robbers, bandits, and tyrants who roam the territory on the other.”42 The
second, and slightly more successful part of his project was to construct his own narrative of the conquest that would act as a counter to those written by conquistadors or colonial officials. While those narratives tended to focus on the heroic aspects of the conquest, particularly the near superhuman feats of the conquerors themselves, Las Casas sought to tell a different tale. Previous authors claimed that the conquistadors were driven by their desire to serve God and the crown, Las Casas presented them as driven by love of gold and their own base desires. The accounts of others described incomparably brave Spaniards vanquishing their indigenous foes against seemingly insurmountable odds, Las Casas portrayed Spanish conquistadors as violent and avaricious and Indians as meek, innocent, primitive, and continually victimized because of their own trusting nature. Other observers saw ample evidence of the devil’s presence, including human sacrifice, idol worship, sodomy, and cannibalism, Las Casas saw evidence that the indigenous people possessed a true Christian nature while Spanish behavior suggested the presence of the satanic influence. Many of his contemporaries questioned the very humanity of the Indians and thus their potential to become Christians; Las Casas turned this around, arguing that he knew some men who, “had become so anaesthetized to human suffering by their own greed and ambition that they ceased to be men in any meaningful sense of the term.”

The narrative form is just as likely to construct truth as it is to represent it. Just as the chroniclers, historians, and memoirists who Las Casas wrote in opposition to had a stake in representing themselves, their countrymen, and the Indians in ways that justified
a specific set of behaviors, so to did Las Casas have cause to represent the various actors in a manner that made Spanish actions seem particularly abhorrent. His were not to be objective accounts of events, but histories with a practical purpose: to convince readers of the errors that had been committed in the Americas and to therefore cause them to repent and rectify their sins. His work could not achieve this end through subtlety it had to cause revulsion and shame intense to inspire real change. This required the demystifying of the conquistadors, on the one hand, and the presentation of the indigenous peoples as indistinguishably innocent, timid, and primitive, on the other. In fact, an important effect of the latter was to accomplish the former.

As we will examine in our discussion of Cortés, conquistadors always walked a fine line in chronicling their achievements. In order to present their actions as heroic they had to construct a narrative of victory over insurmountable odds but their actions could only be justified if their adversaries were represented as lacking qualities – be they moral, intellectual, physical, or technological – possessed by the Spanish. Las Casas, either by conscious design or sincerely held belief, presented indigenous people as so lacking in martial qualities, so trusting and innocent as to transform the narrative from one describing Spanish heroism to one that simply described the slaughter of virtually defenseless peoples.

Examples of the above abound in the writings of Las Casas. Looking just at his *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, we find: that Indians are “naturally so gentle, peace-loving, so humble, so docile”; them represented as “gentle lambs,” upon
whom “the Spanish fell like ravening wolves upon the fold”; it noted as an aside that, “[sixty] horsemen alone were sufficient in number to ravage not only the whole island [of Hispaniola] but the mainland as well”; indigenous people of Nicaragua described as, “naturally gentle and unaggressive.”

Key to Las Casas’s narrative contrast. On the one hand, you had those societies that he explicitly stated one could make war on: the Moors, the Turks and the Heretics. What tied this trio together was their intention to do harm to Christian lands, Christian peoples, and the Christian faith. That war could and should be made against such adversaries was an assertion that few in Spain would dispute. The kingdom still had a sizable minority of Moors – converted to Christianity but still held in suspicion by both church and secular authorities – was facing on its Mediterranean coast a perceived threat from the dominant and expansive Ottoman Turks, and – given the prevalence of Protestantism in many of Emperor Charles V’s own dynastic territories and the role of Spanish priests in the Counterreformation Council of Trent (1545-1563) – was a center of the efforts to combat Protestant heresies. Against all these existential threats Las Casas contrasted the people of the Indies. Far from representing a threat to Christianity and Christendom they were depicted not just as militarily inferior to the Spanish at the moment but utterly lacking any of the qualities that would allow them to ever become a threat:

The simplest people in the world – unassuming, long-suffering, unassertive, and submissive – they are without malice or guile, and are utterly faithful and obedient both to their own native lords and to the Spaniards … Never quarrelsome or belligerent or boisterous, they harbor
no grudges and do not seek to settle old scores; indeed, the notions of
revenge, rancour, and hatred are quite foreign to them. At the same time,
they are among the least robust of human beings: their delicate
constitutions make them unable to withstand hard work or suffering and
make them unable to withstand hard work or suffering and render them
liable to succumb to almost any illness, no matter how mild.45

It is a remarkable description. Here we have the “defender of the Indians,” the most
vociferous critic of any attempt to deny indigenous humanity, and yet in his own
description of them they are barely recognizable as human. In addition to their seemingly
utter lack of ambition, their submissiveness, and their physical weakness Las Casas goes
on to describe their intellectual traits: “they are pure of mind and have a lively
intelligence all of which makes particularly receptive to learning and understanding the
truths of our Catholic faith … indeed God has invested them with fewer impediments in
this regard than any other people on Earth.”46 In constructing his narrative it is not
enough for Las Casas to detail the manner in which the indigenous people had been
treated by the Spanish, according to his descriptions treatment that would be hard to
justify no matter who the victim, he also has to present the Indians as at once utterly
incapable of any actions that could ever justify Spanish violence against them and the
potential to become ideal Christians. Las Casas’s descriptions of Indians are less
anthropological than they are pure wish fulfillment. Inspired by his deep readings of the
Medieval European canon and his own disenchantment with his fellow Old World
Christians, Las Casas creates an Indian as a cipher upon which he can project the qualities he associates with the “true Christian.”

It is important, therefore, to understand that, while the narratives of Las Casas have an appeal to modern readers whose own era has taught them to recoil from the violence associated with the act of conquest and colonization and esteem the humanitarian impulse exhibited in his writings, what we are reading is similarly polemical in nature as the account of the most brutal conquistador. Both aim primarily to convince rather than inform, to present a narrative that supports a set of interests be they of the basest sort or completely moral. This is not to argue that Las Casas necessarily subscribed to the simplistic and paternalistic view of Indians that appear in his public writings – his inner life is not sufficiently available to allow the historian to determine one way or another – as this may have been merely a strategy.

What is clear is that in the writings we do have access to Las Casas presents a narrative in which two basic elements are vital. First, is that in character and temperament the Indians retained many of the traits Columbus had first ascribed to them in his accounts of the initial encounter. He characterizes them as docile, innocent, and timid even as it had become clear by Columbus’s second voyage in 1493 that they were considerably more knowledgeable of warfare and violence than Columbus had guessed. Second, Las Casas would make a positive argument for the continuation of empire, an argument that could appeal to both the moral and the financial proclivities of the sovereign. In the opening to his lengthiest work, *Historia de las Indias*, Las Casas,
explains that, while critical of many aspects of Spanish rule, this was done to support the interests of the crown and Spain not undermine them. Describing his reasons for writing such a history Las Casas writes that among the reasons were:

Third, not to give relish, nor to please or flatter kings, but to defend the honor and royal renown of the illustrious sovereigns of Castile, because those persons who will know of the irreparable damage done in these vast regions … will not know what the Catholic kings, past and present, always ordered provided, and did themselves provide, and the end they aimed at …

Fourth, for the well being and benefit of all of Spain, because when it is known in what consists the good or evil of these Indies I believe that it will be known what consists the good and evil of Spain.48

The pope’s grant had been legitimate in Las Casas mind, of this he had no doubt, and the crown and country had every right to their dominion but the tragedies that he documented could not be rectified if ignorance continued to hold sway over the minds of his countrymen. It was his duty, “to free my Spanish race from error, from the serious, pernicious illusion in which it lives and has always lived until today.”49

The characterization of Indians that emerges from Las Casas writing exists comfortably within a general ecclesiastical view that emerged, in particular, after the conquest of Mexico. In the eyes of the official church Indians, “ellos son como ninos.”50 So, even though Las Casas was vehement in his opposition to any Spaniard who made the error of, “judging that these oceanic peoples lack the nature of men, considering them brute beasts, incapable of virtue and learning …” his own writings tended to replace one
erroneous view for another.\textsuperscript{51} Las Casas would become known as “apostle to the Indians” and perhaps it was this role that made it so difficult for him to see and represent his charges in a manner that showed true understanding. For Tzvetan Todorov it is Las Casas own Christian worldview that obviates against any true understanding of who the Indians are. Todorov writes:

Las Casas loves the Indians. And is a Christian. For him these two traits are linked: he loves the Indians precisely because he is a Christian, and his love \textit{illustrates} his faith. Yet \ldots precisely because he was a Christian his perception of the Indians was poor. Can we really love someone if we know little or nothing of his identity; if we see, in place of that identity, a projection of ourselves or of our ideals?\textsuperscript{52}

In fact, throughout his writings Indians appear not so much as separate and distinct figures but as peoples passing through a stage of history that Europeans had long moved past.

In constructing his own narrative, therefore, Bartolomé de Las Casas aimed to refute his contemporaries, whose own narratives justified and celebrated horrible acts by depicting Indians as incapable of reason and therefore conversion, and convince his sovereigns and his countrymen that these new subjects of the Spanish crown could and indeed must be converted. Las Casas writing was at heart polemical. This fact does not necessarily reduce the moral power of his arguments nor does it diminish his tireless advocacy for those who had few other advocates, but in his efforts to convince his audience that Indians were really not that dissimilar to Europeans he omits the
differences that did exist. Confronted by the novelty of the Americas and their
inhabitants, Las Casas constructed a narrative that elided the essential newness of the
confrontation.

As I examine in more detail in the following chapter, Las Casas’s detractors saw
the bishop’s narratives as key sources of intellectual instability within the Spanish
Empire. They at once called into dispute the notion of a right to conquest while also
revealing the hollowness of religious justifications that masked decidedly unchristian
treatment of Indians. Just as disturbing for the members of class of conquistadors and
encomenderos, who both won the Americas for the Spanish crown and served as the
focus for Las Casas’s ire, was the fact that Las Casas was a key proponent of the policy
of reigning in their power, authority, and influence. To that end Las Casas served a
valuable purpose for those at the top of the political structure who may have been uneasy
with some of his attacks on Spanish behavior but would welcome an argument that
justified the increase of state authority at the expense of colonists.

Las Casas became, late in his life, an inveterate critic of conquest in nearly every
form. One of his favorite authors to cite was Saint Augustine and specifically his
famous work *City of God*. The passage that had particular significance was one that
doubled as a biting critique of Spanish conquest:

> Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but bands of criminals on a large
> scale? What are criminal bands but petty kingdoms? A band is a group of
> men under the command of a leader, bound together by a compact of
> association, in which plunder is divided according to an agreed
What is remarkable about the passage is how well it describes not just Spanish conquest in general but the quintessential Spanish American conquest: that of Hernan Cortés in Mexico. Of course, there had been conquests prior to Cortés’s but it was in Mexico that the first encounter occurred between Europeans and an organized indigenous state. It was one thing to defeat the naked Indians Columbus first encountered in the Caribbean and whose societies were bereft of cities, the great markers of civilization, and another to defeat the orderly, wealthy, city-dwelling societies that existed across Central Mexico. Yet, despite these qualities, Mexico succumbed to a small band of Spaniards who marched right into the center of Mexica power and destroyed the great city of Tenochtitlan. There were conquests after that of Mexico but even the defeat of the Inca Empire – a victory marked by perhaps greater audaciousness, greater difficulties, and greater profits – could not match Cortés’s for sheer influence. Cortés established a template for American conquest based on Old World traditions but also helped establish views towards the conquered. For many observers the victory was a suggestive one. Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, for instance, noted: “… Cortés held oppressed and terrorized, at the beginning and over many days, only with the help of such a small number of Spaniards and so few indigenous warriors, a multitude so immense that it gave the impression that they lacked not only ability and prudence but even common sense. Can
there be any greater or clearer testimony of the advantage that some men have over others in ingenuity, ability, fortitude of spirit and virtue? The conquest of Mexico thus represented the beginning of a myth-model related to a notion of “native” weakness and European invincibility.

At the center of this myth-model was the figure of Cortés himself. The works of such figures as his biographer (some would say hagiographer) Francisco Lopez de Gomara, the royal chronicler Fernandez de Oviedo, and the humanist Juan Gines de Sepúlveda conspired to create a notion of Cortés as “the emblematic conquistador, and to make the Conquest of Mexico a symbol and model of the entire Conquest …” Cortés was not a passive actor in this depiction but an active participant in his own idealization through his own writings. Interestingly therefore, Cortés emerged as the central figure both in narratives written by others who used his experiences as a means for constructing a larger narrative of Spanish legitimacy and in a self-constructed narrative that justified his own actions in the specific case of Mexico. It was in his own narrative that Cortés proved perhaps more responsible than anyone in bringing the logic and political tactics of the reconquest to the Americas.

Cortés offers perhaps the ultimate example of the tightrope that the successful conquistador had to walk. Where Francisco Pizarro applied for and received sanction from the crown for his expedition to the south, Cortés was from the first moment of his departure from Cuba operating against the direct orders of Diego Velázquez, the crown’s official representative on the island. His narrative therefore, could do no less than justify
what was essentially treason and legitimize an act of conquest at the expense of a people against whom the Spanish had no particular grievances, all the while presenting the self-interested exploits of Cortés and his men as the absolute height of bravery, heroism, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Acts of conquest were not distinct from acts of writing. Instead, “writing was an essential form of action, and a sense of what their words would do weighed heavily upon these early writers. So it was that men of arms, at times ill-prepared for the task, became men of letters, who could create texts as nuanced and strategically crafted as many works of literature.”

It is nearly impossible to differentiate the “true” events of the conquest of Mexico from the myths constructed by Cortés and others. Even as the events must necessarily remain somewhat murky, however, we can nevertheless marvel at the dexterousness of Cortés’ narrative itself, a work undoubtedly marked by enough skill, cunning, and audaciousness to match even the most legendary account of the conquistador’s prowess on the battlefield.

The conquest itself can be broken into two distinct phases each lasting about a year. The key events of the first phase began with the conquistadors’ landfall in April, 1519 and Cortés’ assumption of command in defiance of Velázquez. From that point, having received confirmation that a wealthy and powerful sovereign did indeed rule in those lands, the Spaniards began their march inland accompanied by friendly Indians who had previously been defeated by Cortés (see map 4.1). This journey culminated with the Spanish entry into the great city of Tenochtitlan at the invitation of the Mexica ruler Moctezuma. After seizing Moctezuma, the Spaniards spent six uneasy months ruling
through him at which point news arrived that a Spanish force led by Panfilo Narváez had arrived on the coast with orders to arrest Cortés. As a result, Cortés was compelled to divide his forces in order to confront Narvaez while maintaining the Spanish presence in Tenochtitlan. Upon reaching the coast he was able to defeat his adversary and incorporate a large number of his followers into his own force. Even as this occurred, trouble began in Tenochtitlan where the remaining Spaniards perpetrated a massacre of unarmed dancers during a Mexica celebration and soon found themselves facing a massive insurrection. Arriving to find his men under siege, Cortés was forced at the end of June 1520 to lead his forces in a retreat from Tenochtitlan at enormous cost in Spanish lives and treasure. Sometime during these events Moctezuma was killed, likely by Spanish forces, and eventually succeeded by his nephew Cuauhtémoc. The first phase thus ended not with Spanish triumph but with a devastating defeat. The second phase, although of similar length, was made up of fewer parts. After retreating to the friendly city of Tlaxcala, the Spaniards regrouped and began plotting their return to Tenochtitlan. As a prelude to this attack they first began gathering Indian allies while reducing those cities that refused to cooperate. By May 1521, Tenochtitlan was placed under siege with the city eventually falling by mid-August of the same year.
Cortés did not narrate the above proceedings in a single document but in a series of letters he wrote to the king even as the events were still playing out. These letters were far from perfunctory and instead were crafted with remarkable skill in order to accomplish several vital goals. First, given Cortés’s act of disobedience they needed to include arguments that would justify his behavior. To do this Cortés used his knowledge of Castilian law and tradition to construct a legal justification for his usurpation of Velázquez’ authority and took every opportunity to denigrate Velázquez as greedy and self-interested in contrast to his own determination to serve God and the king. Second, the letters had to appeal to the new king (and soon to be emperor) Charles I’s greed and sense of religious obligation as the Catholic Monarch. Given that he acted in opposition to both Velázquez and to Velázquez’ own superior, Diego Columbus, Cortés could only succeed if he convinced the king. Therefore sent to the king, along with his first letter, a
sampling of the wealth already acquired by the Spanish as of June 1519 and peppered his narrative with examples of the abominable, idolatrous, and unchristian customs of the Mexica. Third, the narrative had to present the conquistadors, and none more than Cortés himself, as men of incomparable valor who accomplished extraordinary feats against nearly insurmountable odds. This was crucial since, in the end, Cortés wanted more than permission to carry out the conquest he wanted assurance that he would be rewarded for efforts that were portrayed as far more impressive than that of the ordinary servant of the crown. Fourth, the conquest had to be presented as more than the usurpation of a legitimate ruler’s domains or an act of aggression against an innocent victim; there needed to be a legitimate explanation for the events that would justify Spanish acts of violence and the eventual replacement of indigenous rule with that of the Spanish king. Multiple strategies were employed to this end including descriptions that nearly always presented Indians as the aggressors while the Spanish merely reacted to this aggression, references to the reciting of the requerimiento, and descriptions of Indians as having voluntarily subordinated themselves to the king’s authority, most famously with the spurious claim regarding Moctezuma’s donation of his empire to Charles I. Lastly, all this had to be accomplished using a language that turned a world of unfamiliar places, peoples, traditions, and geography into one that a European reader like Charles could readily understand and to which he could easily relate.

More generally, what this narrative accomplishes, and indeed the same could be said for virtually any of the narratives of conquest produced by Spaniards during this era,
is the transformation of that which was messy, close to incomprehensible, and empty of any larger moral into something tidy, recognizable, and filled with a sense of mission.

On this point Inga Clenninden has observed that:

The story-making predilection is powerfully present in the major Spanish sources. The messy series of events that began with the landfall on the eastern coast has been shaped into an unforgettable success story largely out of the narratives of Cortés and Bernal Diaz, who were part of the action; the superb irresistible forward movement that so captivated Prescott, a selection and sequence imposed by men practiced in the European narrative tradition and writing, for all their artfully concealed knowledge of outcomes, when outcomes were known … [Cortés’s] letters are splendid fictions, marked by politic elisions, omissions, inventions, and a transparent desire to impress Charles of Spain with his own indispensability.58

In order to accomplish all that he desired in his letters, the events could not be conveyed in the same way they were experienced – most likely as terrifying and chaotic times filled with doubt, uncertainty, and a sense of impending doom – instead the portrayal is marked by a single-mindedness suggestive of a man who almost from the start, knew what was required of him by his soldiers, his king, and his God and knew how to achieve the task set before him. If he wanted to be seen as more than the leader of the “band of criminals” depicted in City of God then his wanderings needed a driving force, a motivation, a mission, and a sense of order.

Cortés faced an immediate and seemingly insurmountable political obstacle from the moment he sailed from Cuba. Having moved against the orders of his superior,
Diego Velázquez, Cortés created a situation in which the only possible option was to keep moving forward since retreat would almost certainly lead to his arrest. Success was his only option, yet, even conquest would be problematic if he did not first attach a veneer of legality to his expedition. The heading to his first letter, dated July 10, 1519, offers the first clue as to his strategy for constructing such legality. Rather than being sent to the crown on behalf of Cortés, the letter was sent by “the Justiciary and Municipal Council of the Muy Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz,” and the text stays true to this conceit by remaining in the first-person plural. The municipality, “constituted the fundamental building block in the Spanish political system and city councils, representing the community’s leading families, enjoyed authority not only over the town proper but also over a vast hinterland extending to its boundary with another town and its surrounding countryside.”

Cortés was thus relying on his extensive knowledge of Castilian law and particularly the *Siete Partidas of Alfonso X*, the great thirteenth century compilation of laws that established the ideal of a king and his subjects, “bound together in mutual concern for the upholding of the commonweal against selfish private interests.” Within his narrative, therefore, it is not Cortés who proposes the founding of the municipality, but his men who appealed to him to disregard Velázquez in order to better serve the crown:

…”It seemed to us not fitting to Your Majesties’ service to carry out the orders which Diego Velázquez had given to Hernando Cortés, which were to trade for as much gold as possible … in order that only Diego Velázquez and the captain [Cortés] might enjoy it, and that it seemed all of
us better that a town with a court of justice be founded and inhabited in
Your Royal Highnesses’ name … Having decided this we joined together
with one mind and purpose and made a petition to the captain in which we
said: that he well knew how advantageous it would be to the service of
Our Lord God and Your Majesties if this land were settled … and we
therefore requested him to cease trading in the manner he was doing …
[A]ll this was accompanied by certain intimations that we would protest
against him if he did not do as we required …61

Far from appearing as the lead actor in this drama, Cortés becomes almost the adversary
of the rank and file, the one who is trying his best to carry out his orders but has his hand
forced by the will of his men. He finally relented and agreed to take part in the founding
of the municipality of Vera Cruz, an act that required the signing of documents, the
appointing of regidores (councilmen) and alcaldes (judicial officers), and the reciting of
vows. Upon founding the town a ceremony took place in which Cortés was stripped of
the authority granted him by Velázquez, “as it had expired [and] he could no longer
exercise the office of captain or judicial officer.”62 Having lost their captain, however,
the town needed a new head:

… in order to preserve peace and concord amongst ourselves and to
govern us well it was necessary to elect someone for Your Royal service
who might act in Your Majesties’ name … as chief justice, as captain and
our leader, whom we might all respect … [A]nd seeing that no person was
better fitted for such a responsibility than Fernando Cortés, … we
appointed him therefore, in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, chief
justice and alcalde mayor… When this was done, as is appropriate to Your
Majesties’ service, we received him in Your Royal name, into our council
and chamber, as chief justice and captain of Your Royal armies, and so he is and shall remain until Your Majesties provide whatever is more suitable to Your service. 63

Whether or not anyone outside of their expedition would accept the reasoning presented here is almost besides the point. Cortés was acting the part of the defense lawyer. He did not need to prove that he was acting in good faith when he set off from Cuba, he merely needed to establish enough reasonable doubt so that when he came to the crown with the riches he was sure he would find in Mexico they would have an excuse to pardon his transgressions accept his service. It helped that Cortés was not asking the crown to accept some novel form of legal reasoning since what was being carried out was perfectly in line with Spanish legal traditions dating back centuries as well political traditions that emphasized the consent of the governed as a key component of political authority.

