

# Bartolomé de las casas human rights missionary

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Bartolome de Las Casas was one of the pioneers and a champion of human rights in the most critical period of history. The context of his presence needs a deeper understanding. The Spanish Inquisition or the Crusades were 'justified' as a sanction granted by God. The natives were seen as uncivilized beings and the only way to 'tame' them was by using brutal force.

The genocide of the natives by the Spanish Inquisition resulted in many tribes erased without a trace. The natives referred by Bartolome da Las Casas were only to name a few.

The significance of Las Casas was his ability to push the law and have many inhuman authorities removed from the Council. Under such pretext, it would be unfair to use modern day judgment to criticize Las Casas. This paper establishes that Las Casas, given his time that he lived in and the kind of family that he was raised in, was justified in his manner of referencing to the natives. The world has not become a better place and our modern understanding of human rights and the violation of human rights, at least as expressed by the UN stems from the views of Las Casas.

The historical context explicitly implies that Las Casa himself was from an upper class family who then later had the power to negotiate in favor of the natives. Las Casas was himself 'gifted' with Juanico, a Taino youth for a servant when he was a little boy. So for a man of his stature who belonged and had the 'luxury' of the oppressor, was willing and believed he could stop the evil. He had the ear of the courts who were the decision makers. Although his supplications were met with heavy criticism, he was determined to stop the brutality towards the natives.

As far as the wealth was brought in, and exhibited in Spain from the New World, people were drawn towards it and were completely blind to the atrocities committed by them, and to make things worse, they were all done in the name of religion. Under such pretext who would have been a better person to condemn than a seminarian. The setting is a world where the masses are mesmerized by wealth and are willing to do anything to get their hands on it. This very thought and behavior is against the very religious belief that the colonizers practiced to massacre the natives.

Hence it is understandable if Las Casas is isolated in terms of being the only person who despite his disposition took the risk of condemning and putting his own life on the line to speak for the voiceless. Over and over the attitude of Las Casas is focused only on his description of the natives, whose plight is all the more pitiful, because of the brutal behavior of the colonizers. When he is describing the natives as gentle beings, it highlights their state of helplessness in comparison to the beastly behavior of the colonizers.

God has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural Lords, and to the Christians, whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful and calm, without strife nor tumults; not wrangling, nor querulous, as free from uproar, hate and desire of revenge as any in the world. . . . From a seminarian perspective, the natives are the humble sheep possessed of Christian virtues and the sinners are the Christian colonizers. The description of the natives is in stark contrast to the description of the colonizers.

The Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began to slaughter and practice strange cruelty among them. They penetrated into the country and spared neither children nor the aged, nor pregnant women, nor those in child labour, all of whom they ran through the body and lacerated, as though they were assaulting so many lambs herded in their sheepfold. Hence Las Casas urge to take up the cause of the voiceless natives to the highest authority possible, the royalty, portrays him as a humanitarian by nature and an un-ordained advocate of human rights.

It is true that he suggested to bring slaves from Africa as opposed to making slaves of the natives, but he later repented when he saw that the treatment of the slaves were just as bad. He later regretted when he had to witness the cold blooded violence that the Africans were subjected to, and repented. Though his repentance had no impact on the brutal nature of the colonizers, he is the only one of his time publically known to have repented without himself having inflicted any pain on any human being. The rest of the inquisitors took pride in what they did.

In a world where the natives and Africans were seen as deformed or incomplete or uncivilized human beings, Las Casas addresses them as 'people'. Bartolome de Las Casas reports first hand of the cruelty in its raw graphic nature to evoke sympathy in the eyes of the decision makers. For most part colonizers have been successful in erasing the past of the colonized but Las Casas did not let that happen. It is his record of what he witnessed that makes a significant mile stone in the history of human rights.

Among these gentle sheep, gifted by their Maker with the above qualities, the Spaniards entered as soon as soon as they knew them, like wolves, tiger

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and lions which had been starving for many days, and since forty years they have done nothing else; nor do they afflict, torment, and destroy them with strange and new, and divers kinds of cruelty, never before seen, nor heard of, nor read of. . . . The Language used to describe the native is a surface level issue given the fact that Las Casas was an ordained priest and a colonist. But he set himself up as an example by denouncing encomienda.

He also suggested peaceful co-existence between colonists and the natives which was implemented and successful until the colonizers could not refrain from provoking the natives. Hence it is completely unfair to overlook all of Bartolome de Las Casas efforts towards safeguarding natives over words that depict them as inferior to the Europeans. Had Las Casas not spoken for them, more people would have fallen victims to the genocide. It is not the language but the content of the text that should be the focus, since it is filled with compassion and evokes sympathy through the painful description of torture.

Also, his life was constantly under threat yet he was willing to walk the line for the cause he believed in, until the massacre stopped. Bartolome de Las Casas, can be isolated for his efforts to stop human rights violation but not to be judged over the language he used. He could be given the benefit of doubt that he used humble descriptions to invoke sympathy from a prejudiced court. Works Cited American Taino, Commentary from the perspective of a American Latino. <http://americantaino.blogspot.com/2007/10/bartolom-de-las-casas-witness-to-evil.html>