We also see in the above passages evidence of the case being made against Velázquez. Legal maneuvers were only part of his strategy, he also wanted to present Velázquez as a man whose own self-interest made him a poor royal servant. Part of this strategy involved the explicit denigration of Velázquez’ character – as when he was described as being, “more moved by cupidity than any other passion,” 64 – but also key was an implicit contrast between Cortés and him. Thus, in the earlier quoted passage the implicit message was that the expedition had been charged in the first place with a mission that did not serve the crown nor the soldiers but only Velázquez and Cortés. Nevertheless, Cortés, because he was, “more devoted to Your Majesties’ service than any other cause … disregarded his personal interest in continuing trading … and was pleased
and willing to do all that we requested, for it would greatly benefit the service of your Royal Highnesses.” Velázquez, by contrast, never did anything unless he could be assured an adequate profit. In one instance he halted the expedition of Juan de Grijalba when it appeared that the potential for, “profit was small, in view of stories he had heard … and in relation to his lust for gold.” These issues of Velázquez’ character were of enormous significance since he was at that moment lobbying for concessions on the mainland, a request that the authors of the first letter pleaded with the king to refuse:

[We] beseech Your Majesties on no account to give or grant concessions to Diego Velázquez … for it is not to the benefit of the service of Your Royal Crown that the aforementioned Diego Velázquez, or any other person, should have authority or be granted any concessions … And, moreover, were the aforementioned Diego Velázquez granted some office, far from benefiting Your Majesties service, we foresee that we, the vassals of Your Royal Highnesses, who have begun to settle and live in this land, would be most ill-used by him, for we believe that what we have now done in Your Majesties service, namely to send You such gold and silver and jewels as we have been able to acquire in this land, would not have been his intention …

The text goes on to further describe Velázquez’s greed, corruption, and pettiness, and requested that a residencia be performed to assess these charges and remove him from his governorship.

If the letters contained little more than accounts of legal maneuvers and petty squabbles between various royal servants, they would have been easy to ignore and Cortés understood this. While issues of intra-Spanish quarrels would remain present, as
the letters carried the narrative forward more time was spent describing the great wealth and great depravity of the societies encountered. In the introduction to his second letter Cortés promises to give, “an account of a very large and very rich province called Culua, in which there are large cities and marvelous buildings, much commerce and great wealth.” The lure of imperial profits would have been enticing to any European sovereign of the era but maybe even more so to the young king Charles I who in 1519 had been elected Holy Roman Emperor (as Charles V) but only at immense personal costs, leaving him substantially in debt to various creditors. Coupled with his ambitious imperial designs in Europe his election left him desperate for new sources of revenue. Whether Cortés was aware of the specifics of the situation (by the second letter he was at least aware of Charles’s election as emperor) I cannot say but his narrative was full of hints that the lands he discovered contained great wealth. Wealth was not simply connoted in gold, silver, and jewels but in lands and people.

Juan Castellano has noted in the context of Spanish activities in Granada, that for sixteenth century European monarchs, population was equated with power. More people meant more taxes, more labor, more soldiers and thus Cortés descriptions contain references to great cities, population “almost without number,” thousands of households, and Indian warriors who “covered the entire ground.” We get one representative example while Cortés is in the territory of Tlaxcala. By this time he had encountered many towns and villages but the scale of Tlaxcaltecan cities was far beyond what he had witnessed to
that point. The description was therefore intended to impress his intended audience but most likely reflected some genuine wonder:

The city is so big and so remarkable that, although there is much I could say of it which I will omit, the little I will say is, I think, almost unbelievable, for the city is much larger than Granada and very much stronger, with as good buildings and many more people than Granada had when it was taken … There is in this city a market where each and every day upward of thirty thousand people come to buy and sell, without counting the other trade which goes on elsewhere in the city … There is jewelry of gold and silver and precious stones and other ornaments of featherwork and all as well laid out as in any square or marketplace in the world.70

A passage like the above was designed to elicit multiple reactions. Most simply, the reader would be impressed with the descriptions of wealth, grandeur, and orderliness of the city especially when informed that the rulers of the land, “offered themselves as vassals in the royal service of Your Majesty and offered their persons and fortunes and so they have remained until today and will, I think, always remain so …”71 As significant were the comparisons to the city of Granada. Of course, the easiest way to relate to the unfamiliar is through comparison to the familiar but Cortés choice of Granada as a reference point was likely not chosen arbitrarily. The city had been conquered in Cortés’s lifetime but only after a decade of struggle, the full attention of the Catholic Monarchs, and the aid of substantial church revenues. By contrast, Cortés’s narrative described how he and his small group of followers had, in almost no time and with
almost no resources, added a territory to Charles’s domains that was larger, stronger, richer, and more populous than Granada.

The desire for wealth was a powerful incentive for the monarch to support Cortés in his ambitions. Striving for riches with no sense of a larger purpose, however, was not an admirable quality. Indeed this was exactly the grounds upon which Cortés criticized Velázquez, and so Cortés also appealed to the emperor’s role as the “most high and powerful and Catholic Prince.” Charles had yet to become fully embroiled in the conflicts relating to the Protestant Reformation but part of his role as Holy Roman Emperor and heir to the Catholic Monarchs was to preside over the expansion of Christendom and so, in addition to riches and vassals, Cortés presented him with potential souls.

Cortés employed two strategies in order to push the religious aspect of his narrative. The first strategy was to use the language of the reconquista narrative wherever possible. The second strategy was less dependent on Spain’s old narrative tradition. The reconquista had been fought against enemies of the faith. Because of this those Muslims subjected to conquest were deserving of their fate. Indians, however, were of a different category. The logic of the requerimiento was that these were people who had never been exposed the Gospel which is why it was the duty of the Spanish to provide that introduction. The Indians were not “enemies by nature;” they were not even necessarily enemies at all. To the extent that they needed to be subjugated, it was because circumstances had given them religious, social, and political traditions so
barbaric and abominable that the most extreme measures were necessary to save them from themselves. This was conquest as a moral mission.

Cortés referenced the reconquest narrative most often when his forces needed encouragement. In one such instance, Cortés reminded them that, “as Christians we were obliged to wage war against the enemies of our Faith, and thereby we would win glory in the next world, and, in this, greater honor and renown than any other generation before our time.” The notion that Indians constituted “enemies of our faith” was a clear reference to wars against Muslims. The narrative had to be tweaked, however, to fit the Indians into this category. Indians were not like Muslims, but according to the requerimiento they became enemies of the faith once they had refused its exhortations. There was nothing random about the inclusion of such speeches in his narrative. The intent was not only to demonstrate Cortés’s leadership abilities but to the emperor himself what was at stake. It was not only the soldiers who would win glory, honor, and renown, in this world and the next, but also the sovereign whom they served.

More prevalent were references to barbarous Indian customs mostly related to idolatry and sacrifice. Confronted with such unchristian practices it was Cortés’s duty to do his best to eradicate them. Thus, after a lengthy description of temples of such size and magnificence that, “no human tongue could describe [them],” Cortés related how he had the most important of the idols housed within, “taken from their places and thrown down the steps; and I had those chapels where they were cleansed, for they were full of the blood of sacrifices.” It was not enough to throw down the idols, however:
I made them understand through the interpreters how deceived they were in placing their trust in idols which they had made with their hands from unclean things … And I told them all I knew of [Christianity] to dissuade them from their idolatry and bring them to the knowledge of God our savior … and I urged them not to sacrifice living creatures to the idols, as they were accustomed, for, as well as being abhorrent to God, Your Sacred Majesty’s laws forbid it and ordered that he who kills shall be killed.\(^{75}\)

One of the things that is interesting here is the way in which this behavior diverged from that of the reconquest. Part of the notion that emerged with the reconquest ideology was that it was just to make war on enemies of the faith and certain Spaniards, including Cortés, extended this logic across the Atlantic. However, when Christians defeated Muslims, although they might receive tribute or labor, there was an expectation that the conquered people would be allowed to maintain their traditional religion. The capitulations that ended the War of Granada, for instance, promised that:

Their highnesses and their successors will ever afterwards allow King Abi Abdilehi and his alcaides, judges, muftis, alguaciles, military leaders, and good men, and all the common people, great or small, to live in their own religion, and not permit that their mosques be taken from them, nor their minarets nor their muezzins, nor will they interfere with the pious foundations or endowments which they have for such purposes, nor will they disturb the uses and customs which they observe.\(^{76}\)

In the end, the Muslims of Granada had been forced to convert, but initially, at least, there had existed an assumption of tolerance that was in no way extended to the people of
Mexico. The version of the reconquest carried by Cortés shared some of the logic of that of the Old World but was marked by an intransigence that had only emerged after 1492. For whatever reason, therefore, Cortés felt that he could best appeal to his sovereign’s tastes not with mere promises of future evangelization, as Columbus, had done, but with immediate and direct action against elements of idolatry.

In describing the progress of the Spanish as they march into the heart of Mexica territory, Cortés paints a picture of the Spaniards as individuals worthy of all the glory and riches that the king would allow them. No one comes off better than Cortés himself, however. Because it was technically written by the men of Vera Cruz, Cortés’s first letter offered ample opportunities for self-praise without it seeming boastful. The second letter, by contrast, was addressed to the emperor from Cortés himself. Nevertheless, it was no less of self-congratulatory. Speaking of Cortés’s letters, Inga Clenninden writes:

One of the multiple delights in their reading is to watch the creation of something of a Horatio figure, an exemplary soldier and simple-hearted loyalist unreflectively obedient to his king and the letter of the law: all attributes implicitly denies by the beautiful control and calculation of the literary construction itself … [T]hroughout he continues the construction of himself as a leader: endlessly flexible, yet unthinkingly loyal; endlessly resourceful, yet fastidious in legal niceties; magnificently daring in strategy and performance; yet imbued with a fine caution in calculating costs.77

I would add that aside from his overweening desire to serve his monarch the other quality that comes across especially clearly is Cortés gift as a leader of men. After all, it is they
who choose him as their captain following the founding of Vera Cruz and it is he who
they look to when their spirits dim:

Many times I was asked to turn back, and I encouraged them by reminding
them that they were Your Hignesses vassals and that never at any time had
Spaniards been found wanting, and that we were in a position to win for
Your Majesty the greatest dominions and kingdoms in the world … They
should observe that God was on our side, and to Him nothing is
impossible, for, as they saw, we had won so many victories in which so
many of the enemy had died, and none of us. I told them other things
which occurred to me of this nature, with which, and Your Highnesses
Royal favor, they were much encouraged and determined to follow my
intentions and to do what I wished, which was to complete the enterprise I
had begun. 78

The story serves no function other than to highlight once again Cortés’s skills but it does
this with little explicit boasting and he even gives credit to the Spanish character more
generally, God, and of course, the king, whose mere favor was enough to hearten the
men.

Another theme that runs through the narrative is victory over insurmountable
odds. Time after time Cortés and his small band must face off against great multitudes
and yet on nearly every occasion the Spaniards emerged victorious after having suffered
only minimal harm. The defeat of so many with such relative ease created a potential
problem for the narrative. Cortés wished to give his readers the impression that he led a
group of men of uncommon skill and valor but if a hundred thousand Indian warriors
could be defeated by only a few hundred Spaniards then perhaps the issue was more
about Indian deficiencies rather than Spanish abilities. There was no easy solution to this problem. In the above passage Cortés gave credit to God while in other passages he would praise his foes for fighting, “with great courage and ferocity.” Perhaps the best corrective was the so-called Noche Triste, the night during which the Spanish were driven from Tenochtitlan at the cost of many lives and much of their collected treasure. This is not to suggest that this great defeat was fabricated, but it did serve Cortés’s rhetorical needs by demonstrating that the Indians did have the capacity to defeat Spaniards and therefore that their past victories were never assured nor would their ultimate victory be possible without more of Cortés’s cunning, skill, and strategy.

By depicting his men and himself in a particular fashion, Cortés could hope to increase the chances that his venture would win royal sanction and that the conquistadors would receive all the rewards they deserved. Such a strategy was also a key element in justifying the actions he took against the people of Mexico. This was a time when the nature and suitable treatment of Indians was subject to debate. While no definitive answer had been reached, there was, at the very least, a general belief that the state of affairs that Montesinos found so deplorable in Hispaniola, had to be moderated. J.H. Elliot suggests that Cortés, “had been quick to learn the tragic lessons of the Spanish Caribbean,” and one of these lessons was that empire had to be based on more than marauding, pillaging, and exploitation. It was less about those specific activities than it was about the presentation of such activities. Montesinos and his fellow Dominicans had created an empire in need of a much more complex explanation of legitimacy than that proffered by
Diego Columbus a decade earlier. Within his narrative, Cortés offered several arguments for the legitimacy of his conquest.

The reconquest offered its Christian participants a simple argument: the land had been Christian, it had been usurped by Muslims, and it was now the duty of Spanish Christians to win back that which was rightfully theirs. No such simple formula existed for the New World. One could hardly claim prior ownership of territory that had not even existed in European cosmography a generation before. Cortés, however, did his best to establish a rightful claim to the territory based not on the seizure of Indian territory but on the donation of that territory to Cortés as the representative of Charles. This conceit allowed Cortés to claim that when he resorted to violence other than for self-defense he was really just protecting what was rightfully his or punishing those who had “rebelled” against the king’s authority. We find the best example of this attitude in his introduction to his third letter in which he characterizes the final Spanish assault on Mexica territory as, “the reconquest of the great and marvelous city of Temixtitlan [Tenochtitlan] and of the other provinces subject thereto which had rebelled.”

Indian donations of territory, which were the basis for Cortés’s claims, were motivated, according to Cortés’s narrative, by two different factors: the notion that the Spanish represented the long-absent ancestors of the Mexica who had returned to reclaim their territory, and the reading of the requerimiento.

Gananath Obeyesekere traces the beginning of the myth model of the white-god to “Columbus and especially Cortés.” Cortés indeed claims that Moctezuma believed
that he and his men represented figures from Mexica folklore, although it is less clear, and Cortés never explicitly states that these figures represented gods. Speaking to his assembled chiefs, Moctezuma explained:

… you have heard from your ancestors that we are not natives of this land, but came from another far away, and how they were brought by a lord who left them there, whose vassals they all were … He departed, saying that he would return or would send such forces as would compel them to serve him. You well know that we have always expected him, and according to the things this captain has said of the Lord and King who sent him here, and according to the direction whence he says he comes, I am certain, and so must you be also, that this is the same lord for whom we have been waiting, especially as he says that there they know of us.  

The explanation contains just enough ambiguity to protect Cortés. Nowhere does Moctezuma say that Cortés claimed to be “the Lord and King” or his representative. Instead, the wording makes it seem as if Moctezuma had come to this conclusion himself based on descriptions Cortés gave of his king and the general direction from which the Spanish arrived (although in an earlier passage, Cortés admitted that, “I replied to all [Moctezuma] said as I thought most fitting, especially in making him believe that Your Majesty was he whom they were expecting.” He was, therefore, at least somewhat complicit in the development of this idea). The entire story is suspiciously convenient in that it allowed this Lord to send a representative rather than returning in person, which then gave Cortés yet another chance to display the extent of his loyalty to Charles V.
Seemingly, it would have been easier and more advantageous had Cortés claimed to be this Lord himself, but instead chose to act in the name of his king.

Moctezuma’s belief that the Spanish were the representatives of the returning and rightful ruler of the land was significant because it was the impetus for perhaps Cortés most dubious claim: that Moctezuma gave his kingdom to the Spanish. According to Cortés, Moctezuma told him:

… because of the place from which you claim to come, namely from where the sun rises, and the things you tell us of the great lord or king who sent you here, we believe and are certain that he is our natural lord … So be assured that we shall obey you and hold you as our lord in place of that great sovereign [Charles V] of whom you speak; and in this there shall be no offense or betrayal whatsoever. And in all the land that lies in my domain, you may command as you will, for you shall be obeyed; and all that we own is for you to dispose of as you choose. Thus, as you are in your own country and your own house, rest now from the hardships of your journey.84

Upon his arrival, the political relationship between Spain and Mexico bore no resemblance to that which existed on the Iberian Peninsula during the reconquest. As a result of this donation, however, Cortés could lay claim to a similar justification for conquest. Following the Noche Triste, Cortés sought only to recover that which was already his.

Although less spectacular than Moctezuma’s donation, Cortés also claimed that other lords voluntarily gave up their domains in response to the requerimiento. Although
he only mentions this document by name on a few occasions, he describes at several other times the signing of official papers in the presence of a notary, probable allusions to the requerimiento. In one of the first references, we get a sense of the problems with the ritual associated with the document:

Only a stone’s throw from them there appeared a large number of Indians, heavily armed, who with a great shout began to attack us with many javelins and arrows. I began to deliver the formal requerimiento through the interpreters who were with me and before a notary, but the longer I spent in admonishing them and requesting peace, the more they pressed us and did us as much harm as they could.85

This was an exceptional example, however, and in most cases Cortés cites the process was carried out under more favorable circumstances. In one instance, Cortés had a message delivered to the chiefs of the city of Churaltecal in which he, “warned them that if they did not appear within the period specified, I would march against them and destroy them as rebels who refused to subject themselves to the dominion of Your Highness.”86 Sending them a notarized command (most likely the requerimiento), he informed these chiefs that, “those who wished to be Your vassals would be honored and aided, but that on the other hand, those who rebelled would be punished in accordance with the law.”87 In several other instances, it is less clear whether the requerimiento was read but nevertheless, great lords spontaneously offered up their lands: “Coatelicamat sent several of his messengers to offer me his person and his land in the service of Your Sacred Majesty …”88; “He likewise offered himself to Your Royal service, together with
all his lands, and begged me to take him as a friend …”89 “Then all together and each one by himself they promised to obey and comply with all that was demanded of them in the name of Your Majesty, as true and loyal vassals must do, and to provide all the tributes and services which formerly they paid to Moctezuma …”90 Cortés and his men and his Indian allies eventually did need to fight in order to win their ultimate victory, but what is remarkable is how much of the conquest – and it was referred to as a conquest by Cortés, his contemporaries, and later generations – was accomplished, in Cortés’s telling, without violence and even without animosity.

Hernan Cortés and Bartolomé de las Casas both constructed narratives that sought to present their particular views on Spanish expansion. Las Casas’s narratives represented the kinds of questions that could emerge in the context of an imperial expansion that had occurred too hastily and in territory too unfamiliar. His questions and his critiques forced Spaniards who participated in the empire to confront the intellectual ramifications of their overseas venture and to reformulate their own ideas in relation to those of Las Casas. He was never truly a lone voice, “crying out in the desert,” as Montesinos had formulated it, but he was the most vocal critic of the imperial enterprise. More than any other single figure of his era, Las Casas made it his life’s work to convince people that the Spanish Empire was founded on a narrative that did not make sense. Regardless of the strength of its armies, its bureaucracy, or its institutions, the Spanish Empire would remain vulnerable without a legitimizing narrative at its center. So Spaniards debated and discussed and wrote and passed new laws and in the end no
answers emerged; by the 1570’s, with Las Casas’s long life finally having come to an end, the matter was quietly dropped by Philip II. In Chapter 6, I suggest that even though Las Casas was not able to see “God’s plan” fulfilled in the Americas, he did leave behind an important legacy for the narrative traditions of later empires.

Cortés, although sometimes depicted as an adversary by Las Casas, left behind a narrative of a very different sort than those of the bishop. Las Casas always wrote within the context of a larger debate consisting of many different people and thus he was always responding to arguments he disagreed with, attempting to convince those who could help him, accusing those whose behavior was inhuman, and defending himself from the attacks of others. Although he would eventually emerge from Mexico, an international hero who had no small part to play in these debates, his literary legacy is singular in that it was a one-sided conversation. How would a Persian king, a Chinese emperor, an Ottoman sultan, or an Arab caliph have responded had messages begun to arrive at court from a low-ranking bureaucrat who had taken it upon himself to become a conqueror? Would they have supported this rogue bureaucrat? Send forces to aid him? Sent forces to eliminate him? Would they have accepted a legitimizing narrative constructed outside the normal channels or would they have seen it as a threat to their authority? However, these rulers would have responded to such a situation it is important to note, that Charles V had few options available to him when it came to Hernan Cortés.

There were no armies in the Americas that could be sent to stop or aid Cortés. Velázquez tried to end Cortés’s expedition himself but most of the men he sent ended up
joining Cortés rather than fighting him. As other Spaniards got wind of the potential wealth that existed in the Americas they also became more inclined to help rather than hinder. The Spanish state simply lacked the understanding or capacity to control its vassals in an empire separated by three thousand miles of ocean. Even conquistadors whom the crown had granted specific license to discover and conquer became virtually impossible to control once they actually set out on their expeditions. Just as Cortés had earlier done, those who explored and colonized unfamiliar territories filled with unfamiliar people found themselves with considerable ability to dictate their own narrative. Unable to restrain the construction of narratives, the crown did the next best thing; they suppressed those that were created. Even Cortés’s could not escape this fate. For decades the letters circulated throughout Europe, promoting the idea in five languages that the conquest of Mexico was the personal achievement, the crown finally decided to ban Cortés’s letters out of the fear that his popularity would become a political threat. 91 Despite their efforts, however, Cortés achievements, and more specifically his accounting of his achievements, became massively influential such that by the end of the century Spanish conquerors no longer looked for inspiration to the medieval knights of the reconquest but to Hernan Cortés. 92
CHAPTER 5
Consolidating the Empire:
The Rise of the Letrados and the End of Conquest

This chapter follows this attempt to regularize the process of imperial rule in the latter half of the sixteenth century. This called for enormous structural changes, of course, but it was a process that had massive ideological ramifications as well. The shift in emphasis from conquest to consolidation necessitated the marginalization of the old conquistador class in favor of bureaucrats and the elimination of the narrative chaos that had plagued the empire at least since Montesinos’s time. The former of these efforts met with significant success; the results of the latter were much more ambiguous. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish state had suppressed many of the narrative strands that had emerged across the empire, but had failed to construct a legitimizing narrative as a replacement. Lacking a narrative to justify conquest, the Spanish crown repudiated conquest altogether.
By the 1560’s the American empire was probably more secure, better run, more directly under crown control, and a more important source of revenue for the royal treasury than at any point since its history. Yet, despite its relative political, financial, and institutional strength the empire was built on a shaky intellectual foundation. The newness of the Americas, even seven decades after the initial encounter, continued to make it resistant to assimilation into narrative traditions that were Old World in nature and origin. Spain’s empire had flourished due to the audacity and ambition of men like Cortés and Francisco Pizarro but the other side of this were those like Martín Cortés in Mexico, the Gonzalo Pizarro in Peru, and the infamous Lope de Aguirre – individuals whose expectations for the rewards of conquest exceeded that which the crown was willing to provide.

As we have seen, for decades the legitimacy of Spanish rule in the Americas had been based on some combination of religion and the right to conquest. But by the time of Philip II, and by the 1560’s in particular, both of these arguments had developed serious flaws. Even as the sources of legitimacy became increasingly suspect, the scene of the debates over legitimacy also shifted. The earliest debates had focused on Spanish activities in the Caribbean and this had remained the case until 1521, when news of the conquest of Mexico began to circulate throughout the empire. From this point, the mainland began taking on increased prominence, eventually dominating virtually any discussion of the political, economic, or intellectual ramifications of Spain’s empire. In
the 1540’s focus shifted again, this time south, to Peru – a region of even greater wealth than Mexico, but also one that experienced more substantial issues of legitimacy.

Conquest had a complicated legacy for the crown by the latter half of the sixteenth century. It was, after all, conquest that provided the crown with access to the enormous amounts of wealth that sustained Spanish power across Europe but it was also conquest that produced conquistadors whose ambitions, jealousies, and rivalries made them a particularly difficult population to control. Spain’s imperial policy in the time of Philip II was therefore driven by a desire to finally establish uncontested authority over his New World territories. Further conquest, however, complicated this project by creating new groups of conquistadors who, like their predecessor, would have clamored for wealth and power for themselves and their heirs. It was partly for that reason that Spanish monarchs became more reluctant, as the decades passed, to endorse the notion of the right to conquest. Instead of conquest, imperial policy shifted towards consolidation. This, in turn, required a more formalized and bureaucratized administration – a transition that had been ongoing in Spain since the time of Ferdinand and Isabella – and it required an end to the narrative chaos that still engulfed the empire.

Las Casas was the single most consistent critic of the empire (and continued to be until his death in 1566), but it was the conquistador class that constituted the more pressing problem for Spanish imperial rule. At issue were competing legacies of the reconquista narrative. For the crown, Granada was the ideal reconquest victory – a centralized conquest followed by direct state involvement in the settlement and
administration of the conquest – and saw it as the model for future conquests. Conquistadors, in contrast, envisioned themselves as heirs to the conquerors of Andalucia. These were men whose successes were memorialized in ballads and romances and, more importantly, who were rewarded with enormous estates and significant autonomy. The crown needed to disabuse the conquistadors of this view; their authority and their revenue were at stake. To do so, the crown sent in the bureaucrats. Before describing the role of bureaucrats in constructing new narratives of legitimacy, I first must describe the untenable situation in Peru. There, the lack of a central legitimizing narrative contributed to a conquistador class that rebelled against the crown attempt to check their political and economic power.

Of all the Spanish conquests in the Americas during the sixteenth century perhaps none elicited as much moral opposition amongst Spaniards as the conquest of the Inca domains. Where Cortés had constructed a careful legalistic account of his actions in Mexico to forestall any attempts to label him a usurper or his conquests illegitimate, the first forty years of Spanish presence in Peru were marked by activities that were harder to justify even for those most partial to the cause of Spanish imperialism. The period under review began with the capture and controversial execution of the Inca Atahualpa in 1532-33, and ended with the capture and execution of the Inca Tupac Amaru by Viceroy Francisco Toledo in 1571 (an act that allegedly earned the viceroy censure upon his return to Spain). During this time, the Spanish faced significant indigenous resistance – highlighted by the development of the neo-Inca state at Vicabamba – civil war between
contending groups of conquistadors, and the near total breakdown of crown authority before Toledo was able to establish regular and systematic rule during the 1570’s. While none of these difficulties led significant numbers of Spaniards to call for the abandonment of territorial claims in Peru, it did make for a particularly lengthy and heated debate about the nature of the crown’s legitimacy in the viceroyalty.

The most famous moment in the encounter between Spaniards and the people of Tiwantisuyu occurred in the square of an Andean town called Cajamarca. Here, 168 Spaniards ambushed and massacred thousands of men who made up the retinue of the Inca Atahualpa. It was during this melee that the Inca himself was captured and, eventually, executed. While clearly important to the larger history of the Spanish presence in the Andes the events at Cajamarca are at times, and particularly in popular history, given too much attention, and too simplistically assimilated into the larger narrative of indigenous helplessness in the face of the European challenge. The encounter between Spaniards and Andeans, however, is not encapsulated in this single incident, which represented neither definitive victory for the Spanish, nor the total defeat of the Inca.

The Inca Empire had been sustained through brutal policies including forced relocations, and mass executions and as a result there were many groups within Tiwantisuyu that saw the Spanish more as partners or allies rather than invaders and oppressors. Even within the Inca royal family there was reason to view Atahualpa’s execution as something less than a tragedy. He was, after all, new to the position of Inca
and his ascension had not been universally accepted. Upon the death of his father Huayna Capac, Atahualpa had gone to war with his brother Huascar, whose claim to the title was generally seen as stronger, over the right to succession. By the time of the Spanish arrival, the civil war had only recently been decided in Atahualpa’s favor with the defeat and capture of Huascar by Atahualpa’s forces. The victory, in fact, was so recent that when he came to Cajamarca to encounter Pizarro and his men he had yet to return to Cusco to lay claim to his authority. Far from an established figure, therefore, Atahualpa was a somewhat divisive figure and much of the Incan nobility were willing to accept Manco Inca – Atahualpa’s brother and Pizarro’s hand-picked choice – for the position of Inca.

Once in power, however, Manco Inca found that the Spanish were more than just temporary guests, they meant to stay. The relationship quickly deteriorated under the strain of continual Spanish efforts to extort treasure from the kingdom and general ill treatment of Manco Inca. The Spanish had hoped that he would be a compliant puppet, but instead Manco became increasingly disenchanted with the relationship. Forced to suffer through countless indignities he finally decided to eradicate the Spanish from his domains in May of 1536. His forces lay siege to the city of Cuzco but after a few months the Spanish broke out of the city and defeated the besieging Inca army. Spaniards who took part in the action would later claim that they were aided by the Virgin Mary herself as well as the patron saint of Spain, Santiago, who, after many years of helping Christians defeat Moors in the Iberian Peninsula, had apparently turned his attention to the Christian
struggle in the Andes. Although things had looked grim for a time, the Spanish victory assured their survival and forced Inca forces to retreat to the valley of Vilcabamba. There, Manco would establish an incañate-in-exile that would develop alongside an emerging Spanish state. Relations between the two parallel authorities were thereafter marked alternately by periods of discord and periods of rapprochement.

The problems did not end with Manco Inca. Even as they had been fighting for their survival against Manco Inca’s forces tensions had been mounting between rival groups of conquistadors – one group associated with the Francisco Pizarro and his brothers, and the other loyal to Pizarro’s partner Diego de Almagro (the almagristas). The divisive issue was the spoils of the conquest. Almagro felt that Pizarro and his supporters had received a disproportionate share of the spoils of the conquest. He was further embittered when he discovered that the territory of Nueva Toledo (the southern portion of the Inca Empire corresponding to modern Chile), over which he had been appointed governor, contained no great wealth, only hostile Indians. In 1537 Almagro seized the city of Cuzco, beginning a civil war between his faction and that of Pizarro. After some initial successes the almagristas were routed at the Batle of Salinas, leading to Almagro’s capture and execution. In 1541, war erupted again when almagristas led by Almagro’s son assassinated Francisco Pizarro. By September 1542, however, the almagristas were again soundly defeated.  

Disorder of this sort would be troubling for any imperial regime, but as of yet the factional fighting had not acquired any dangerous ideological pretensions. If the
almagristas had proven victorious they would have been no less inclined to offer their loyalty to the crown. Events took a more troubling turn, however, beginning in 1542 and once again, Las Casas was one of the key actors.

By mid-century, Las Casas was at the height of his powers. While he had many enemies, he was also highly regarded by Charles V who seemed genuinely concerned with the moral and spiritual issues highlighted by the Dominican. As a result, some of Las Casas’s critiques began to be addressed in major colonial legislation of the time. Most famous, in this regard were the “Laws and ordinances newly made by His Majesty for the government of the Indies and good treatment and preservation of the Indians,” better known as the New Laws. Promulgated in 1542, the New Laws addressed some issues of general governance but gave particular attention to remedying the plight of Indians through the gradual eradication of the encomienda.

Charles V had made attempts to eliminate, or at least reduce, the importance of the encomienda since 1521. Initially he forbade the institution from expanding to the mainland following Cortés’s victory but this order came too late. Cortés had almost immediately made a distribution of Indians to his supporters, reserving a generous number for himself and others for the crown. Charles relented in the face of this fait accompli, and in subsequent years allowed the encomienda to be extended into new parts of the continent. The encomienda, nevertheless, continued to be dangerous to crown authority. A royal representative in Mexico, for instance, observed that “in some regions the villagers consider the lords and encomenderos of the villages as their kings, and they
The New Laws were intended to finally do away with the institution. The provisions of the New Laws were constructed in such a way so as to avoid a sudden termination of the encomienda, but encomenderos understood that this would be their long-term effect. The regulations declared the following: no new encomiendas would be granted; encomiendas held by those who could not prove legal title would revert to the crown; those held any official, churchman, or member of a religious order would also revert to the crown; even encomiendas that had been legally granted would end with the death of the current encomendero. All throughout the Indies, colonists and officials reacted with shock and dismay to the New Laws. However, it was in still restive Peru that the reaction was most extreme.

The first viceroy of Peru, Blasco Nuñez Vela, arrived in Peru in May 1544. He was determined to establish order in the territory, rein in the Pizarro clan, and put the New Laws into effect. Almost immediately, he found himself opposed by the conquistadors. These men, who had won the territory through their own struggle and sacrifice, had no intention of surrendering their rights to royal authority. By August, the opposition had coalesced around Francisco Pizarro’s younger half-brother, Gonzalo, who led his forces on the city of Lima. Having virtually no allies, the viceroy fled north to Quito. In January 1546, the forces of Pizarro routed Blasco Nuñez Vela’s small, ill-equipped army. During the battle the viceroy himself suffered a mortal wound:

As he lay dying, one of Pizarro’s lieutenants found the ill-fated viceroy, ordered him decapitated, and had his head hoisted on a pike … [later] they
put a string through the deceased official’s lips and carried his severed head throughout the victorious army’s march southward to Lima. Their trophy served as a reminder of the fall of royal fortunes in the Andes.\[^{11}\]

Some of Pizarro’s most devoted followers urged him to declare himself the king of Peru, but he demurred. Within the year, a new royal representative raised a new army and defeated the *pizarristas*; sensing that the tide had turned against him Pizarro surrendered and was executed. A short-lived rebellion broke out again in 1554, but with its suppression the Spanish could finally begin consolidating their empire.

At first glance, the chaos in Peru does not seem to relate to our topic of imperial narratives, but it is intimately connected. I described above, the differing views of the reconquista held by the crown and conquistadors. The narrative issues went beyond this, however. Even given similar interpretations of the reconquista, the narrative was ill suited for a situation of conquest-discovery. The usefulness of the reconquista narrative is that it allowed conquerors to serve God and their king while also promising them clear rewards. Seemingly, this would be the case for New World conquest as well but this was not the case.

Bernal Diaz famously wrote that the motives of the conquistadors were: “To serve God and his Majesty, to bring light to those in darkness, and also to get rich.”\[^{12}\] It was an unfortunate reality for many, however, that riches were not awaiting them at the end of an expedition of conquest. Even Bernal Diaz found that the rewards for taking part in the conquest of Mexico were limited. Of all the expeditions that set out to various parts of the Americas, only a bare minority found the wealth they had imagined. This is because
such expeditions were based on rumors, hopes, and myths instead of actual knowledge. When they failed to find riches, conquistadors had to figure out how to profit in other ways. According to the narrative, courage, sacrifice, and service were the paths to social mobility; what they found was that this was not necessarily true. Dating back to the reconquista, acts of conquest had offered one of the few means for upward mobility for Spaniards and this had remained the case even as Spanish conquests had spread across the Atlantic:

In 1513 [when the Laws of Burgos were promulgated] military success in acts of conquest offered the aspiring noble advancement in prestige and honor and wealth transplanted from reconquest Spain: the successful conquistador garnered advanced title and status of his family name, and earned wealth in the form of land and the servitude of the conquered. ‘Conquest’ as a term, a strategy, and a practice served the interests of the nobility and the crown alike. By 1573, that prestige economy has been seriously curbed by the monarch, whose interests are no longer served by the all-too-evident brutality of conquest … [T]he monarch’s finances are now better served by consolidating the exploitation of the vast and yielding mineral wealth in Mexico and Peru. His favor thus falls away from the conquistador and toward the colonial administrator.”

As the empire lumbered through the transition from conquest to consolidation, the conquistadors found themselves suddenly anachronistic. They understood the reconquest narrative and mostly tried to work within its confines, but found those in charge had begun reading from a different story. This is one of the reasons why they reacted to the proposed elimination of the encomienda with such fervor and, in the case of Peru,
violence. It was not only that they were being stripped of their one source of wealth and status (although this was certainly a significant part of it); it was the sense that their time was coming to an end. Charles V had allowed Cortés to pull him along in a dubious narrative for the sake of promised riches, but by mid-century the narrative of the conquistadors was no longer part of the mainstream. Conquistadors and their heirs continued to lobby the crown for the rewards they felt they deserved, but their time had passed. The larger narrative of conquest would continue to be contested, but the key figures would now be men-of-letters, not men-of-arms.

As we will see, it was these administrators who would play an ever-increasing role in writing the narratives of Spanish Empire in the Americas. These were men who were not always the most capable and they were certainly not incorruptible, but their success, perhaps to a greater extent than any other group in the empire, was dependent upon their being useful to their superiors. If nothing else, this made them easier to control than the conquistadors. For an empire that stretched across an ocean, the ability to control far away officials was vital.

Despite the chaos that engulfed it for nearly a quarter century after the conquest, a basic model for righting the situation existed. Peru was not so different from earlier conquests, according to Stafford Poole, and required a similar process to be righted: “After each conquest came consolidation. And with consolidation came the bureaucrats.”\textsuperscript{14} It was these bureaucrats who, among other things, would be tasked by Toledo with constructing a narrative that would justify the Spanish presence in Peru.
In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that the process of bureaucratization is one in which the power of individuals becomes subsumed by the power of institutions. In his formulation, the “biological individuals” who staff institutions become irrelevant as formalized education makes them increasingly interchangeable. The result of this process is that, “relations of power and dominance no longer exist between individuals; they are set up in pure objectivity between institutions,”¹⁵ and, I would add between institutions and individuals. These new relationships of power then “render it superfluous constantly to reassert power relations by overtly resorting to force.”¹⁶

It would be premature to describe sixteenth century Spain as a place in which institutions staffed by interchangeable individuals had become predominant but we do see, particularly by the reign of Philip II, an educated class of lower nobility, the *letrados*, playing an increasingly important role in the institutions of Spanish rule both at home and in its empire. *Leetrados* were not quite the interchangeable individuals described by Bourdieu but they marked a step in that direction. With the development of the Spanish university, opportunities arose for larger numbers of Spanish men to receive a formal education. Education would open up a number of new possibilities for these individuals with some of the best opportunities coming through service to the crown. As Spanish monarchs sought to increase their authority lettrados came to play a very important role in the crown effort to assert authority over local areas. Whereas the nobility represented the entrenched local interests of their seigniorial holdings, were at times openly critical of
crown policies, and often had ambitions which failed to mesh with those of the crown, letrados were rootless, loyal, and interchangeable, and had ambitions that were best served through competently carrying out their duties. According to Stafford Poole, the letrado mentality was characterized by “a concern for good record keeping, financial responsibility, the rapid and unimpeded flow of information, and a rational and centralized administration in which each section, from the top to the bottom, knew its function and carried it out.”¹⁷ None of this sounds particularly exciting, but good governance requires bureaucrats who share similar mentality.

They did not impress everybody. In 1568, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza – who was the scion of the great Mendoza family that included the first viceroy of Mexico, Antonio de Mendoza – reported his distaste with the fact that such unimpressive people were gaining precedence over men like him:

[Letrados] are neither great men nor are they small men. They are something in between. They wish to offend neither. Their profession is the law. They are moderate, discreet and truthful. They lead blameless, uncorrupt lives. They do not entertain or take bribes or have close friends, nor do they dress expensively or live beyond their means. They cultivate a bland and sympathetic mien.

… The Catholic Kings transferred real power from the nobles to the lawyers … This method of ordering public affairs … has since spread to the whole of Christendom. Today it has reached a peak of authority and prestige, so powerful is the notion that there is some particular virtue in decisions taken collectively (although there are those who have their doubts).¹⁸
As individuals the letrados may have been bland particularly for noble tastes, but as those who staffed the key institutions of governance they were crucial. Because of their dependence on crown beneficence letrados could be counted on, perhaps more than any group who took part in the narration of the Spanish conquests, to put forth the official line in their correspondence.

A narrative written by a letrado would necessarily take a very different form than those written by a conquistador or a clergyman. The narratives of the conquistadors were accounts of a history that they themselves made, records of their service to the crown and, oftentimes, requests for recompense for those services. Those of letrados were of a very different form. It was not the job of the letrado to make history, but to serve as an objective mediator between that which had occurred and those who would benefit from knowledge of that past. The chief job of the historian, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa wrote, was to “write the truth, since the chief value and perfection of history consists in its accuracy, thoroughly sifting each event, verifying the times and periods of what happened so that no doubt might remain of what passed.” Although they were usually not characters in their own narratives, this does not mean letrados wrote out of selflessness.

Those of the letrado class, were not immune to the lures of self-interest. The role of the letrado was to serve his king with the understanding that good service would mean advancement. What constituted good service, however, was open to question. In situations marked by rampant corruption or obvious signs of political instability it might
be easy to assess the job of the crown’s representatives, but not all situations produced such clear outcomes, and the kind of detailed information needed to provide accountability was not always available to those at the top of the structure. Additionally, the desire for advancement created a competitive atmosphere within state institutions that did not always make for the smooth functioning of governance. Although certainly not a disinterested observer, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza described the bureaucratic situation that emerged in Granada in the decades after the conquest:

Zealous officials appeared [in Granada] bringing with them petty quarrels and bickering between the Ministries of Justice and War and endless bureaucratic delays. Everything had to be confirmed in writing and signed and sealed in duplicate. Each official interpreted each document according to his own departmental or personal interest. Each was determined to stop his rivals amongst his colleagues getting their own way. Instead of modesty and honour we had the constant in-fighting of Jacks-in-office.²⁰

Given the competitive nature of their positions and the necessity of receiving the patronage of the powerful the goal could just as often be to flatter the powerful as serve them.

Las Casas had spoken to this point when he observed, in the prologue to his History of the Indies, that it was not the job of the historian “to give relish, nor to please or flatter kings.” He went on to quote the historian Polybius on this same point: “He who chooses the office of historian should sometimes exalt enemies with high praise, if their excellent deeds deserve it, and at other times should severely upbraid and rebuke friends
when their mistakes are worthy of blame.\textsuperscript{21} For the letrado, however, this was not the best means of advancement; they prospered by their ability to promote the wishes of their superiors.

In order to promote the wishes of their superiors, the letrados needed to know what was expected of them. For most of the sixteenth century, the empire had drifted from one crisis to the next with the king giving it his attention only when he could pull himself away from pressing matters in Europe. Charles V admitted as much at the beginning of the New Laws:

Know, that having for many years had will and intention as leisure to occupy ourselves with the affairs of the Indies, on account of their great importance, as well in that touching the service of God our Lord and increase of his holy Catholic faith, as in the preservation of the natives of those parts, and the good government and preservation of their persons; and although we have endeavored to disengage ourselves to this effect, it has not been possible through the many and continual affairs that have occurred from which we were not able to excuse ourselves …\textsuperscript{22}

Philip II was less given to itinerancy than his father had been, however, and devoted more of his time to the minutiae of the empire. Beginning in the 1560’s, he turned his attention to fixing the problems still plaguing his American domains. Given Spain’s enormous fiscal problems, it was vital to fix the empire’s structural problems were to ensure the more efficient extraction of resources, but Philip proved that he was similarly concerned with ideological weaknesses. By the 1560’s no official narrative had yet emerged, even as the old narratives were falling apart.
The right of conquest had proved increasingly problematic as a justification for empire. Aside from the moral arguments against conquest made by Las Casas and others like him, the behavior of the conquistadors had raised the question of whether such a justification was in the crown’s interests. Even as conquest fell out of favor with the Crown, the religious justification for Spanish dominion became more problematic as well. Aside from the effect of Las Casas’s writings, there was also the fact that nearly seventy-five years after Columbus the Caribbean had been almost completely denuded of its original inhabitants and even on the mainland, where significant indigenous populations still survived, the progress of Christianization had been slower and less complete than expected. The debate over Spanish legitimacy had reached stasis.

Fiscal issues increasingly superceded moral issues as Spain’s growing power in Europe became more and more dependent on maintaining and growing her colonial revenues. Thus any reform aimed at improving the condition of Indians had to do so without causing any interruptions in the ever-important silver supply. The empire was therefore in a strange place as it drew towards its eightieth anniversary: in some ways prospering but also with a group of elites on either side of the Atlantic anxious over the continuing lack of intellectual mooring for the whole enterprise.

To help him resolve the empire’s lingering ideological issues, Philip II looked to one of the more outstanding examples of the letrado class from the latter half of the sixteenth century, Juan de Ovando. With the help of powerful patrons Ovando worked his way up within the Spanish bureaucracy receiving posts of greater and greater
responsibility. One of his most important assignments was his appointment in 1567 to head up a visita – “an exhaustive inquiry by a competent and trustworthy individual who had the confidence of the king”\textsuperscript{23} – of the Council of the Indies, an institution that he would later head even as his visita continued. Visitas normally concerned themselves with the conduct and functioning of various aspects of Spanish governance. They reviewed prior work and activity, assessed the overall performance, and sometimes held accountable those responsible for poor performance. Ovando’s investigation was to be more far-reaching, however, concerning not just the council as it operated in Spain but the entire apparatus of Spanish government throughout the Indies. More than just a critique of the past, Ovando’s visita offered positive lessons on the best way to move forward. Key to his recommendations were suggestions to put better people in place in the ruling councils throughout the Indies and to reward those who served well with advancement within the system (unsurprisingly, perhaps, this letrado was arguing that what the Americas needed were more men such as himself), and to place more attention on the spiritual care of the Indians. It is the latter that we gain access to what can be considered as close to an official position on Spain’s right to rule as existed at the time. Two things emerge here. First, is that the efforts to evangelize to that point had not been adequate:

It is of great importance that order is quickly given to that which concerns the spiritual, \textit{which is the foundation of the republic}, because neither the churches are ordained, nor endowed nor provided with Ministers, and those that there are, useless, provided by indulgence and respect of the
people and not from the public. There is not a Bishop in the church of Sanct Joan [sic] of Puerto Rico; that of Sacto Domingo was 16 years without a prelate; in Cuba there is a Bishop, and in all [the island] there are not four clerics; in Venezuela there is only a bishop and an old and decrepit Dean; in Cartagena there is no Bishop, nor in Guatemala, nor in Nicaragua, nor in Tlaxcala, nor in New Galicia; In México he is so old that he is useless and there is not one in the Nuevo Reyno; in Popyan he that is there is of very little substance; in los Reyes [Lima] he is very old and wants to be done with the responsibility that he has; Cuzco has been more than ten years without a Bishop; Tucuman is without a Prelate. [italics mine]²⁴

The notion that the “foundation of the republic” lies within the spiritual realm is an important one. It suggests a view more closely in accordance with Las Casas, that there is something conditional about Spanish rule in the Americas; that it depends not just on the facts of Spanish Christianity and indigenous paganism, but on the best efforts of Christians to rectify the situation. The second point to highlight from the visita is that even as Ovando accepts the notion that the Spanish have a responsibility to evangelize he had no doubt that the conquest was justified:

“By our industry and at our cost and expenses [Spaniards] have discovered more than nine million leagues of coast of tierra firme and islands of great grandeur, and the tierra firme and islands populated by great numbers of peoples and nations, and the great majority of them naked, barbarous, and without laws and all subject to tyrants, and more distressing, to the tyranny of the Devil, under whose tyranny and servitude and idolatry were all of them, with abominable vices and sins against nature, and in many parts
eating one another and sacrificing to the Devil and to their idols many children, men and women.\textsuperscript{25}

As opposed to Las Casas, who depicts pre-Colombian America as akin to pagan Europe, filled with people who lack the True Faith but are firmly capable of reason and high civilization, Ovando depicts a situation so deplorable as to make conquest a humanitarian mission. Not surprisingly, given that they were participants in the same set of meetings, this is a very similar view as that which Toledo would promote during his tenure in Peru. This brief narrative also lacks any mention of the papal grant, part of a general trend in which, to the consternation of the papacy, the Bulls of Donation would be deemphasized.

By the 1560’s a sort of middle ground has been reached within the dominant discourse. The kind of exploitation of Indians carried out by the original encomenderos in the Caribbean was not to be tolerated and increasingly the notion of conquest was to be looked at with suspicion by the crown and its representatives. Conquest was something done against or by Moors, Turks, and heretics and applying the term to the Americas raised complicated questions. In Ovando’s formulation, therefore, the lands had been “discovered” by Spaniards, not conquered. The reconquista had become less of a reference point for the Spanish by this point. It still stood as a central narrative of Spanish history but was increasingly part of the distant past and fewer and fewer Spanish were left who had even been born by the time of the conquest of Granada and even fewer who had actually participated in these final battles. But even as conquest had lost some of its prestige, the religious narrative favored by Las Casas had been only partially adopted.
The views expressed by Ovando represented an emergent official opinion. It is unlikely that Ovando arrived these opinions alone; instead he was a lead actor, along with Philip himself, in the effort to promote a new, more unified theory of imperial rule throughout the empire. Since his ascension to full authority in 1556, Philip II had made it his mission to affirm that his power over his American empire was uncontested, unrivaled, and unconstrained by native elites, disenchanted subjects, or even the papacy. One result of this was that Las Casas, who had been tolerated by Philip’s father, came to be seen as an impediment to narrative stability, and was thus marginalized at court. This move was indicative of Philip’s strategy towards his empire’s ideological problems. It was a strategy that was reliant more on the suppression of inconvenient narratives than the construction of new ones. But Philip did want to promote an idea that would cement his imperial authority while undermining the claims of his rivals. To achieve this goal, Philip did what he always did: he formed a committee.

Over the course of the 1560’s issues related to America were a significant focus of Philip II. It was from 1567 onwards, though, that Philip II and Ovando made their most concerted effort at crafting a new imperial policy. In 1567, a committee was put together made up of members of the various governing councils of Spain and headed by Juan de Ovando. In a series of special meetings the committee tackled a host of issues concerning the government of America. Among the most important results of these meetings was the formal rejection of the papal grants as a basis of crown legitimacy in the Americas. The idea was to affirm the notion that “Spanish
imperialism was neither more nor less than the power of the crown.”

This view called for the rejection of the logic of the requerimiento – whose logic had been based on the Bulls of Donation – and a suppression of the arguments of Las Casas. In their place, the committee promoted the view that the king’s authority over his American domains was uncontested and unmediated. There was to be “one sole empire, ruled over by one sole authority, the Crown of Castile.”

Present at court while these ideas were being formulated, was the viceroy-designate of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, and to him was given the charge of establishing these views in his viceroyalty. As a result, Toledo made it his mission in Peru to eradicate alternate narratives of legitimacy while attempting to construct one of his own. He was not entirely successful in his endeavors but, nevertheless, his time in Peru represented one of the most concerted attempts to solve the ideological problems of the Spanish Empire.

Toledo’s reign in Peru is indicative of the empire’s shift from conquest to consolidation. Short-term interests had once predominated imperial actions, but the new focus was on long-term stability. Tzvetan Todorov described this process as a shift from an empire of enslavement to one of colonialism. In this formulation, Montesinos had railed against the impulse towards enslavement, just as many of Las Casas’s own writing depicted Spaniards as operating from within this pole. Enslavement suggests a reduction of the other to an object whether through slaughter, disfigurement and mutilation, exploitation with no concurrent effort at preservation; in short any behavior that treats the Indian as less than human. Colonialism on the other hand treats the other as a subject
who can produce or achieve a certain object valued by the colonizer. Given the importance of indigenous productivity, there arose a concurrent desire to ensure their survival so that they could continue to serve as intermediaries between the colonizers and those things that they would like to possess. As much as Las Casas and Cortés can be considered adversaries, they actually shared a preference for colonialism over enslavement. There still remained the issue of what the object produced by these subjects should be. For many Spaniards the object could be a commodity like silver, cacao, hides, or dyes; even as the object for Las Casas was souls. The emergent official view was slightly different, however. Even as it continued to place emphasis on religious mission, there remained the fundamental and more easily measurable task of ensuring the increase in the amount of objects produced.

With the arrival of Viceroy Francisco de Toledo, Peru was to decisively move from the pole of enslavement towards that of colonialism. It was a rich territory to which Toledo arrived but one whose economy had still not fully made the transition from one based on the plundering of existing resources to one based on extracting and producing new resources. His job was a tricky one. The logistical problems alone were daunting, given Peru’s varied climate and geography, and had required pre-Colombian Andean societies to construct complex systems of vertical exchange between ecosystems. Thus in the instructions Toledo brought from Spain it was suggested that in certain situations he should, “figure out the manner of governance used [by Andean peoples] up until that point and if convenient and if it will not cause too much damage to go ahead and use
This is advice Toledo followed on more than a few occasions including most famously with the institution of the *mita* system of labor extraction, which was in part based on an Inca era labor draft of similar name. Toledo, aided by a growing group of talented administrators, expended enormous effort in the political and economic reorganization of the viceroyalty and succeeded in setting it on a path towards greater stability. His efforts also had to be directed towards the aforementioned issues of legitimacy. The conquistadors had been weakened to the point that they ceased to represent a major threat to crown authority. The more significant issues, by Toledo’s time, were the continued critiques of the conquest by religious figures and the continued existence of a neo-Incan state that claimed to be legitimate heirs to political power in the region.

Because of his service on the 1567 committee, Toledo would have been well aware that his project in Peru was as much ideological as administrative. He was responsible for establishing a legitimizing device that was fundamentally divorced from the previous narrative traditions. The narrative would make the case, through a variety of mechanisms, that Philip’s rule was legitimate but for reasons different from those articulated previously. The Spanish still saw it as their role to evangelize but they would no longer argue that their claim to rule was dependent upon a Christian narrative that turned them into mere tools employed by God to carry His message across the seas. At the same time, the notion of a “right to conquest” was also to be deemphasized. Not only was the logic of the requerimiento, by which Pizarro had justified his conquest of Peru,
marginalized but the very word conquest, whether used to describe a just war or not, was to be renounced.

The new narrative removed the emphasis from Spanish actions and placed it on the lack of legitimacy of the previous rulers of Peru. Because the Incas were tyrants and usurpers it was left to the servants of Philip to free their subjects from their rule and when they did so the right to rule had passed to the Crown of Castile. As Toledo wrote to his king in 1573: “As Your Majesty is the real ruler of the kingdom and there are no legitimate heirs of the Inca tyrants, all the wealth, land, and livestock reserved for the service of the Incas, and which are not private property, justly belong to your majesty.” The fact of Incan tyranny was a key element of Toledo’s argument for Spanish legitimacy. In this narrative, promoted by Ovando and adopted by Toledo, the Incas had forfeited their authority by creating a society that was barbaric and immoral.

It was difficult to make this case, however, as long as the Spanish continued to tolerate the continuation of indigenous practices and social organization. By reordering Andean society, sought establish a sustainable extractive economy. Such a restructuring served the additional purpose, however, of striking a blow against certain surviving indigenous practices. As long as these practices were allowed to continue it would undermine the argument of indigenous barbarism that in Ovando’s view at least, helped justify the Spanish presence. Thus even as some practical elements of Andean society would be maintained by Toledo, he would show less tolerance more generally for
elements of indigenous social organization which he felt were hindering the spiritual progress of the population.

Toledo’s commitment to disrupting indigenous social organization at times exceeded that of the crown. For instance, on one occasion he wrote to the king to express his feelings about the indigenous elite: “I advise the king that these Incas should be brought to Spain, or somewhere away from the people of Peru. The people always retain the memories of the Inca in their hearts and adore one of the Inca lineage.” The crown was not impressed with this logic but did support other means of reordering Andean society. In one key example of this Toledo was tasked with establishing reducciones de indios, a strategy described by the crown in its original instructions to the viceroy:

To lessen the number of Indians that are dispersed and living outside of populated areas or are newcomers in areas that are not suitable for them is a point of utmost importance and one in which their conversion, doctrine, customs, and policing in large part depend … [Y]ou must make a new attempt to take charge of and make use of all means at your disposal, to condense the Indian population and to found and form new places and cities that will be suitable for them.

Not only would this strategy make it easier to police Indian practices – and with this reorganization more emphasis was to be placed on the extirpation of indigenous religious practices – but would also make it easier to access Indian labor. Within this new system Indians would continue to be the source of wealth for the crown through their productive labor, but attention was also to be paid to their well-being. So even as he wrote to the crown of his efforts “to compel the native Indians of this kingdom to work in the mines,”
he also made sure to put in place ordinances, “to ensure [that they receive] suitable pay and good treatment.” Las Casas, whose views had become more radical by the end of his life, would probably not be satisfied with this new middle ground but it did mark a shift to a new official position that took into account the related but independent elements of religious instruction, the treatment of Indians in areas not related to their souls, and also their role as the key producers of wealth for the empire. The steps taken by Toledo helped to integrate the Indians more fully into Spanish society and reduce the impression that the Spanish had merely taken over for the Inca.

Rather than merely “a Christian continuation of the Inqa (sic) Empire, [Toledo] legitimated the conquest in Spain’s traditional recognition of a people’s right to revolt against a tyrannical monarch.” This was a crucial distinction since if it could be claimed that the Inca themselves were illegitimate then there would no longer be, “a need to negotiate or to offer terms of peace which recognized their nobility.” This solved two problems. First, it offered a response to those, like the Franciscan monk Marcos de Niza, who claimed that Spanish actions in Peru were done, “without any justification,” and, second, it changed the way in which the neo-Inca state at Vilcabamba was viewed. Where a few years earlier it had appeared as if a place could be made for such a state parallel to that of the Spanish colonial state, by Toledo’s time this was no longer deemed tolerable. He would arrive in Peru with plans to eradicate Inca rule. In a period of consolidation there could be no rivals to authority.
Toledo’s argument that the Inca were usurpers, who had conquered their territory without justification and ruled their people tyrannically, was not a self-evident one. In making his case, Toledo referenced the Medieval European canon. Through this canon he could argue for the right of subjects to overthrow tyrannical rulers and the illegitimacy of certain types of conquest; doing so, however, raised uncomfortable questions. Most monarchs would be uncomfortable placing too much emphasis on one’s subjects inherent right to rebel against tyranny and, for imperial Spain, questioning another empire’s right to conquest may have hit a little too close to home. Toledo, therefore, had to construct his argument carefully and put the full force of his administration towards propagating it. He thus made use of two of his most trusted lieutenants, the aforementioned Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa – appointed royal cosmographer by Toledo – and the licenciado Juan Polo de Ondegardo, who ascended to the position of corregidor of Cuzco with the help of Toledo. Polo fits more precisely into the category of letrado given, his studies at the famous university of Alcalá de Heñares, whereas Sarmiento went into the military at 18. Regardless of their backgrounds, both men fit clearly into the category of administrators rather than conquistadors. Although Polo and Sarmiento both had military backgrounds, and Sarmiento won some fame as an explorer and navigator, these were men whose skills lay in the pen more so than the sword. As a result they proved themselves useful to multiple viceroyos and to the crown itself. In Peru the key distinction was between those of the conquistador class, whose interests lay in establishing autonomy from royal control and maintaining the perpetuity of the
encomienda, and the realistas who worked for the interests of the crown. Polo and Sarmiento both proved to be loyal administrators and, even though neither of them arrived with Toledo, when he went on his famous five-year visita of the viceroyalty (1570-5) he brought the two men with him.

Sarmiento and Polo were relatively sympathetic to the cause of Indians. In the 1560’s, for instance, it was Polo who attempted to reform and regulate labor practices within Peru’s mines. Even though the results of his efforts were not particularly effective at improving the morality and efficiency of the mines, he would continue to work for improved labor practices to encourage Indians to work in the mines in return for better pay and better treatment. These practical matters, however, paled before the pressing intellectual problems facing Peru in the form of what seemed a transatlantic Dominican conspiracy to disrupt the foundations of Spanish rule in the viceroyalty. Unsurprisingly, it was Las Casas along with his colleague Santo Tomás and other Dominicans residing in Peru, who were at the heart of the effort. Las Casas was approaching eighty years old but rather than being mellowed by age his views had become more and more radical late in his life. Whereas two decades before he had constructed arguments that still allowed for the legitimacy of Spanish dominion, by the 1560’s his arguments came close to the sentiment that all Spanish conquests in the Indies had been illegitimate. Given that the conquest had been evil, the governments set up subsequently were also evil and thus it was left to Philip II to make amends:

The Catholic king of Castile, our lord, is obligated, by the need to save his soul, to make restitutions of the kingdoms of Peru to the Inca, grandson of
Huayna Capac, that is, to the one who is the heir of the said kingdoms. And he is likewise obligated to give back to the other lords that which was theirs.”

It was this argument and others like it that Toledo felt obliged to respond to; Polo and Sarmiento were to be vital to this response. Thus, when attacked by the arguments of churchmen Toledo responded with the arguments of bureaucrats.

Although Juan Polo de Ondegardo had the more impressive academic background, and indeed did engage in a war of words with Las Casas and his allies, the most concerted attempt to fight back against claims to Spanish illegitimacy was made by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa under the direction of his viceroy. The work that emerged from this effort, *The History of the Incas*, is a fascinating document. The book is both a practical work of history based on rigorous research, and a polemic in which the author highlight facts best suited to undermine the legitimacy of the Inca. These two sides of the narrative are not independent of each other either. The impetus of the book may have been to rebut the charges of those who criticized the Spanish project in Peru, but in order for this rebuttal to achieve any legitimacy, Sarmiento and Toledo needed to be able to present the book as sufficiently objective.

Whatever its intent, the scholarly ambitiousness of the project was impressive. *History of the Incas* itself was originally intended to only represent the second volume of a three-volume work. It covered Incan history beginning with their origin story and going up to the capture of Atahualpa. In contrast, the first volume would describe the geography of Peru, while the focus of the third was to be on the deeds of Spaniards since
the time of Pizarro. In the end, *History of the Incas* was the only volume that was completed and sent on to Philip II.

Sarmiento began the work while accompanying Toledo on his great visita of the viceroyalty in October 1570. As the viceroy and his entourage traveled from region to region on their way from Lima to Cuzco, they interviewed town elders, local notables, and Incas at every stop in order to gain insight into the government, religious life and customs of Andean society. It was during the group’s long stay in Cuzco, from February 1571 to October 1572, that Sarmiento undertook the bulk of the work on *History of the Incas*. In Cuzco, Sarmiento conducted extensive interviews with indigenous leaders from the Cuzco and Yucay regions, with the heads of kinship groups in Cuzco itself, and with the surviving remnants of the original conquistadors, many of who still resided in the region. By February 1572, Sarmiento had completed a draft of the book which was then read to a group of forty-two of Cuzco’s indigenous (although non-Incan) elite who, it was assumed, could provide the most rigorous fact-checking of the document. After it was read to them, the Indians made their suggestions, and these were then incorporated into the finished manuscript. The completed work was finally signed by Toledo, and then given to Jerónimo Pacheco to deliver to king. So even given its stated purpose as a response to critics like Las Casas, the manner of the book’s construction made it difficult to dismiss as mere polemic. Yet, in the end, the historical rigorousness of the work is a mere backdrop to the polemic. The acts of conducting the interviews and publicly reading the manuscript to the group of Indian notables were necessary to the volume’s
compilation but just as importantly, they were crucial in giving Sarmiento’s argument intellectual cover from which to strike at the charges of the Dominicans and other critics.

*History of the Incas* began with a letter of introduction from Sarmiento to King Philip II. In it, Sarmiento did what any ambitious letrado should: he praised the man in charge of his immediate future, viceroy Toledo, to the man whose support would be key to future advancement, King Phillip II. Beyond that, the letter of introduction made it clear that the narrative to follow would be very different from those produced by Sarmiento’s predecessors. Nevertheless, Sarmiento began his narrative in a familiar place:

Alexander VI, the vicar of Jesus Christ, considering that this might give rise to impediments in preaching the holy evangel to the barbarous idolaters, besides other evils which might be caused, desired of his own proper motion, without any petition from the catholic kings, by authority of Almighty God, to give, and he gave and conceded for ever, the islands and main lands which were then discovered and which might hereafter be discovered be discovered within the limits and demarcation of 180° of longitude.40

For Sarmiento, the importance of the Bulls of Donation lay in the fact that they gave exclusive rights to the Spanish and thus forestalled the efforts of other “great princes” whose “hunger for gold” made them “desire to take part in this great business.”41 Thus the conditionality of the grant is reduced in importance and the exclusivity is emphasized. The devil had previously had an open door to causing “dissensions and disturbances,” but with the Bulls of Donation he had to try something else.42 Afraid
that the Spanish would expel him from territories that he had once had dominion over, the devil therefore began using preachers – “the very soldiers who resisted him” – as a means of calling into question, the “rights and title which the kings of Castile had over these lands.” The devil had thus created the sense that the Spanish crown had a weak claim over Peru when, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

According to Sarmiento’s argument, however, the papal grant was not what made the king’s claim so strong. Instead it was the depravity, barbarity, and tyranny that marked the lands and people prior to the Spanish arrival; the indigenous elite’s illegitimacy; and the subsequent Spanish efforts to eradicate such evils that legitimized Spanish dominion:

It will be understood that your Majesty has a specially true and holy title to these kingdoms of Peru, because your Majesty and your most sacred ancestors stopped the sacrifices of innocent men, the eating of human flesh, the accursed sin, the promiscuous concubinage with sisters and mothers, the abominable use of beasts and their wicked and accursed customs. For from each one God demands an account of his neighbor, and his duty specially appertains to princes and above all to your Majesty. Only for this may war be made and prosecuted by the right to put a stop to the deeds of tyrants … So that by this title alone … your Majesty has the most sufficient and legitimate right to the Indies, better that any other prince in the world has to any lordship whatever.44

It wasn’t an entirely new argument – Cortés emphasized the cruelty of the Mexica in his own narrative – but we can nevertheless see the effect of Philip’s rejection of the Bulls of
Donation and, by association, the requerimiento. Pizarro’s own claim for justification was based on a submission related to the requerimiento. The famous events at Cajamarca were said to have begun when the Inca Atahualpa rejected a bible offered him; this was the pretext for the conquistador’s attack. In Sarmiento’s account, however, there is no mention of any justification of this sort. Pizarro is not relevant to the discussion, nor Almagro or any other Spaniard.

The story instead was one in which the activities of the Incas themselves, prior to the Spanish arrival made them illegitimate tyrants. The Spanish, by contrast, were merely exercising their “right to put a stop to the deeds of tyrants.” There were religious elements to the narrative, but it was not a religious narrative; there was an assumption of an exchange of sovereignty between Incas and Spaniards, but it was not a conquest narrative. Instead it was an assertion of the notion – constructed by Philip II and Juan de Ovando, carried to Peru by Francisco de Toledo, and articulated within the narrative of Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa – that “Spanish imperialism was no neither more nor less than the power of the crown.”

The tendency in other narratives created about the Americas was for the writers to present arguments that directly supported their own self-interests. The work of Sarmiento, by contrast was only indirectly about him; it was instead written in support of, what he considered, the interests of the crown. Sarmiento, for instance, did not directly seek in his narrative recompense for services rendered to the crown as so many others had over the previous eighty years. Instead, the narrative itself was his service to the
crown and in its way this service was as important as any rendered the king. As he wrote to the king, “in writing this present history, I have not done a less but a greater service than all the rest.”

This impulse to serve the crown, Sarmiento writes, was neither a new one, nor an impulse that arose only when he needed something from the crown. It was something he had always pursued and would continue to pursue in the future:

… I believe I can do what I say in your royal service. The talent which God has given me leads me to aspire to the accomplishments of these achievements … I believe that I shall comply with what will be required, for never did I so wish to achieve anything. Your Majesty sees and does not lose what other kings desire and hold by good fortune. This makes me speak freely of my desire to die in your service in which I have laboured since my childhood.

In some ways these assurances of fealty do not read much differently than similar statements to the Emperor Charles V, written by the hand of Hernan Cortés. Cortés, however, was the main character in his own narrative. Because of this fact, virtually everything he wrote reflected back on him as an example of his courage, his foresight, and his dedication to the emperor. The narrative existed to relay information about Cortés. Sarmiento, though, was virtually absent from the narrative he produced. The text made reference to the methods by which he constructed the history, but otherwise he was engaging in one of the key tasks of the bureaucrat: compiling information and then relaying that information up the hierarchy.
In making the claim that he wrote the truth, Sarmiento hoped to establish the precedence of his historical account over rival accounts. The key rivals to his narrative, and the ones that therefore needed to be combated, were European critics of Spanish rule in Peru and the accounts of the Incas themselves.

His response to the first group was to note that those who questioned Spanish legitimacy did so only because they lacked enough information to ascertain the true nature of Spain’s claims to Peru. To give just a few examples peppered throughout Sarmiento’s introduction:

All this arose owing to a want of curiosity on the part of the governors in those lands, at that time, who did not use the diligence necessary for ascertaining the truth … This chaos and confusion of ignorance on the subject [of Spanish rule] being spread over the world … [Theologians and other literary men] have expressed serious opinions on the subject based on incorrect information … This will undeceive all those in the world who think that the Inca were legitimate sovereigns.48

Unlike his scholarly rigor, the critics of Spanish rule were overly credulous, insufficiently curious and, as a result produced and reproduced lies. Although Las Casas is not referred to even indirectly in these statements, it is easy to imagine that he was one of the main targets of Sarmiento’s rhetoric. His writings on Peru, in particular, were vulnerable to this sort of criticism based on Las Casas’s complete lack of direct experience there, as well as his reliance on correspondents in the construction of his accounts.
The other narratives that had to be contested were those of indigenous storytellers. Their narratives were, according to Sarmiento, “the most strange and racy history … that has, until now been read to any political nation in the world.”

Since the Incas would seem to have a better claim to truth given their own participation in their narrative, Sarmiento had to employ a different tactic than that which he used against European critics. To undermine indigenous historical accounts Sarmiento emphasized the key attribute that the people of the Andes lacked: “As these barbarous nations of Indians were always without letters, they had not the means of preserving the monuments and memorials of their times, and those of their predecessors with accuracy and method.”

Their inability to write meant that their history was vulnerable to distortion. The source of those distortions was a familiar figure: “As the devil, who is always striving to injure the human race, found these unfortunate to be easy of belief and timid in obedience, he introduced many illusions, lies and frauds [into their history].”

Sarmiento thus presented History of the Incas as a corrective to the ignorance and distortions found in other accounts.

The strategy employed by the history was an interesting one. It sought to combat charges of Spanish brutality and usurpation by changing the subject to the previous regime’s brutality and usurpation instead of with a spirited defense of or explanation for Spanish behavior. Thus Sarmiento reported to the king without a hint of irony:

… [T]he Incas were strangers in Cuzco and … they seized the valley of Cuzco, and all the rest of the territory from Quito to Chile by force of
arms, making themselves Incas without the consent or election of the natives.\textsuperscript{53}

Perhaps if Sarmiento had completed volume three, he would have been able to mount a more full-throated defense of Spanish actions, but without a narrative of the Spanish conquest we are left with only the second volume to do the work.

Sarmiento directly asserted that his work was meant to be read as a response to doubts stirred up by “foreigners, as well Catholics as heretics and other infidels” on the, “right which the kings of Spain claim and have claimed to the Indies.”\textsuperscript{54} Such doubts, he explained to King Philip II, were rooted in “ignorance on the subject being so spread over the world.”\textsuperscript{55} Contrary to the opinions of so many who questioned the Spanish claim to the territory Sarmiento reported that Philip’s title to the Americas was “more holy and more honourable than that which any other kings in the world have to any of their possessions.”\textsuperscript{56} The dilemma lay in the fact that not enough people understood this, including the king himself. This would be rectified by Toledo, through the pen of Sarmiento:

The Viceroy proposes to do your majesty a most signal service in this matter, besides the performance of all the other duties of which he has charge. This is to give secure and quiet harbour to your royal conscience against the tempests raised even by your own natural subjects, theologians and other literary men, who have expressed serious opinions on the subject, based on incorrect information.\textsuperscript{57}
The incorrect information had to do with the Incas own right to sovereignty over the land. The issue of Inca legitimacy, or the lack thereof, was a key element of the book and one that seems to have been built into the design of the narrative rather than emerging from the research. Toledo’s assistant, Antonio Baptista Salazar, for instance, reported that:

[The viceroy] ordered investigations and inquiries carried out, in written and painted form, on the genealogy, origins, and ancestry of the Inca before they all die. He confirmed that they were tyrants and not true lords as was believed until then … [Toledo] ordered all the information known to the old conquistadors [collected] so that … the [histories] could be completed, filled with truths about many things that were not told in the other [works]. [italics mine]  

The idea that Sarmiento’s painstaking research “confirmed” Toledo’s view of Inca tyranny confirms that The History of the Incas was meant to be more than just a neutral collection of information. In fact, the goals of the manuscript were threefold: first, to question the legitimacy of individual Inca rulers; second, to demonstrate that each of the Incas committed crimes against natural laws and were thus tyrants; and third to raise questions about the curacas (local Indian lords). If volume three of his work had ever been written, readers could have contrasted the barbarous rule of indigenous rulers with the great social reforms that Toledo was in the process of implementing. Even without the third volume, however, the comparison should have been implicit.

The single factor that made legitimizing Spanish expansion into the Americas so difficult was their distance from Spain. The lack of contact between the regions made it difficult to assert any of the usual causes for just war. Learned members of
the royal court constructed elaborate defenses of the Spanish actions, but it was, nevertheless, difficult to escape the appearance of usurpation. With Las Casas growing more radical, and even arguing, for the first time, that it was necessary to give Peru back to its rightful rulers, Sarmiento responded in *History of the Incas* that their was nothing rightful about the rule of the Incas. The depictions of sins, acts of barbarism, cruelty, and depravity attributed to the Incas are so numerous in the narrative as to be tedious. Instead of cataloging the many examples I focus instead on the assertion of Inca legitimacy that was so vital to Sarmiento’s argument against Spanish usurpation.

There was nothing subtle about Sarmiento’s rejection of Incan legitimacy. As he progressed through the thirteen generation of Inca who ruled the empire, he asserted that every one of them lacked legitimacy. According to Sarmiento’s narrative, prior to the migration if the Inca to the Cuzco Valley, the region was inhabited by people living in “simple liberty without recognizing any lord.”

Into this world came the Incas, led by the first Inca, Manco Capac. The Incas were depicted as tyrants before they even began to rule. Sarmiento records a speech given prior their advance into the Cuzco Valley: “We will go forth from this place to seek fertile lands and when we find them we will subjugate the people and take the lands, making war on all those who do not receive us as their lords.” The Incas were as good as their word and conquered the territory with what the narrative portrayed as characteristic cruelty. Whenever he has the chance, Sarmiento establishes contrasts
between the actions of the Inca and those of others that are legitimate. Thus, early in their history they confront a local chief who “although he was a late comer, he settled with the consent of the natives of the valley, and had been incorporated in the nation [italics mine].”62 By contrast, when Manco Ccapac led his forces into the land of Alcabisas, the conquered tribe laments, “These are men who are bellicose and unreasonable! They take our lands … Away! away! out of our territory.”63

It was not enough for Sarmiento to establish the conquest of the Cuzco Valley as the Original Sin of the Incas. It was not to be the final act of illegitimacy, but the first of many that occurred generation after generation. Although Sarmiento would continue to highlight conquests and examples of rule without consent, his key mechanism of delegitimization was through the failure of the Incas to follow their own rules of succession:

This Manco Ccapac ordered for the preservation of his memory, the following: His eldest son by his legitimate wife, who was his sister, was to succeed to the sovereignty. If there was a second son his duty was to be to help all other children and relations.64

This precedent only lasted one generation, however, and Manco Ccapac’s grandson, the third Inca, rose to the position despite having an elder brother.

After cataloging the entire Inca line and its failure in nearly every generation to pass authority to a legitimate heir, Sarmiento focuses his argument on his true objective: the current claimants to the title of Inca:

It is well established that it is a thing false and without reason, and
which ought not to be said, that there is now, in these kingdoms, any
person of the lineage of the Incas who can pretend to a right of
succession to the Incaship of this kingdom of Peru, nor to be natural or
legitimate lords. Only two sons of Huayna Ccapac escaped the cruelty
of Atahualpa. They were Paullu Tupac, afterwards called Don
Cristóval Paullu, and Manco Inca. They were bastards, which is well
known among them … These were the lowest of all, for their lineage
was on the side of their mothers which is what these people look at, in
a question of birth. 65

It was crucial to dispute Manco Inca’s legitimacy because his sons were still living in
the isolated region of Vilcabamba, with the eldest, Titu Cusi Yupanqui, ruling as the
Inca. Toledo had been dispatched to Peru to, among other things, establish Philip II’s
sole right to rule his empire. Yet, there existed in Peru a rival to Philip’s authority
and one with plausible claims to legitimacy.

The years of civil war and rebellion in Peru left little opportunity for the
Spanish to respond to presence of the neo-Inca state. By Toledo’s time a modus
vivendi had been established that potentially might have allowed Vilcabamba survive
parallel to Spanish Peru. Toledo was determined to keep this from happening.
Labeling Manco Inca a bastard was not expected to cost him the support of his
indigenous followers. Rather it was a means of changing the dynamic between the
two states. If Vilcabamba represented a legitimate, if enemy, state then the Spanish
would have to make war on it. War, however, was legally and morally tricky. But, if
Manco was illegitimate (for good measure, Titu Cusi was also labeled illegitimate),
then an attack on Vilcabamba could be justified by the fact that the neo-Inca were not legitimate successors to the Inca but “treasonous subjects of the King of Spain who had usurped his authority in what was now Spanish territory.” Usurpation, after all, was one of the just causes for war accepted by Medieval Christians.

It may have been in the interest of Sarmiento and his superiors to place the focus on the behavior of the Inca prior to the Spanish arrival rather than on the Spanish conquest itself, but I end this chapter with a narrative that sought to put the focus squarely on the behavior of the Spanish following the events at Cajamarca. Written by the aforementioned Titu Cusi Ypanqui with the aid of friendly Spanish friars, the narrative represented a direct challenge to the traditional Spanish account of such events. It was exactly the sort of idea that Philip II wished to see eliminated from his empire and exactly what Toledo and Sarmiento

Of the many interesting aspects of this counter-narrative is that it represents the degree to which, just two generations after Cajamarca, even opponents of Spanish rule had assimilated significant elements of traditional Spanish cultural, political, social, and narrative norms. Titu Cusi provides us with a prominent example of this fact, but throughout the Americas significant numbers of indigenous people found themselves, knowingly or not, forced to contest Spanish rule using a language, a set of laws, and even an understanding of history that was not completely theirs. Contesting Spanish authority within a framework that was Spanish in design and implementation had the contradictory effect of legitimizing much of the structure of Spanish dominance. Thus even though
Titu Cusi argued that the Spanish actions in Peru represented more of a usurpation of authority than a conquest, his means of making these claims, through a written appeal to Philip II, represented an implicit recognition of Spanish sovereignty over the territory.

Written a few tears before *History of the Incas* from his secluded stronghold of Vilcabamba, Titu Cusi Yupanqui’s narrative offers a fascinating alternate history of the Spanish conquest. Similar to Sarmiento’s work, that of Titu Cusi also made the issue of proper succession paramount. According to Luis Millones, Sarmiento’s suggestion that the Incas often failed to follow their own rules of succession relied too much on the importance of patrilineal descent. Millones argues that the tradition was not more ambiguous in the Andes than it was sometimes depicted. Nevertheless, when it came time for Titu Cusi to argue for his own legitimate claim to the Incaship, he followed a line of reasoning very similar to that of Sarmiento:

> I am the legitimate son, I say, the first heir that my father Manku Inqa Yupanki left among many others, amongst whom he left me in charge, with orders to look after them as if they were my own person, which I have done from the day he died until the present …

Of course, his relationship to Manco Inca would only have significance if Manco was indeed the true heir of Huayna Ccapac instead of “lowest of them all,” as Sarmiento suggested. Therefore, Titu Cusi continued:

> Also, let his Majesty know that my father Manku Inqa Yupanki, is the son of Wayna Qhapaq and grandson of Inqa Thupaq Yupanki, by the direct lineage of his forefathers the most powerful lord of all his kingdoms of Peru, anointed as such by his father Wayna Qhapaq and
held and obeyed as such in all the land for the rest of his days as I have been, am and will be in this land, after my father’s death.70

His choice to use European notions of patrilineal descent is perhaps explained by the goal of his narrative. Titu Cusi told the story of his father’s treatment at the hands of the Spanish in order to convince Philip II that the Spanish conquest of Peru was invalid. It was perhaps this need to convince the far away king, or perhaps the influence of the priests who helped him craft his narrative, that led him to make an essentially European argument in connection with an issue of Andean politics.

The case that Titu Cusi attempted to make was that the Spanish narrative of their conquest of Peru was false. For centuries the events as Cajamarca have received disproportionate amounts of attention from chroniclers and historians attempting to narrate the Spanish conquest.71 In Titu Cusi’s telling, however, the incident was entirely irrelevant since Atahualpa was never the legitimate ruler of Peru but, “a bastard,” whose mother was, “of base and soiled blood.”72 All the while the Spanish parried with Atahualpa they were wasting their time with an illegitimate pretender even as Manco, the true Inca, resided in the imperial capital of Cuzco. Thus while Atahualpa’s behavior may have justified the Spanish response, no such argument could be made regarding Manco. He had never given offense to the Spanish, if anything he had indulged them too much, so they had no justification for their treatment of him. Based on this understanding of the conquest, Titu Cusi, “thought it possible that the Inka dynasty could become a Christian royal house, peers alongside
the greatest crowns of Europe.”

Titu Cusi, however, was out of step with Spanish political trends. In the 1560’s there had existed the possibility, at least, that Vilcabamba would be allowed to survive alongside Spanish Peru – although certainly not as a royal house with the prestige Titu Cusi seemed to envision – but by 1570 Toledo was the viceroy of Peru with instructions to eradicate Vilcabamba and secure the Spain’s role as the sole source of legitimacy in the region. More generally, by the 1570’s Philip II was no longer interested in entertaining questions of legitimacy. The empire existed to provide a source of revenue, not a source of narratives. Narratives would continue to be written, some even with the support of the crown, but the debate had come to an end. Las Casas was dead, his works banned to the public and locked up within the Council of the Indies; Sarmiento’s work, despite its being intended to serve the king, also was denied publication. An interesting dynamic had emerged in the empire by the 1570’s. Just as the empire was growing more politically assertive – as evidenced by the effort to establish Philip’s sole right to rule – it became more ideologically defensive. When Charles V had called together the famous debate in Vallodolid in 1551, the question to the participants had been, “How can conquests, discoveries, and settlements be made to correspond with justice and reason?” The idea was to construct a positive argument for empire. Philip seemed no longer interested in constructing such an argument; instead his policy was based on the suppression of debate entirely. The king wanted no more talk of legitimacy and, relatedly, no more
talk of conquest.

In 1573 conquest ceased to formally exist within the Spanish American Empire. The Ordinance on Discovery and Population, promulgated in that year, although arguably of little practical consequence,\textsuperscript{76} constitute a repudiation of the reconquest as a useful model for Spanish behavior. Largely thanks to Las Casas, conquest had come to be seen as unsavory and thus the Ordinance, according to Henry Kamen, “definitively banned further conquests in America, and emphasized the preaching of religion and the protection of Indians as primary objectives.”\textsuperscript{77} According to the Ordinance:

\begin{quote}
Discoveries are not to be called conquests. Since we wish them to be carried out peacefully and charitably, we do not want the use of the term 'conquest' to offer any excuse for the employment of force or the causing of injury to the Indians…\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

In this brief statement Juan de Ovando, the primary author of the document, brilliantly diagnosed one of the sources of Spanish difficulties over the prior century. Conquests were messy; not just in a military sense but ideologically as well. This was particularly the case in the unfamiliar environment of the Americas where the old stories failed to provide the intellectual order that they had in the Old World and the new stories tended to create as many problems as they solved. Conquest required legitimacy and legitimacy was aided by a familiarity that was not present where discovery and conquest became entwined. As a result of the Ordinance, discoveries could continue but conquest would be replaced by the notion of pacification.
In Chapter 1, I wrote that the effectiveness of legitimizing narratives should be judged by extent to which the narrative is disputed in its own right or challenged by a competing vision. By that criteria the Spanish legitimizing narrative, based on a papal donation and the right of conquest, had been substantially ineffective. Suddenly faced with the prospect of ruling over the unfamiliar, the Spanish turned to what they knew, the ideas that had sustained them in Spain. Within a few decades, however, the prodding of the Dominicans had begun to unravel this narrative. Over the next half-century people from all over the empire attempted to piece a narrative back together even as a central narrative failed to develop.

The failure of the narrative, however, did not mean the failure of the empire. Does this suggest that narratives of legitimacy are unrelated to imperial success? It is, in the end, difficult to quantify the relationship between imperial success and legitimizing narratives. The fate of an empire is certainly determined by more than just ideas. We can, however, look at the actual behavior of people within empires and determine that participants understood stories to be crucial to their own survival. Thinking back to the ideological debates at the Han court, the Chronicles written for the benefit of Alfonso III, the Islamic historians crafting elaborate genealogies to connect Muhammad to Abraham we can observe that in all these places narratives were constructed as key companions to power.

As we turn to our final chapter, I argue in the that Spain’s ideological problems did not merely affect their own culture of legitimacy, but had consequences
for later empires as well. As it turned out, Spain’s decision to repudiate the rhetoric of conquest in 1573 was one of the key legacies left by the narrative chaos of the Spanish Empire.
I began this dissertation with a narrative of the contemporary world. The story constructed by George W. Bush and his speechwriters was meant to be illustrative of the importance of narrative as a legitimizing device. It was also suggestive of the fact that the importance of narrative did not decline with the emergence of modernity. Narrative would, in fact, continue to play a crucial role in the empires that emerged after the Spanish. However, for other European empires that emerged beginning in the seventeenth century, the Spanish experience was to leave a significant intellectual legacy. Spain had been an unwitting test subject in an experiment of overseas empire. They were forced to try out new institutions, new political and religious strategies, and new forms of economic exploitation. Yet, the greatest challenges that Spain faced were intellectual. It was thus in the realm of ideas that the lessons of Spanish overseas empire had their greatest influence. Legitimizing narratives continued to be constructed by other
European empires in the subsequent centuries, but they told stories of expansion that did not include conquest. The Spanish crown decided, in 1573 that “discoveries are not to be called conquests,” and Spain’s rivals absorbed this message. Conquests continued to occur, but the rhetoric of conquest disappeared.

The ideological issues that confronted the Spanish in the Americas seem to have been unique and this makes sense given the unique situation in which the Spanish found themselves after 1492. The concurrence of discovery and conquest that marked Spanish expansion in the Western Hemisphere was not only unprecedented, it was impossible to replicate. Other European societies would engage in their own overseas expansions in the centuries that followed, but always with elements of the Spanish experience somewhere in their minds. Thus, one of the many consequences of 1492 was that it represented the end of novelty in human encounters even as marked the pinnacle of novelty. This is not to say that humans never again confronted the new or the unfamiliar, but that never again would two societies encounter each other in a context of such pure novelty. The Spanish had no chance to make sense of their activities because, by the time the significance of their activities began to dawn on those who participated in them, the die had already been cast. The Spanish thus found themselves in control of an empire that did not make sense to them. In this final chapter I reflect on what happens to empire once conquest had been repudiated. It is my argument that a new narrative of race emerged in the nineteenth century and served as an ideal justification for new imperial pursuits even as the rhetoric of conquest remained out of favor. I offer these thoughts as
a preliminary attempt to establish the distinctiveness of the Spanish Empire both in relation to its forerunners and successors.

By the late sixteenth century, the Spain’s rivals had followed her across the Atlantic seeking access to their own empires. In doing so, they managed an incredible feat; they expanded into territory containing significant populations and, yet, did so without conquest. To be more specific, what was missing was in these expansions was not conquest – English, French, and Dutch expansion was far from peaceful – but a rhetoric that described their activities within the language of conquest.

The English did not take part in anything like the Spanish reconquest; instead they had their own experience of conquering and occupying land in Ireland. There are certain similarities between English activities in Ireland and those they carried out in North America, but where campaigns against the Irish were waged under a rhetoric of conquest, we do not find similar rhetoric regarding American colonization. In his description of the Virginia colony, for instance, William Strachey speaks not of a land that was taken, occupied, pacified, or any other term suggestive of conquest. Instead he describes, “that parte that was begun to be planted by the English in the yeare of our Lord God, 1606.” Patricia Seed observes that this focus on planting the land was a peculiar trait of the English. For the English, occupation of land was not enough to establish ownership; only the improvement of the land gave one a legal claim to it. This view is perhaps traceable to the English experience with Ireland, a land filled with people whose lifestyle was seen as barbaric by the English partially due to their failure to “improve” the land. In Ireland,
as opposed to the Americas, an additional goal of English settlers was the exploitation of Irish labor; an aim that was not as much a part of early English policy towards Indians in North America.³

Indeed, one of the most significant elements of the English depiction of their efforts in the New World was the degree to which Indians were marginalized from the story. Just as William Strachey began his account of the Virginia Colony with planting the land rather than conquering people, other accounts also suggest an occupation of empty land as a starting point. At times it was divine intervention that played the key role in establishing the conditions for English settlement. Thus, William Bradford explained that: “[t]he good hand of God favored our beginnings, sweeping away great multitudes of natives … that he might make room for us.”⁴ Even when violence did emerge between Indians and English, they depicted it differently than the Spanish did.

Spanish wars against indigenous societies were generally understood through the lens of Spanish sovereignty. Thus, even wars against unconquered indigenous groups were characterized as rebellions or revolts, whether or not the Spanish exercised any prior sovereignty.⁵ By contrast, the English never assumed that they held sovereignty over neighboring groups since their own claim to legitimacy was based on the fact that nobody had made legal claim to the land before their arrival. As a consequence, conflict between the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies and Pequot Indians was labeled as the Pequot War rather than the Pequot rebellion. Conquest was not completely absent from this conflict – Major John Mason wrote of his victory at Mystic: “Let the whole Earth be
filled with his Glory! Thus the LORD was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder 
Parts, and to give us their Land for an Inheritance — but it was not depicted at the time 
as an act carried out for the purposes of expansion. Puritan historians depicted their 
colonies as being beset by adversaries on all side and always in danger of elimination. 
The war was not fought for material reward, according to these accounts, but out of 
necessity due to the vulnerability of the English position in the region.7

The Dutch understanding of their own presence in North America seems to 
resemble that of the English in many significant ways. As in the English case, the fact 
that the land had prior occupants did not present a problem. In his Description of the 
New Netherlands, Adriaen van der Donck conceded that Indians were there when the 
Dutch arrived, but depicted them as being irrelevant to the question of Dutch legitimacy. 
The fact that Indians might have true claim to the land is not considered. Instead they are 
used to offer verification of Dutch claims: “That this country was first found or 
discovered by the Netherlanders, is evident and clear from the fact, that the Indians or 
natives of the land, many of whom are still living … declare freely, that before [the 
Dutch] arrival, in the Year 1609, they (the natives) did not know that there were other 
people in the world than those who were like themselves …”8 As an argument, “we know 
we were the first people there because the people already living there told us,” is not 
particularly convincing, but is certainly revealing of a general attitude.

Like with the English, no rhetoric of conquest accompanies Dutch descriptions of 
this sort. To the extent that Indians merit any attention at all, it is for decidedly
disturbing reasons: “… we deem it worth our attention to treat concerning the nature of the original inhabitants of the land; that after the Christians have multiplied and the natives disappeared and melted away, a memorial of them may be preserved.” What stands out from remarks of this nature is their passivity. People do not simply disappear, something happens to them. Yet, other than the fact that they would multiply, we are given no indication what role the Dutch would play in causing this disappearance. By the same token, the Indians are given little credit as historical actors in their own right. Make no mistake, Van der Donck and Mason are talking about conquest, but both feel the need to distance themselves from the implications of that fact. Contrast these Dutch and English depictions with one from Cortés:

When I saw how determined they were to die in their defense I deduced two things: that we would regain little, or none, of the riches they had taken from us, and that they gave cause, and indeed obliged us, to destroy them utterly. 

It is a horrifying description. We still find a bit of distancing (“they gave cause, and indeed obliged us”) but Cortés, nevertheless, has to take action to destroy them, just as it was the actions of the Indians that obliged him to commit this destruction.

As we have seen, the Spanish were willing to give credit to God for their victories, but were also much more likely to attribute success to their own courage and audacity. They did not feel the need to eschew the rhetoric of conquest in their accounts. In contrast to Dutch and English narratives that marginalize Indians – both as people who were defending land that was their own, and as potential subjects post-conquest – we can
look back to a statement attributed to Diego Columbus that I quoted in Chapter 4. In it the admiral remarked that, “the Spaniards had won those islands with great hardships and had subjugated the pagans who held them.” This statement displays no hesitance to depict the events as anything but a conquest. Hispaniola was not occupied, or settled, or merely discovered, it was won; it was also not an empty land, its people were not expected to disappear nor melt away, they were subjugated.

Seventeenth-century European imperialism in Asia was of a different character than that of the West Indies. Asia was a place of highly developed society, technology, and economy. Europeans had a more difficult time dismissing Asians than they did Americans. Not only were Asian societies clearly “civilized” in the European estimation, but in many places they lived in densely populated areas and were unlikely to “melt away.” In the seventeenth century it was the Dutch who took part in the most substantial expansion in Asia, but this expansion was not understood within the category of conquest. The absence of European conquest in Asia, was determined much more by a lack of capacity than due to attitudes towards the idea of conquest. Representatives of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) reached Asia early in the seventeenth century possessing sovereign rights granted them by the States General, but nevertheless saw trade as their mission rather than conquest or colonization. “Colony-like areas” arose throughout maritime Asia but it would take considerable time before these dispersed settlements were integrated into anything like an empire. The one example of something resembling Spanish-style conquest in Asia was the Dutch attempt to colonize
the island of Formosa (Taiwan). As evidence of their lack of capacity for such ventures, the effort ultimately proved a failure.\textsuperscript{12} Asia would eventually be the scene of European conquest, but in the seventeenth century, at least, Europeans had little reason to make use of the language of conquest in the near total absence of activities that resembled conquest.

To be clear, neither the Spanish rhetoric recognizing conquest nor that of the English and Dutch that denied it is morally superior to the other, but the difference in rhetoric is suggestive. Something had changed since Columbus’s day and certainly since Cortés’s. By the seventeenth century, European expansion in the Western Hemisphere was continuing apace. By and large, however, it was not being discussed through the language of conquest. Even the Spanish – since the 1573 Ordinance of Discovery – officially repudiated the old conquistador mentality, though this repudiation had little practical affect.\textsuperscript{13} The question is why this change occurred.

One can imagine that part of the explanation has to do with the differing cultures of the expanding states. Thus the Spanish, with their long history of conquest connected with the reconquest, were accustomed to the practice of militarily defeating and subjugating other societies and occupying their land, while this was not as much part of the national experience for the Dutch, French, or English. Patricia Seed suggests something similar to this, arguing that each of the countries involved in Atlantic expansion had their own set of ceremonies to signify the act of taking possession of territory. This is a compelling idea and Seed provides numerous examples that connect
the specific ceremonies that each country took part in with some element of their self-
identity. For instance, the Portuguese, with their history of maritime exploration, upon
first reaching the coast of Brazil took part in a ceremony which involved mapping the
stars above; while the English, coming from “a land of villages,” claimed possession by
building houses, erecting fences, and planting gardens.¹⁴ For our purposes, however, what
is most significant about these different ceremonies is that it is only those of the Spanish
(and to a lesser extent, the French) that acknowledge that they were not just taking
possession of territory; they were taking possession of territory that belonged to someone
else. It is this distinction that needs explanation.

One noteworthy element of the comparison Seed makes is that she contrasts a set
of ceremonies that take place in different eras. The examples with which she opens her
book, for instance, range in time from an account of a Spanish ceremony of 1492, to one
from the French in 1612, to an English example from 1583, to a Dutch ceremony of
1616. But the world was different in the late sixteenth century and certainly in the
seventeenth century than it had been in 1492 – mostly because of what had occurred as a
result of 1492.

Of course, the intellectual ramifications of Columbus’s discoveries were
enormous but the advent of Spanish overseas empire had also led to the emergence of an
anti-Spanish rhetoric on the part of Spain’s rivals. The creation of the so-called “Black
Legend” probably predates 1492,¹⁵ but the notion that the Spanish were a particular
brutal, rapacious, and licentious people found a wider European following after the
publication of las Casas’s *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* in 1552-3. That book served as useful anti-Spanish propaganda in the rest of Europe, especially for the Dutch who found themselves increasingly disenchanted with the rule of their lands by Philip II. J.N. Hilgarth notes that las Casas’s work represented, “exactly what the Dutch wanted” – between 1578 and 1698 they published more editions of *Short Account* than the rest of Europe combined.16

Dutch rebels highlighted Spanish mistreatment of Indians not necessarily because of sympathy for their plight but as a means of portraying Spanish barbarism and to warn countrymen of the fate that awaited them if they remained under the Spanish yoke. Indians became kindred spirits with the Dutch since they shared the experience of living under Spanish tyranny. Possessing incomparably productive printing presses and highly skilled engravers, the Low Countries were able to dominate the representations of the New World and fashion, “a version of America that matched the rhetorical imperative of the day.”17 The Indians therefore became sympathetic innocents who had been deprived of their liberties by the barbaric Spanish. William of Orange’s *Apology* of 1580 offers one of the more famous examples of the genre. After claiming that Philip II had murdered his own wife in order to enter into an incestuous marriage with his niece, had killed his son and heir (who William claimed was illegitimate anyway), and was guilty of ruling tyrannically, William turn his attention to the Spanish people as a whole. He accused them of having a character defect. Spaniards, he said, were “an accursed race, seeking to torment the whole world.” More specifically, they were “cruel, avaricious,
proud … naturally perverted, and tyrannical as ‘became too clear in the Indies.’” Worst of all, the Spanish sought to do to the people of the Low Countries just as they had done to “the poor Indians.” Other works lamented the “destruction of the Indies,” the “tragedy of the Conquista,” and suggested that, “the violent conquest of the Andes no less than Antwerp revealed the ‘true character of the Spanish race.’” The rhetoric owes a lot to Las Casas, giving some credence to those, like Sarmiento, who accused the Bishop of providing fodder for the enemies of Spain. I suspect that, had he been alive, Las Casas himself would have been horrified to see his life’s work, created with the intent of winning freedom for the Indians from bondage, toil, and exploitation, being twisted to support the propaganda of Protestant heretics.

Propaganda it did become, however. As the English broke an uneasy alliance with the Spanish in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, they became a receptive audience for such propaganda. Initially, the French and English would not necessarily have disputed the notion that force alone gave the Spanish title to their New World possessions but, as the Black Legend became more ubiquitous, that attitude changed. By the first decades of the seventeenth century – when the English, French, and Dutch began claiming territories of their own in North America – it seems likely that the propaganda had not only influenced their views of the Spanish but also their views of what constituted a legitimate act of possession. If this is the case then it is possible that the origins of conquest’s unseemly reputation lay with the narrative crisis of the Spanish Empire that helped to produce Las Casas.
Whatever the reason for the general tendency of Europeans to repudiate conquest, it is the case that, from the seventeenth century there are relatively few examples of acknowledged conquest of non-Europeans. Of course, imperial growth did continue and the most significant example of European expansion in the era was the eighteenth-century British expansion in India. This expansion shares some superficial similarities with that of the Spanish two centuries earlier. Both, for instance, were spearheaded by acts of private subjects rather than agents of the state – in the British case the empire builders were employees of the East India Company – and because of this both empires formed without a set imperial policy and, just as significantly, without an established political ideology. In India and in America, therefore, legitimacy had to be constructed to justify conquests that had already occurred. Unlike the Spanish, however, the British were reluctant to associate the word conquest with their increasing dominion in India even where it was wholly appropriate.

While some of eighteenth century Britain’s greatest military heroes, Robert Clive being the most notable, emerged in India, their victories were generally not represented through a rhetoric of conquest. The most famous British military action of the eighteenth century, for instance, was Clive’s victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Despite the fact that the result of Plassey was increased British hegemony within Bengal, it was not specifically fought in the name of conquest, but in the interests of Mir Jaffar, a claimant for the position of Nawab of Bengal. Even in subsequent years, the British claim to Bengali resources was justified by the need to fund the army so that it could defend
Bengal and maintain the new Nawab in power. The fiction of an independent Bengal
only ended, in fact, after British exactions had became so onerous as to leave the Nawabs
bereft of resources. 20

To reiterate, my argument is not that the British expansion in India took place
without conquest, but that at each step along the way there were means of understanding
what was occurring in terms other than conquest. So, for instance, when they first arrived
in India it was only to engage in peaceful commerce. Later, when they had established
semi-independent trading posts, they engaged in warfare only to protect those interests;
when this policy led to EIC domination of significant areas of India, the company
propped up Indian nawabs as the true authority figures. Even after they had become the
dominant party in the wealthy and populous Bengal region, they maintained the fiction
that responsibility lay in the hands of the nawab Mir Jaffar to whom they were only
servants. Thus, by the late nineteenth century, when they finally began ruling over
territory in a more direct fashion, they found themselves in charge of hundreds of
thousands of square miles of territory none of which had been conquered. The Indian
situation was not an aberration either. The emergence of a British Empire formed
through feats other than conquest seems to have been part of an emergent eighteenth
century narrative that increasingly found favor among, “creole elites and imperial
officials from throughout the British Atlantic world”:  

According to this conception, the British Empire had certain characteristics
which distinguished it both from past empires and from contemporary
imperial polities such as the Spanish Monarchy … The British Empire was an
arena of hemispheric and international trade. Its character was therefore commercial. The attachment to commerce … made the British Empire different from its predecessors or its rivals, most of which (it was believed) had been integrated by force, or had been operated more for reasons of power (often over subject peoples) than plenty.\textsuperscript{21}

Although narrative had been constructed to describe the Atlantic world, elements of it applied just as well to India.

In particular, we find in India similar ideas of a benign empire working for the plenty of all rather than for the power of the few. The British narrative for India, however, necessarily differed because it had to account for a large population of conquered people, something that was unnecessary in the Atlantic world where conquered people were generally not acknowledged as subjects. The legitimizing narrative for India was closely tied to the notion of an ascendant liberalism that would soon spread its benefits to Indians, who had for too long lived under “oriental despotism.” Developed in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this was a narrative that not only described the past but also included a vision of a future. In this future, Uday Mehta explains, “the ambivalence of ‘not-being-one-of-us’ and being ‘one-of-us’ would be resolved.” The metaphor that was constantly referred to in this narrative was that of the parent and the child: “India is a child for which the empire offers the prospect of legitimate and progressive parentage and toward which Britain, as a parent, is similarly obligated and competent.” The added benefit of such an ideology was that it was, “the basis for the justification of denying democratic rights and representative institutions to
In the minds of some Englishmen, at least, it was not just that Indians were children; they were deviant children, “who could be dealt with only with the harsh sting of the parental cane.” Even within a story of a paternalistic empire designed to uplift rather than exploit, space was made for a bit of imperial despotism.

While most acts of conquest in India could be understood within the legitimizing narrative as being waged to protect commercial interests, defend British claims, or even to spread the benefits of British governance, there were certain acts that did not fit easily into a narrative of the British Empire as one based on progress rather than power. When conquest was pursued, however, public reaction in Britain tended to be negative. We see a reflection of this in a nineteenth-century history written by George Cox. Throughout his narrative, Cox lauds the efforts of the British to bring civilization and order to India, and maligns acts of conquest or expansion carried out for base reasons. Beyond the moral ramifications of such expansion, he also saw it as counterproductive. In one example of this view, Cox describes Robert Clive desire to annex new territory. Clive urged the Prime Minister to “take over the sovereignty of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and pointed out that the surplus of revenue and expenditure would not be less than two millions sterling annually. The proposal was rejected on the ground that such an acquisition might render the British Crown too powerful and endanger the liberty of Englishmen.” In another example, Cox criticizes British aggression in Afghanistan and the Sind: “In truth, here as in Cabul, the British government was not merely acting in a way unworthy of itself, but it was spending millions in a vain chase for thousands. Sinde
was conquered, but it was not worth a tithe of the money spent on its conquest, and the dearly bought acquisition led in no very direct way to the great mutiny of 1857.²⁵ It is revealing that at virtually the same time that the British Empire was beginning its most sustained period of expansion, popular historians like Cox were depicting conquest as somehow unbecoming of the British character.

In nineteenth century North America we find another story of expansion absent a discourse of conquest. The young nation of the United States was undergoing a process of expansion to the west. Such an expansion, however, required a justification that could represent the emerging empire as something other than an empire formed through military aggression, massacre, ethnic cleansing, and betrayal. The primary narrative that emerged to legitimize these is one so ubiquitous that it has become cliché: that of Manifest Destiny.

Although many contributed to the development of Manifest Destiny, the man to whom scholars give most responsibility for the origin of the phrase was the journalist John L. O’Sullivan. Manifest Destiny first appeared in print in O’Sullivan’s United States Magazine and Democratic Review in the summer of 1845, although many of the basic elements of the idea, if not the actual phrase, can be traced to an 1839 piece O’Sullivan published in the same journal. Titled “The Great Nation of Futurity,” the article lays out the author’s view that the founding of the United States marked a sharp break with the past. In the first paragraph O’Sullivan writes: “… our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system,
which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and … we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity [italics in original].”

This is an example of a new narrative tradition created for a still relatively new society. O’Sullivan makes explicit that the United States was not beholden to any previous history – its people may have “derived their origin from many other nations,” but the American narrative would have, “but little connection to the history of any of them.”

The piece makes no explicit mention of expansion, and certainly not of conquest, but is infused with the sense of American exceptionalism that would serve as such a vital element in justifying imperial ventures whether on the North American continent, in the Caribbean, in Southeast Asia, or in the Middle East. This exceptionalism is rooted in the very origins of the United States. As O’Sullivan notes, “… the principle upon which a nation is organized fixes its destiny, and that of equality is perfect, is universal. It presides in all the operations of the physical world, and is also the conscious law of the soul – the self-evident dictate of morality, which accurately defines the duty of man to man, and consequently man’s rights as man.” Thus a narrative tradition began with a founding principle.

A good legitimizing narrative is more than just a representation of events, it constructs the past, influences the way one analyzes present circumstances, and creates expectations for the future. The narrative constructed by O’Sullivan posited the U.S. as a society that originated on the principle of equality and since it was based on such a
principle what it had done, what it was doing, and what it would do in the future could only be reflections of that founding principle. The effect that this view had on O’Sullivan’s interpretation of American history as well as future Americans’ understanding of American actions was significant. Within this narrative, American actions do not have to be judged based on their merits; if actors are just then their actions are by nature just. Thus, despite much that was troubling in America’s short history O’Sullivan could say without hint of irony that:

It is our unparalleled glory that we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement. Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage where men were led on by hundreds of thousands to slay one another, dupes and victims to emperors, kings, nobles, demons in human form called heroes. We have had patriots to defend our homes, our liberties but no aspirants to crowns or thrones; nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led by wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide [italics mine] …”

It is a less than compelling argument coming at the tail end of a decade that saw numerous forced relocations of Indian tribes and the Second Seminole War, which would continue until 1842, not to mention the continued slavery of millions of blacks, a practice that hardly accorded with O’Sullivan’s notion of an America governed by “the self-evident dictate of morality.” Without expressly calling for American expansion across North America, “The Great Nation of Futurity” certainly contains much rhetoric
evocative of expansionist aims: “The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficient objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march?”

The narrative shares some similarities with that of British India, but where the British narrative concerned the march of a political tradition marked by a set of ideals and values, the notion of Manifest Destiny was specifically about the march of white Americans. The British believed that their expansion had no victims because everyone benefited from living under their rule; Americans believed that their expansion had no victims because it was only understood as having brought new land to the nation not new people.

Without arguing that narratives like that of John L. O’Sullivan are the cause of imperial expansion – the actual motivations for conquest were various, although if we believe Brian Ferguson somewhat limited – the best of them can become pervasive within a society to the extent that when conquest does occur people understand and justify it within the logic of the narrative. In the United States, the notion of Manifest Destiny and the view of American exceptionalism that lay at its heart were to become central to the legitimacy of American actions at home and abroad. Sixty years after O’Sullivan wrote “The Great Nation of Futurity” the presidential campaign of William McKinley produced a poster with a clear example of the way in which these ideas had become naturalized. Amid pictures extolling the economic resurgence of McKinley’s
first term are images of the recently acquired territory of Cuba. Centered at the bottom of
the page in large red letters is the phrase: “The American flag has not been planted in
foreign soil to acquire more territory but for humanity’s sake (image 6.1).” The
statement had the clear implication that while other nations acquired territory and
established empires with only their own self-interest in mind, the United States only did
so with the interest of others in mind. Indeed, to some observers the pairing of America
with empire was so incongruous as to approach absurdity. Albert Beveridge – Senator
from Indiana, onetime president of the American Historical Association, and arch-
imperialist – could thus explain to those foolish enough to accuse America of imperialism
that, “[t]o have an empire one must have a monarchy.”27 One could similarly argue that
to have an empire one must engage in conquest, yet for the most part the empires formed
by Europeans since the seventeenth century failed to acknowledge what most would
consider the founding act of empire.

The McKinley campaign’s notion of American empire as a benign moral agent
was not a new view of empire. We have seen already that the British were committed to
a similar imperial narrative in their own domains. Alongside this notion of humanitarian
empire, however, a new narrative had emerged. This new narrative was extremely
powerful because of its unequalled ability to justify empire both internally and, because
of its cross-national origins, externally. This was the narrative of race.

The origin of racial understandings of human difference is a topic of great
complexity and debate.28 Regardless of how or when racialist and then racist thought
first emerged, it is undeniable that by the latter half of the nineteenth century race had become an immensely influential, if not the single most influential, mechanism through which those of European descent understood human difference. There were a variety of factors that led to the development of what has been called modern or scientific racism, but the contradictions inherent in European imperialism certainly played a role in the process. Late-nineteenth century imperialism had to make sense of a contradiction. Empires of the era wanted to extol their role as bearers of civilization to benighted people.
at the same time that they denied those people things like liberty and opportunity that were some of the key markers of civilization.

This was a contradiction that derived from pre-racial justifications for empire that emerged, with certain regional variations, in association with European overseas empires. Justifying expansion at the expense of people who lived thousands of miles away generally required the positing of some kind of social, cultural, or civilizational defect, which the imposition of empire would help solve. These defects generally were said to have emerged over time and as a result of certain historical elements. The notion of “oriental despotism” was one such defect, particularly as it related to states and empires of “the east,” that over time had produced a certain effect over the afflicted society. Alexander Dow could thus describe India as “the seat of the greatest empires,” as well as, “the nurse of the most abject slaves.” It was this legacy of “slavery” that, according to Dow, the new British rulers would have to remedy, but in doing so they had to be careful not to bring Indians along too fast. He wrote: “When a people have long been subject to arbitrary power, their return to liberty is arduous and almost impossible. Slavery, by the strength of custom, is blended with human nature; and that undefined something, called Public Virtue, exists no more.” Implicit in this was that Indians would learn to return to liberty from their British rulers.

The British desire to serve as tutors to Indians so that they could, in this case, help reestablish their “Public Virtue” shared something with the French notion of the mission civilatrice or the Spanish interest in evangelization, in that all three ideologies
established narratives of legitimacy that had natural ending points. Presumably, at some point, students no longer need tutors; civilizing missions eventually succeed in establishing French institutions, values, and desires in new places; pagans become Christians; and at the point when these things occur the justification for empire disappears. The virtue of a racialist view of imperial subjects is that it took traits that had once been seen as resulting from contingent factors that were remediable, and turned them into traits that were inherent and thus irreversible.

A racial narrative could also remedy another contradiction present in European empires having to do with the supposed degrading effects of climate on human populations. Prior to the emergence of a knowledge of biology and genetics, Europeans commonly believed that climate was constitutive of a society’s physical, intellectual, and moral characteristics. India’s climate was thought by the British to have a particularly “enervating character,” that made it nearly impossible for Indians to engage in, “the labour of being free.” Having been subject to the Indian climate for the longest period of time, the Hindu population was particularly affected – according to Robert Orme, Hindus were “the most effeminate inhabitants of the globe” – but even those who were more recent arrivals to India felt the effects. Thus, climatic conditions in India even “enervated the strong fibres with which the Tartars conquered it.” The implications of such an understanding were inconvenient for a British population who, by the end of the eighteenth century, were establishing a more permanent presence in India. Within this context it became awkward for the British to continue to cling to notions of climatic
determinism unless they were also going to acknowledge that the Anglo-Indian population would be subject to a similar degeneracy. Increasingly, though gradually, the Indian population was depicted as being the result of more enduring cultural and racial factors that would protect the superiority of resident Europeans from any degradation.  

Race served as the perfect legitimizing narrative for modern empires. Older imperial narratives tended to be too culturally specific – the Sassanid claim that they were heirs to Achaemenid Persia, for instance, may have helped establish their legitimacy in relation to rival Persian elites but did little to convince the Romans that they should give back Anatolia – or struggled to produce a theory of difference that could justify conquest. The Spanish attempted to establish a legitimizing narrative partially based on their historical destiny as carriers of the Christian message to new places and peoples. Yet at the same time, Indians became subject to brutal treatment and many prominent Spaniards argued that these subjects were not quite human enough to become Christian. The Indian’s supposed lack of humanity was repudiated by the crown and the church – an institution devoted to the idea of monogenesis or a single creation – even as baptized Indians continued to suffer from low status and exploitation. Race, by contrast, told a story that took human difference and explained it – not in the contingent terms of culture, environment, or history, but in the immutable language of scientific certainty. Many racial “scientists,” particularly in the United States, argued against the prior Christian view of a single creation and began to argue that human difference was the outcome of multiple creations.
Darwin’s argument that the races shared a common origin but that differentiation had occurred in the distant past operated as a sort of compromise between mono- and polygenesis partisans, but of greater import to the development of a racial narrative was that it provided a biological language for those who argued that racial difference also necessitated racial hierarchy. Differences in form now came to be seen as markers of qualitative differences among humans.\textsuperscript{33}

The racial narrative was one that stretched back to the beginning of humanity and suggested an emergent racial destiny for whites. As a justification for empire, such a narrative could preserve the notion of a benevolent imperialism, by depicting colonial people as eternal children who required the care of paternalistic Europeans, but could also support an exploitative and almost genocidal vision of empire.\textsuperscript{34} Race remained a potent force in imperial narratives at least though World War II. One of the effects of Nazi racial ideology – founded on a racial narrative of the Aryans – was to delegitimize race as a justification for empire. Indeed, empire itself became an increasingly dirty word over the course of the twentieth century. But just as actual conquests did not disappear with the repudiation of the idea, so to have empires continued to function long after it became a term of accusation rather than one of glory; the narratives changed but the human actions remained remarkably similar.

When the Philip II declared in the Ordinance on Discovery and Population that “discoveries are not to be called conquests,” he was issuing an order that had likely never been given by a sovereign. Stephen Greenblatt has written of the need to “resist the drift
toward normalizing what was not normal. This is an important reminder when thinking of the Spanish imperial project in the Americas. Too often the Spanish Empire is discussed within general discussions of early-modern empire, or overseas European expansion. The effect is to normalize its activities or acknowledge its distinctiveness but only as part of a distinctive European project. The Spanish Empire does not just represent one part of a larger process; it was the first empire to have to confront the pairing of conquest and discovery and because it did no other empire would have to. The history of empires had always involved conquest at the expense of near neighbors or known societies. Such expansion generally presented political or logistical difficulties, bit not problems of narrative. When, in the Americas, the Spanish conquered they also discovered, where they discovered they also conquered. What they struggled to do, was construct a story that sufficiently normalized, justified, and legitimized this experience.
NOTES

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1


5 Although not the subject of this dissertation, theories of warfare’s causes and origins constitute an interesting and vital avenue of scholarly debate. Margaret Mead famously argued that war was neither a biological necessity nor a sociological inevitability but a human invention like “writing, marriage, cooking our food instead of eating it raw, trial by jury, or burial of the dead, and so on.” Mead, “Warfare is Only an Invention–Not A Biological Necessity,” Asia XL (1949): 402- 405. Others have proposed a variety of explanations regarding the prevalence of violence and warfare among human societies. For a discussion of competing theories of human warfare see Stephen K. Sanderson, “Politics and War,” in The Evolution of Human Sociality: a Darwinian Conflict Perspective (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 308-330.


7 Like Ferguson, other scholars also suggest that war occurs due to a limited number of causal factors. Christian Mesquida and Neil Wiener argue that even in modern societies, competition over women is a determinant for warfare. Joshua Goldstein, by contrast, discovered a relationship between economic cycles and warfare. In another example William Eckhardt lays out what he calls, “dialectical evolutionary theory,” to argue for relationship between a society’s size, its level of civilization, and the frequency with which it engages in warfare. He concludes that large-scale societies must make war in order to deal with

8 To be clear, discovery is not distinct to the Western European experience post-1492 nor is conquest and colonization across large bodies of water. Austronesian speakers discovered and colonized enormous stretches of the Pacific centuries before Christopher Columbus was born and the ancient Mediterranean, just to give one example, was dotted with Phoenician and Greek colonies that extended the influence of their home societies. What was distinct about the Spanish experience with the Americas was the way that all the traits associated with the unfamiliarity of a discovery were mixed together with the features of a conquest and colonization. The Polynesians “discovered” as they spread throughout the Pacific but there are no recorded examples of overseas imperialism (beyond the range of the archipelago) that accompanied these discoveries. Similarly, while the classical Mediterranean world offers examples that share attributes with later maritime imperialism, the sea itself did not represent a barrier that separated societies but a sort of highway that allowed for the rapid diffusion of ideas, technologies, and people from one shore to the next. The Mediterranean Sea was not marked by the unfamiliarity of its societies but by its role as one of the key zones of human interaction on the planet. On human expansion in the Pacific see, Donald Denoon, et al, “Human Settlement,” in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37-79.

9 The crown’s desire to disentangle conquest and discovery after 1573 should not mask the role that the crown played in allowing the two actions to become paired in the first place. We see this in, for instance, the *Capitulación para la conquista del Perú* within which the crown granted license to Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro, “to conquer, discover, pacify and settle … the said province del Perú.” Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo ed., *Textos y Documentos de la América Hispánica, (1492-1898)*, 2nd Edition.
Contrast this pairing of conquest and discovery in the Americas with the activities of Europeans in other newly “discovered” lands. The Portuguese first reached China by sea in 1513, first began direct trade in 1517, and brought their first missionary in 1555, but it wasn’t until the 1580’s that we get actual campaigning for the conquest of China. In 1583 the Spanish Jesuit Alonso Sanchez, who seemed to have picked up the conquistador spirit while residing in New Spain, lobbied to gain support for the conquest of China. Sanchez won over the viceroy of the Philippines who approved Sanchez’ plan and sent him on to Madrid to present it to the crown. See Andrew C. Ross, “Alessandro Valignano: the Jesuits and Culture in the East,” in John O’Malley, et al. ed., The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences and the Arts, 1540-1773 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 336-351.

Around the same time, the Jesuit bishop of Malacca called for the conquest of the Chinese city of Canton, a task he believed that could be carried out with little expenditure of resources or manpower. See Geoffrey Parker, Success is Never Final: Empire, War, and Faith in Early Modern Europe (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 27. China never was conquered by Europeans, suggesting another distinctive trait of the Spanish encounter with the Americas: it was one of the few places on the planet where, for a variety of historical, biological, and contextual reasons, discoverers arrived already possessing both the will and capacity for conquest.


11 Ibid, 3-4.


14 Contemporary China scholars have begun to seriously question the notion of Chinese historical continuity based on concepts like Confucianism, the dynastic cycle, or the Mandate of Heaven. While they


16 Ibid, 91.

17 Ibid, 84. White’s work has been subject to significant criticism since he first rose to prominence with the publication of his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. Because of the applicability of his ideas to multiple disciplines, he has been subject to criticism on different fronts. For instance, “… historians have dismissed his relativism, literary theorists and intellectual historians have criticized his formalist methods.” For a discussion of the critiques that have emerged around White and the school of narrativism associated with him, see, Wulf Kansteiner, “Hayden White’s Critique of the Writing of History,” *History and Theory* 32, no. 3 (1993): 273-295; Chris Lorenz, “Can Histories be True? Narrativism, Positivism, and the ‘Metaphorical Turn’,” *History and Theory* 37, no. 3 (1998): 309-329.


19 Most significantly Obeyesekere was responding to an issue that didn’t exist. As Nicolas Thomas writes: “… the proposition that is offensive to Obeyesekere, and implausible for many others, is that Cook was taken to be ‘a god’ – a European category that only roughly corresponds with Polynesian *akua*. For
Polynesians, divinity was manifest in a variety of living things and people as well as in supreme deities; for them there was therefore nothing exceptional or outrageous in the identification of a priest, a chief or a powerful foreigner such as Cook with Lono or Ku.” Nicolas Thomas, *Cook* (New York: Walker Publishing, 2003), 443.


22 Ibid, 11.

23 The book has been the center of controversy and debate within the anthropological and historical communities due to the specifics of Obeyesekere’s critique of Marshall Sahlins’ work on Cook’s encounter with the Hawaiians. While *Apotheosis of Captain Cook* was lauded early on, it eventually became academic conventional wisdom that Sahlins arguments have proven more persuasive. See Gananath Obeyesekere, *Apotheosis of Captain Cook* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). It was in *Islands of History* that Sahlins first made his argument that Cook was understood to be the god Lono upon his arrival in Hawai’I but he expanded and refined this argument in a myriad of further books and articles published subsequently. On the status of the debate see I. C. Campbell, “The Culture of Culture Contact: Refractions from Polynesia.” *Journal of World History* 14, no. 1 (2003): pars 14-23, http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jwh/14.1/campbell.html (accessed July 26, 2007).


25 Ibid.

27 My choice of these examples is not intended to suggest that such limitations are the sole provenance of so-called “primitive” societies, but rather the opposite. When I bring up cargo cults in my classes, students usually chuckle at images of New Guineans proudly wearing boxes of Kellog’s cereal or tin cans in their headdresses even as they wear clothing and other accoutrements that fetishize a variety of carefully selected brands. A Ramones t-shirt worn by an eighteen-year-old college student has different significance than the “cargo” of New Guineans, but not so much difference as to support a belief that one group is irrational while the other is rational.

28 Pagden, European Encounters with the New World, 53-4.

29 Significantly, Pagden wrote the foreword to the paperback edition of Tzvetan Todorov’s, Coquest of America: The Question of the Other (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). This is an enormously important work that nevertheless contains some problematic elements. Chief among these problems is his argument that the literacy of Cortés and the Spanish made them better able to manipulate signs, and thus improvise in the face of unfamiliarity, than the Aztecs who, dominated by ritual, were incapable of improvisation. It is Todorov’s contention that the Spanish defeated the Indians “by means of signs” and Pagden not only endorses this notion but takes it even further: “the Europeans were unable to conquer the peoples of India and Asia not because the latter were technologically better-equipped than the Aztecs and the Circum-Caribbean tribes (they were not, and as Todorov is well aware, European firepower was of more symbolic than practical worth). It was precisely because in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea the various groups that came into conflict with one another ‘manipulated signs’ in nearly identical ways.” See, Conquest of America, xi-xii. While it may be true that the technological gap between Spaniards and Indians has been overemphasized as a causal factor in the conquest, it is nevertheless misleading to argue that no significant technological gap existed between Asians and the peoples of the Americas in the sixteenth century. More problematic in my estimation, is the notion that the differing outcomes of the encounters in America and Asia was the result of the various societies’ ability to manipulate signs rather than, for instance, the debilitating effects of disease on American populations after
NOTES TO CHAPTER 2


3 K.C. Chang has, for instance, argued that Neolithic China was marked by a number of societies who constructed their own distinct material cultures in North China Plains. By 4000 B.C.E. these societies had grown enough that began to engage in more frequent interaction with each other. This interaction led to a greater exchange of materials and ideas over the next one thousand years leading to less cultural diversity and eventually something akin to a single civilization. Cultural diversity did not disappear completely in North China but there did much greater coherence and unity within, at least, elite “Chinese” culture. This suggests that long historical relationships can lead to the expansion of a society without necessitating the conquest of one society by another. Chang, “China on the Eve of the Historical Period,” from Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy eds., The Cambridge History of Ancient China, Volume I: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 54-8.


Woodside argues that within what he calls the “Confucian kingdoms” of China, Vietnam, and Korea there were differences that emerged within social practice but that all three shared a, “very strong sense of a political "center" that received tribute from its peripheries and universalized its own principles outward to them in return.” The Chinese Ming Dynasty could thus justify its incursion into Vietnam based on the idea that it represented the center while Vietnam, based on centuries of Chinese occupation beginning during the Han Dynasty, was a natural part of its periphery. The Vietnamese, however, may have been willing to pay tribute to Chinese emperors but saw themselves as representing their own “central domain” rather than being part of someone else’s. Woodside, “Territorial Order and Collective-Identity Tensions,” 197-8.

Fletcher, “Reconquest and Crusade in Spain, 1050-1150,” 41

Ibid, 45-6.

Michael Whitby, Emperor Maurice and His Historian Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 204.

Ardashir is reported to have said that, “… religion and kingship are two brothers and neither can dispense with the other. Religion is the foundation of kingship and kingship protects religion. For whatever lacks a foundation must perish and whatever lacks a protector disappears.” Quoted from J. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrian Religion,” in The Cambridge History of Iran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 877.

Ibid, 696.

Whitby, Emperor Maurice and His Historian, 202-3.


This is quoted from Richard Eno, “The Spring and Autumn Annals,”


17 Ibid, 591.


21 Ibid, 58.


24 The Ottoman were not the first Turkic empire to find themselves facing this issue. Ralph Brauer suggests that it was ghazis who played the decisive role in advance into and the occupation of Anatolia. He argues that in the eleventh century in particular the Seljuk sultans Malikshah and Arp Arslan preferred to focus their attentions on Egypt and Ghazna rather than become embroiled in war with the Byzantines. This was a decisive century for the Turkic advance into Anatolia yet, “[i]t was the raiding activity of the Turcomans both before and after Manzikert that forced the hand of the Seljuk sultan in spite of his wishes and caused him to dispatch his kinsman Suleiman with a modest force to lend some air of Seljuk interest in the resulting conquests.” The Ottoman seem to have been more successful in marginalizing their irregular forces but this would be a significant problem for the Spanish in the Americas since, other than bureaucrats,


26 See, for instance, Suraiya Faroqhi. The author notes that in the sixteenth century and later the Ottoman made repeated references to themselves as warriors for Islam who derived their legitimacy from prosecuting wars against Shi’a heretics and Christian infidels. The danger of this, Faroqhi argues, is that it is only convincing so long as warfare continued and was successful. As Ottoman victories became less frequent, however, and their interests increasingly lay in maintaining peace along its borders it became more difficult to control the forces they had once encouraged. Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 114-16.


28 Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age*, 33-34.


33 Ibid, 19.

34 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 175.


The notion of Abraham as a figure disconnected from specific ties to Judaism or to Christianity and instead as the common heir of all monotheistic faiths emerged within the Qu’ran: “Ye People of the Book! Why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? … Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in faith and bowed his will to Allah … The nearest of kin to Abraham, are those that follow him …” Of course after the efforts of the biographers Muhammad would be more closely related to Abraham than others but when the Qu’ran was set down in writing this was not yet the case. *Holy Quran* (45:65-7).

Interestingly, the history of Mormonism shows the danger of unchecked revelation. Joseph Smith emphasized the importance of personal revelation for everyone, partly as a means of separating his new faith from hierarchical and institutionalized mainstream churches of the time. Even though he later tried to temper this belief, it was an idea that continued to be extremely popular amongst believers and since 1830, more than two hundred schismatic Mormon sects have splintered off from Smith’s original religion. The trend has continued up to the present and, consequently, the mainstream LDS church finds itself opposed by a variety of communities following self-proclaimed prophets. Contrast this with the history of Islam, where there has certainly been serious religious disputes, but nowhere near the number of schisms as in the history of Mormonism. This is despite the fact that Islam has been around for fourteen hundred years as opposed to less than two hundred years for the Mormon Church. On Mormon fundamentalism see John Krakauer’s, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

For a recent work examining the succession see Wilferd Madelung. The author argues in opposition to the historiographical tradition suggesting that the issues surrounding the Sunni/Shi’a split emerged at a relatively late time. Madelung, by contrast, finds evidence of dissatisfaction with Abu Bakr’s succession from the very beginning. Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
Although the early Islamic period was not marked by strict family rule, Madelung suggests that the correctness of this path was not universally acclaimed. It was generally true that tribal leadership was not strictly hereditary, but most tribes did accept the notion of noble lineages and, most significantly, within Mecca the Quraysh had adopted hereditary succession as the rule. There is some evidence that members of Muhammad’s family, the Banu-Hashim, were disgruntled with the selection of Abu Bakr, believing that one of their members would make the most suitable successor. They were upset enough that some sources report that the Banu-Hashim arranged for the preparation and burial of Muhammad privately and did not allow Abu Bakr to pay his respects to the Prophet. Madelung, The Succession to Muhammad, 5.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3


2 While the reconquista may not have prepared the Spanish ideologically for their experiences in the Americas, it does seem to have established clear methods of establishing political and economic hegemony over new territories. The process of conquering, populating, administrating, and exploiting new lands was carried out time and time again during the reconquest and these lessons were transferable to the Western Hemisphere. It is at least arguable, therefore, that the reconquista made the Spanish particularly well-suited to the exigencies of overseas empire. Arguments of this nature can be found, for instance, in Elena Lourie, “A Society Organized for War: Medieval Spain,” Past and Present, 35 (Dec. 1966): 54-76; Derek W. Lomax Reconquest of Spain (New York: Longman, 1978), 178; H-World listserv (exploration is uniquely European, November 2007); Patricia Seed, American Pentimento: The Invention of Indians and the Pursuit of Riches (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

3 Lomax, Reconquest of Spain, 175-6.

4 Thomas Glick suggests that myth building is an inherent part of the process of writing history; that it is not something that requires any well-understood motives or even conscious effort. He writes: “Historians,
whether critical or not, at one point or another in their work, embody in the past values which seem to
them to be the most significant or enduring of a given peoples' experience. Since values are culturally or
socially defined, historians, from this perspective, engage in a process of myth-building.” Even as he notes
the universality of this process he also observes that the Spanish seem to have an especially difficult time in
recognizing the myths that stand at the center of their historiographical tradition. He posits that conflicts
with Muslims in the Middle Ages helped to create among Spanish Christians a very real basis for fear and
it was this fear that became internalized into both individuals and the society as a whole. The result of this
was a pervasive fear of the stranger, characterized by the Moor, that permeated Spanish society even after
“the enemy was vanquished, the Jews expelled, and the Inquisition disbanded.” Maybe it was this sense
of apprehension towards the stranger that was brought over with the Spanish to America along with their,
plants, animals, and diseases. See, Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle


University Press, 2002), 85.

7 Ibid, 87.

8 In examining the rate of conversions to Islam in Persia, Richard Bulliet discovered that graphing the
number of conversions on the y-axis versus time on the x-axis produces the familiar shape of the bell curve.
Looking at similar data for the Iberian Peninsula Thomas Glick was able to produce a very similar looking
graph in which the rate of conversions is slow early on, gradually begins to increase, and then reaches a
tipping point in which large numbers of people convert in a relatively short time, before leveling off again.
Despite the general similarity of the graphs, however, the Iberian Peninsula would remain far less
islamized than Persia and Christians continued to be a majority population throughout the era of Islamic
rule. See, Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversions to Islam in the Middle Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle
Ages*, 24.
The term *mozarab* describes Christians living in Islamic territory who had become arabized. Even as the Islamic conquests left Christian kingdoms intact in the north of the Peninsula, the bulk of the region’s Christians continued to live in areas under Islamic authority. Over time many of these converted to Islam but many others retained their original faith even as they became reconciled to the new society and culture within which they found themselves. These Mozarabs, and particularly those within the Church, provided a key link between the Christian north and the Islamic south. Interestingly, as the reconquest progressed the opposite dynamic emerged as many Muslims found themselves living under Christian rulers. The *mudéjars*, as they were known, were eventually to suffer as the relative tolerance of earlier eras gave way to the more intransigent attitude of late-Medieval Spain. By the beginning of the sixteenth century all the Muslims of Castile were forced to convert to Christianity and as *moriscos* lived under constant threat of persecution until their expulsion in 1610. On the emergence of Mozarabs see, Sidney Harrison Griffin, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the world of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 151-5; On the Moriscos see, Julio Caro Baroja, *Los Moriscos del Reino de Granada*, 5th edition (Madrid: ISTMO, 2001); Manuel Barrios Aguilera, *Granada Morisca, La Convivencia Negada* (Granada: Serie Granada, 2002).


The author of *The Prophetic Chronicle* centered his work around a prophecy of Ezekiel that predicted that Gog would do battle with Israel. Gog was associated with the Goths while Israel became Ishmael, the eldest son of Abraham and in Jewish and Islamic tradition the ancestor of the Arabs. The chronicle suggests that the Ishmaelis had been sent by God across the Straits of Gibraltar as punishment for the sins of the Gothic people. For a recounting of this work see, Tolan, 98; Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 189-90.

Quoted in, Fletcher, “Reconquest and Crusade in Spain,” 34.
For a discussion of Isidore of Seville and Medieval accounts of Gothic origins see, Arne Søby Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths: Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002). Although not about conquest or imperial expansion the book does offer an interesting example of narrative construction arguing that the two men most responsible for creating an historical account of Gothic origins did so using a mixture of unverifiable information and information clearly borrowed from other peoples’ histories. Once put together this narrative of the Goths was picked up by later writers including Isidore. Isidore is specifically discussed in chapter 10, “The Origins of the Goths, Berig, and Isidore,” 301-317.


15 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *The Spaniards in their History*, translated by Walter Starkie (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1950). Chapter 4, “Centralization and Regionalism,” makes the argument most clearly. Pidal suggests a precocious nationalism that develops in the north and was the source of Spanish strength and resistance and the basis for the survival of Spanish Christianity.


17 The invasions of the Almoravids at the end of the eleventh century and the Almohads in the second half of the twelfth century are fascinating topics in their own right. These successive Berber Dynasties followed similar paths to power with each emerging in North Africa under founders espousing a more orthodox Islam than that practiced by many of their co-religionists in al-Andalus. Just as it looked as if the momentum on the Peninsula had swung decisively towards the Christians the Almoravids were able to cross the Straits of Gibraltar reunite Islamic Spain under their rule and check the southward progress of the reconquest. As the Almoravids faltered in the twelfth century the Almohads were able to sweep in and replace him. Despite their early successes, however, neither of these invasions were able to win back significant territories from the Christian kingdoms. In fact, when the combined forces of Castile, Aragon,

For many years, scholars made use of the term “crusade” to specifically connote the twelfth and thirteenth-century struggle to restore the Holy Lands to Christian rule. Efforts made Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula were sometimes denied the crusade designation, but more often were simply ignored in the literature. More recently, scholars have begun taking a more expansive view of crusade. Jonathan Riley-Smith, for instance, defined the crusade as “an expedition authorized by the pope, the leading participants of which took vows and consequently enjoyed the privileges of protection at home and the Indulgence, which when the campaign was not destined for the East, was expressly equated with that granted to crusaders to the Holy Land.” This definition made space for wars against Muslims in Spain – as well as those against pagan Slavs in Eastern Europe, and heretics like the Albigensians – to be considered as part of the history of crusades. An excellent historiographical discussion of Spain’s place in the discussion of crusades (including Riley-Smith’s definition of the term) can be found in the introduction to Joseph F. O’Callaghan, Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Jimenez, “Frontier and Settlement in the Kingdom of Castile,” 50.

Barbastro was a fortress in the taifa of Zaragoza which was assaulted and captured by French knights in 1064. O’Callaghan writes: “The expedition might be thought of as the first of the crusades, as Pope Alexander II granted to the participants the plenary indulgences characteristic of the last crusades to the Holy Land …” O’Callaghan, A History of Medieval Spain, 197. R.A. Fletcher has countered this view:
“… pope Alexander II’s indulgence has no connection with the campaign. The Barbastro episode presents several points of interest, but that it was a ‘pre-Crusade crusade’ is not one of them.” Fletcher, “Reconquest and Crusade in Spain,” 42. Supporting Fletcher’s view is Alberto Ferreiro, “The Siege of Barbastro, 1064-65: A Reassessment,” Journal of Medieval History 9 (1983), 129-144.


24 Ibid, 44-5.


26 Jimenez, “Frontier and Settlement in the Kingdom of Castile,” 54

27 Ibid, 54, 72.

28 Lomax, Reconquest of Spain, 168.


33 Ibid, 17.


35 Elliot, Imperial Spain, 79-80.

36 Lynch, Spain 1516-1598, 6-7.

37 Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, Granada despues de la conquista: Repobladores y mudejares (Granada: Biblioteca de Bolsillo, 1988), 5.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 4


5 *Archivo General de las Indias*, Lima, 122: 1568-1574, Cartas y expedients: personas seculars, 10 of febrero 1570.

6 The term Aztec derives from the name of the mythical homeland of the Mexica people, Aztlan, and was first used by Alexander von Humboldt early in the nineteenth century. There is no indication that the people of Mexico ever referred to themselves as the Aztecs. Their own codices most often use the term Mexica which has become increasingly popular amongst modern scholars. See, Dirk R. Van Tuerenhout, *The Aztecs: New Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 31-60.

7 The Archivo General de las Indias is full of such letters from a random assortment of subjects throughout the empire. The ones referenced here come from Lima, 122: 1568-1574, Cartas y expedients: personas
seculares. The notion of the “father king” ready to provide wisdom and justice to his subjects was
developed further in later centuries. See Thomas E. Anna, “Spain and the Breakdown of the Imperial


10 Of the four authors, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa and Titu Cusi Yupanqui never saw their works
published during their lifetime and, in fact, both were published for the first time in the nineteenth century.
The letters Hernan Cortés wrote from Mexico were published and became enormously popular in his
lifetime. As the environment for publication became more restrictive around mid-century, however,
Cortés’s work was banned from further circulation. Las Casas had his *Short Account of the Destruction of
the Indies* published. The book became enormously popular amongst Spain’s enemies, winning particular
acclaim in the Low Countries where more editions were published than in the rest of Europe combined.
His most ambitious work, the multi-volume *History of the Indies*, was still a work in progress when he
died. In his will, written in 1559, he forbade the publication of the manuscript until forty years after his
death. By that time Las Casas’s works had long been banned from circulation and *History of the Indies*
was not published until 1875. On Las Casas, see Anthony Pagden’s introduction to *Short Account of the

11 Stephanie Merrim, “The First Fifty Years of Spanish New World Historiography: The Caribbean,
Mexico, and Central America,” in Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker eds., *The
Cambridge History of Latin American Literature: Discovery to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1996), 58.


13 Quoted in Abbas Hamdani, “Columbus and the Recovery of Jerusalem,” *Journal of the American


Ibid.

Las Casas relates these events in Book III of his *Historia de las Indias*. I have taken the above sections from Sanderlin, *Witness*, 67. For an excellent discussion of Montesinos and the motivation for Dominican radicalism in Hispaniola in relation to other Holy Orders, see Patricia Seed, “‘Are These not Also Men?’: The Indian's Humanity and Capacity for Spanish Civilization,” *Journal Of Latin American Studies*, 25, no. 3 (Oct 1993): 630-52.

From *Witness*, 67.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid, 49.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Quoted in Pagden’s introduction to, *Short Account*, xxxix. Las Casas’ notion that conquest could be justified against these few communities was to have consequences for Las Casas’ historical reputation.
Early in his crusading life he proposed that larger numbers of African slaves be brought to the Americas to protect the declining Indian population and increase the royal treasury. Because of this comment Las Casas has been accused of being the “instigator of African slavery. At the time Las Casas made claim, however, he was under the impression that African slaves had been captured in a just war and therefore their enslavement was justified. When he later discovered that the West Africans who made up the majority of Transatlantic slaves were generally neither Muslims nor captured as part of a just war he repudiated his earlier position and became one of the few Europeans of the era to oppose African slavery. For a discussion of these issues see, Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession*, 64-9.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 The *encomienda* was a uniquely Spanish institution that dates to the reconquista and was established with the first Spanish colony in the Americas on the island of Hispaniola. In its original conception the encomienda was intended to solve two distinct but related problems. The first was a lack of available labor to work in mines and in agricultural enterprises particularly after it was decided that the enslavement of Indians was inhumane and unjustified. The second problem was that despite the presence of Catholic Spaniards on the island the Indians were no more Christian than when Columbus had first observed that “they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion.” The encomienda granted a number of Indians to particular colonists as laborers or as tribute providers. These Indians were considered free laborers but nonetheless had to give a certain amount of their time to laboring for their encomendero. In exchange the encomendero was expected to provide his wards with protection, instruct them in the Faith, and defend their rights to use the land for their own subsistence. Although intended to mitigate the evils of slavery, in practice the encomienda produced a slightly different form of enslavement under a different name. Las Casas himself began his life in America as an encomendero, but in subsequent years he would come to see the institution as one of roots of Spanish cruelty in the Indies and a serious

34 Sanderlin, *Witness*73-4

35 Ibid.

36 White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” 98.

37 From, *Historia de las Indias* in Sanderlin, 29-30.


40 “Bull Inter Caetara,” in Papal Encyclicals Online.

41 Las Casas, *Short Account*, 32-3.

42 Ibid, 90.

43 Ibid, 3.

44 Turn to virtually any page in *A Short Account* and you will find some reference to Spanish brutality and Indian helplessness. The examples I chose come from pp. 6, 11, 35, and 37.


46 Ibid.

47 Las Casas has indeed become the source of significant debate among modern historians. Most famously two eminent historians of colonial Latin America, Lewis Hanke and Benjamin Keen, debated, among other things, the significance of Las Casas. It was Hanke’s view that figures like Las Casas provided evidence for a particular Spanish concern with justice in the Americas which, in turn, offered a defense against the Black Legend. Keen worried that “a ‘white legend’ of Spanish altruism and tolerance, is not beginning to emerge from the writings of such scholars as Lewis Hanke.” Perhaps Keen’s most devastating rejoinder to Hanke’s attempt to use Las Casas as a representation of Spanish “altruism and tolerance” he wrote of a basic paradox: “the figure whose greatness as a humanist, historian, and anthropologist [Hanke] has so ably
and amply documented, is Las Casas, the supposed source of the Black Legend. Yet Hanke's views on Spain's colonial policies have a striking affinity with the attitudes of Las Casas' foes, who championed a 'white legend' of Spanish altruism and tolerance.” The appropriate replacement for the Black Legend, in my estimation, is not an equally distorted white legend but an understanding that while Spanish colonial activities may have been brutal they were not demonstrably worse than those of their competitors through the rest of the Americas who tended to encounter smaller concentrations of population and destroyed them just as effectively as the Spanish had. See Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America*, 7th ed. (London: Little Brown, 1965); “A Modest Proposal for a Moratorium on Grand Generalizations: Some Thoughts on the Black Legend,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 51, no. 1 (February, 1971): 112-127. Benjamin Keen, “The Black Legend Revisited: Assumptions and Realities,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 49, no. 4 (November, 1969): 703-719; “The White Legend Revisited: A Response to Professor Hanke’s ‘Modest Proposal,’’” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 51, no. 2 (May, 1971): 336-355.

48 Sanderlin, *Witness*, 27-8

49 Ibid.


53 To be more specific he changed his views regarding the lawfulness of conquest. Where in early treatises he had argued that baptized Indians were subjects of the Spanish king and thus guilty of rebellion if they resisted his decrees, in his later years he argued the more extreme position that the papal donation only became valid if Indians voluntarily consented to place themselves under papal sovereignty. Since the Indies had been conquered with violence and ruled by violence, however, then the Indians ad the right to resist and rebel against the unlawful seizure of their territory by tyrannical measures and the only right thing to
do was restore their land to the rightful lords. By the end of his life, therefore, Las Casas had come to a conclusion that the Spanish Empire was illegitimate, a notion that he had avoided assiduously in earlier years. See D.A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 97-100.


56 Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 16-17.

57 Ibid, 59.


62 Ibid, 27.

63 Ibid, 27-28. According to Elliot, these incidents took place as a result of skillful political manipulation on the part of Cortés, who first built up the expectations of his men before demanding that the group return to Cuba. As he had anticipated, the men reacted to this with their own demand that they stay in Mexico and continue their expedition. Elliot, “Cortés, Velázquez, and Charles V,” xviii.

64 Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 5.


66 Ibid, 10.

67 Ibid, 37.

68 Ibid, 47.


71 Ibid.

72 Ibid, 45.

73 Ibid, 63.

74 Ibid, 107.

75 Ibid.


78 Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 63

79 Ibid, 58.


84 Ibid, 86.

85 Ibid, 71.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid, 92-3.

89 Ibid, 95.

90 Ibid, 99.

91 Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*, 12.
On of the most interesting examples of this influence was Juan de Oñante’s 1598 expedition to New Mexico. Before Oñante, the reference point for Spanish conquerors was always Spain and Spanish history. This is reflected, for example, in place names like New Spain, New Castile, New Granada, or new New Toledo. Oñante’s conquest, by contrast referenced not Spain and the reconquest, but Mexico and Hernan Cortés after whom he modeled himself. See Lane, “On Colonial Forgetting,” 57.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1 I am generally dubious of giving pre-modern monarchs too large of a role in crafting policy. The slowness of communication meant that authority was necessarily decentralized, and one of the results of this was that leadership tended to be more reactive than forward thinking. Philip II seems to have been something of an exception to this. While he could not overcome the inefficiency of communication technologies, he was an indefatigable worker who made it a point to be involved in every decision, read every document, give every order. His reign might have benefited from a more hands-off approach, but it did mean that the empire was very much ruled based on his vision. See, Henry Kamen, Philip of Spain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Geoffrey Parker, The Grand Strategy of Philip II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

2 Antonio Garrido Aranda is the author of an excellent source on the connections between the incorporation of Granada into Castile and the Americas into the Spanish Empire. Although its focus is on comparing methods used in the evangelization of the two groups, it also offers more general comparisons. The influence of Granada on imperial policy in the Americas and vice versa is a relatively unexplored topic (particularly in English), but potentially a fruitful one for exploration. One interesting example of a connection is the fact that while Antonio de Mendoza was serving as the first viceroy of Mexico, his elder brother Luis Hurtado de Mendoza was the captain-general of Granada. Garrido Aranda, Moriscos e Indios (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1980).
In the introduction he wrote for the Hakluyt Society edition of *History of the Incas*, Toledo is referred to by Clements Markham as, “the regicide Viceroy Toledo.” Clements Markham’s introduction to, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, *History of the Incas* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1999), xix. It should be noted that despite the fact that the Hakluyt Society has played an invaluable role in publishing and translating innumerable primary sources related to the history of the Spanish Empire, it has also played an important though unexplored role in propagating elements of the so-called “Black Legend”. The Black Legend refers to propaganda efforts of primarily Dutch and English Protestants to depict the Spanish as particularly cruel, intolerant, and greedy. The famous chronicler Garcilaso de la Vega told a possibly apocryphal story that when Toledo returned to Spain he was chastised by Philip II who was alleged to have remarked that he: “had not sent him to Peru to kill kings, but to serve them.” Quoted in Kamen, *Empire*, 194.

In the context of Spanish American empire, the term Peru refers to the viceroyalty of Peru, an administrative unit that at its greatest extent covered virtually all of South America except the eastern portion of Brazil. The Inca, themselves, referred to their domain as the *tiwantisuyu*. This was a designation that described the empire in terms of its four quarters, each of whose quarters met at the imperial capital of Cusco. For a brief description of Inca state formation and organization see, Brian S. Bauer and R. Alan Covey, “Processes of State Formation in the Inca Heartland,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3, New Series (Sep., 2002): 846-864.

The PBS documentary *Guns, Germs, and Steel* – based on the book of the same name by Jared Diamond – offers a clear example of this phenomenon. In the series’ second episode, entitled “Conquest,” the outcome of the encounter at Cajamarca is presented as inevitable because of the accrued benefits of geography for European civilization and, connected to this, the disadvantages to which all American societies were subject due to the peculiarities of their own geography. The argument is ultimately unconvincing given the contingent nature of so much that occurred in that first encounter including the specific tactics used by the Spanish as well as the overconfidence of Atahualpa. There may well have been inherent advantages held
by the Spanish as a result of geography, with disease being the most significant, but Cajamarca is not particularly well representative of those advantages.

6 Rivalries in Peru tended to fall along ethnic lines. The Spanish in Peru, as well as Mexico and elsewhere, were successfully able to exploit these rivalries. This was a crucial factor in the Spanish conquests. After the conquest, however, these Spanish-Indian alliances tended to fall apart within a few decades. See Steve J. Stern, “The Rise and Fall of Indian-White Alliances: A Regional View of "Conquest" History,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 61, no.3 (Aug. 1981): 461-91. For an interesting look at the continuation of these ethnic rivalries in colonial Peru see Carolyn Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). In the book Dean examines the way the Spanish conquest over the Andeans was replayed yearly at the Corpus Christi celebration. One significant element in the festival was the role different ethnic communities would play in the reenactment. The Corpus Christi procession did more than just portray Incas as victims of Spanish conquest but also non-Inca ethnic groups as victims of earlier Inca conquests. As a result ethnic conflicts were relatively frequent especially between members of the Inca ethnic group and those of the Cañari who had been among the first indigenous groups to side with Pizarro and had fought side by side with Spaniards in many important battles.


8 Lyle McCalister has written a useful description of the creation and evolution of the encomienda that manages to address both the history of the institution as well as the historiography. See, McCalister, *Spain & Portugal in the New World, 1492-1700* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 157-165.

9 Quoted in McCalister, *Spain and Portugal*, 162.

10 “Las Leyes Nuevas, 1542,” in *Textos y Documentos de la América Hispánica*, 107-111.
In some ways Philip was more like the letrado-in-chief of his domains rather than the active warrior-emperor that his father had been. He was infused with the “letrado mentality” and this led him to make increasing use of councils. During his reign, the number of councils increased dramatically even as he attempted to maintain a close watch over all the empire’s affairs individually. On Philip’s governing philosophy and style see, Kamen, Philip of Spain, 212-241.
Kamen, *Empire*, 192.

Ibid, 195.


Ibid.


“Instrucciones al Virrey Francisco de Toledo,” 109

Archivo General de las Indias, Lima 28B: Cartas y expedients de virreyes de Perú.


Ibid.

Marcos de Niza is quoted by Las Casas in *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 113.

Francisco de Toledo was impressed enough with Sarmiento that in a 1571 letter to Philip II he described him as the, “most able man … I have found in the country.” Clements Markham translator, *Narratives of the Voyages of Pedro de Gamboa to the Straits of Magellan* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1895), xix. Markham’s introduction represents one of the few biographical sources on Sarmiento.

It is not clear what the process was for choosing these elites, but it is the case that they all came from outside the ruling ethnic group. Inca rule was far from benign and the empire was sustained through brutal conquest of people throughout the Andes and beyond. The indigenous elites who fact-checked Sarmiento’s manuscript had good reason for promoting a history that disparaged the Inca. See, Adorno, *Polemics of Possession*, 198.
Rolena Adorno has remarked on the problematic nature of the accommodation of indigenous people into histories of this sort: “Overall, the accommodation of Amerindians in historiography was not historiographical problem as such but rather a cultural, and even more immediately, a political one.”


53 Ibid, 5.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid, 9.

57 Ibid.


59 Ibid, 15.


61 Ibid, 45.
62 Ibid, 57.

63 Ibid, 59.

64 Ibid, 61.

65 Ibid, 192-3.


67 This is an issue Steve Stern discusses at length in the chapter entitled “The Indians and Spanish Justice,” in his book, Peru’s Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest, Huamanga to 1640 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2nd edition 1993), 114-137.

68 Luis Millones, ed., Ynstrucion del ynga Don Diego de Castro Titu Cusi Yupangui para el muy ilustre Señor el licenciado Lope Garcia de Castro, Governador que fue destos reynos del Piru, tocante a los negocios que con su mageslad, en su nombre, por su poder a de tartar; la qual es esta que se sigue (1570) (Lima: ediciones El Virrey, 1985), 7.


70 Ibid.


Most Spanish accounts put particular emphasis on Atahualpa’s rejection of the bible offered him in order to make this one of the key moments of the conquest. Patricia Seed suggests that the incident was much more ambiguous than usually portrayed. See Seed, “‘Failing to Marvel’: Atahualpa’s encounter with the word,” Latin American Research Review, 26, no. 1 (1991): 7-32.

72 Titu Cusi, A Sixteenth Century Account of the Conquest, 134-5.


74 There is seems to be a correlation between Philip II’s desire to assert his authority in the Americas and the control of publishing in and about the Americas. From 1565 to 1575 – a period that roughly coincides with Juan de Ovando’s attempts to establish a new basis for Philip’s authority in his empire and Toledo’s
attempt to impose those ideas on Peru – at least six different regulations were promulgated relating to the regulation of written material going to or coming from the Americas. See, Mohler, “Publishing in Colonial Spanish America,” 263-265.


76 Lewis Hanke saw the Ordinance as an example of Spanish decency, or at least, efforts to promote a moral empire, while Benjamin Keen was more skeptical. Instead of merely reading the Ordinance Keen suggested looking at actual Spanish activities after 1573 to assess whether life improved in any appreciable way for Indians. He concludes that since life did not improve – and indeed could not without radically restructuring the entire basis of the Spanish imperial system – we can therefore conclude that the passage of the Ordinance on Discovery tells us something about Spanish psychology in 1573 but virtually nothing about the actual nature of Spanish colonial society after that year. Keen, “The White Legend Revisited: A Response to Professor Hanke’s ‘Modest Proposal,”’ 341-2.

77 Kamen, Empire, 255.

78 Quoted in Hanke, Aristotle and the American Indian, 86-7.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6


2 Seed, American Pentimento, 37-40.


5 Kamen, Empire, 116.


7 This may indeed represent the Puritan view at the time but recent scholarship suggests that it was the Pequot themselves who were most vulnerable. They were increasingly isolated, outnumbered, and their confederation was in the process of being broken up by rival tribes. See Alfred A, Cave, The Pequot War (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 122.


9 Ibid, 190.

10 Cortés, Letters from Mexico, 223-4.

11 Although one sometimes sees references to a Dutch Empire in the seventeenth centuries, the Dutch themselves did not understand their mercantile activity in Asia and America in imperial terms. Indeed, even when their activities in Asia became more typically imperial, they never regarded themselves as such. See, Gert Oostindie and Bert Paasman, “Dutch Attitudes towards Colonial Empires, Indigenous Cultures, and Slaves,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 31, no. 3, Americas (Spring, 1998), 351; Anthony Pagden, Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 4.

12 Even in this case, we find a rhetoric connected with pacification more than conquest. On the Dutch in Formosa see, Tonio Andrade, How Taiwan Became Chinese Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Leonard Blusse and Yonghe Cao, eds., Around and about Formosa: Essays in Honor of Professor Ts'ao Yung-Ho (Taiwan: Ts'ao Yung-ho Foundation for Culture and Education, 2003).
The nature of the conquest and the conquistador changed. The first generations of conquistadors had considered themselves the heirs of the reconquista but within a few generations it had become unsavory to place so much emphasis on conquest considering that Indians were clearly different beasts than Moors. The interests of the crown had also changed. In the early years of the empire, conquistadors had often been troublesome for the crown, but also represented enormous potential for new resources at very little direct cost. As the empire grew and developed, however, the main source of revenue ceased to be plunder and increasingly came from the discovery of mineral deposits. As opposed to conquest, the mining of these deposits required a relatively well-regulated bureaucratic system to ensure the efficient extraction and export of those resources. Conquistadors came to represent a destabilizing force while conquest itself was a distraction from the extractive economy. See Lane, “Ends of Performance,” 57.

Seed, American Pentimento, 18.

Benjamin Keen, “The Black Legend Revisited,” 703.


Benjamin Schmidt, Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xix. Implicit in this view of Indian innocence and Spanish barbarism was the sense that when the Dutch became involved in America they would protect the rights and liberties of the Indians. Schmidt makes it clear that this intention quickly ran afoul of the needs of profit and the Dutch soon found themselves becoming tyrannical themselves. This serves as further illustration of the fact that what we are dealing with here are not realities within which the Spanish conquer and exploit and the Dutch settle peacefully, but representations. These representations sought to depict radical difference between Spanish and Dutch projects when, in fact, the biggest differences were probably associated with the scale of the enterprises rather than their morality.

Quoted in Hilgarth, The Spanish Mirror, 316.
19 Benjamin Schmidt, “The Dutch-Chilean Encounter and the (failed) Conquest of America,” Renaissance Quarterly, 52, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), 443.


22 Uday Singh Mehta, Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 32-3.

23 Ibid, 35.


29 That there is a distinction between racialism and racism is not something that is necessarily assumed and indeed, sometimes the words are used as synonyms. I follow Kwame Anthony Appiah in seeing the terms as different but related concepts. Racialism is the view, “that there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all
the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race.” Racialism is not an inherently dangerous view but it is a presupposition for the doctrine of racism which takes the notion of distinct races and adds the belief that the differences that exist are such that they warrant differential treatment of people of different races. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13-14.


31 Ibid, 8-9.

32 In an original and fascinating article, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra made the case that it was, “seventeenth-century learned colonists who, as they sought to defend Spanish America from negative European characterizations, invented modern forms of racism that scholars have wrongly attributed to the rise of modern science in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” It was his contention that, “the science of race, with its emphasis on biological determinism, its focus on the body as the site of behavioral-cultural variations, and its obsession with creating homogenizing and essentializing categories, was first articulated in colonial Spanish America in the seventeenth century, not in nineteenth-century Europe.” Whether “the science of race,” emerged in seventeenth century America or nineteenth century Europe (or India) need not concern us. What is significant is the argument that race emerged, like in India, from a contradiction between a desire to denigrate one population based on the effects of their environment and a desire to maintain the claims of superiority of the conquering populations. Cañizares-Esguerra, “New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 33-68.


34 Both paternalistic and exploitative imperial visions were infused with racist assumptions but the implications of race were very different for their proponents. The paternalists took the racial inferiority of various non-white peoples as the impetus for a sort of humanitarian imperialism that would seek to uplift
barbarians or savages as much as biology made possible. Others saw race as a justification for exploiting people whose race made them at best unworthy of and unsuited for the benefits of civilization, and at worst made them an obstacle to whites that needed to be removed. Most official justifications for empire came out of the paternalist school which. This created some tension as those who adhered to a more virulent form of racism were loath to accept imperial missions based on humanitarian ideals. This tension was particularly pronounced in the U.S. where imperialists and racial ideologues often worked at cross-purposes. The McKinley poster above, for instance, offered a message that had little appeal for those who thought white Americans should be the only beneficiaries of empire. See Eric Tyrone Lowery Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2004).

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