First Paper Assignment

(1) **What.** You are required to write a five-page (double-spaced, 12 point) paper. You may exceed five pages by half a page or so, but woe to him or her that fails to fill the fifth page.

(2) **What for.** This paper will help you to develop proficiency in making an historical argument based on sound logic and the judicious use of secondary sources. The better you are at arguing persuasively, reasoning clearly, and citing appropriate evidence the better you will do on the midterm, the final examination, and Life Itself.

(3) **How to do it.** Choose one of the three topics below. Besides the readings in the syllabus, you need to make use of at least two of the additional readings provided for each topic. Be sure the readings you choose to cite in your paper are relevant for the argument you are making in the paper; and to explain why you believe this to be so in the paper itself. Each topic presents a plausible account of an historical process. Approach the statements critically, assess possible counterpoints, examine the evidence and build an argument of your own. You can support the statements, argue against them, or show that they are incomplete. Your argument should be bold, taking care to anticipate and smash relevant counterarguments.

(4) **How to find journal articles.** All the additional bibliography listed after each question is available online through Harvard Libraries E-Resources. To find an article online use the Citation Linker at http://sfx.hul.harvard.edu:82/citation/sfx_local/.

(5) **Citing Sources.** In arguing your case, you must take care to refer to the readings you have done. You need not footnote well-known facts (eg, Cortes landed at Veracruz in 1519), but you should cite sources for evidence that is less certain or less well known. And you should be sure to cite the authors (or other authorities) whose arguments you are supporting or attacking.

(6) **Escape clause.** If you don’t like any of the topics below you may invent your own topic for the paper, but only if you overcome each and every one of the following bureaucratic obstacles: (a) put it in writing, that is, write, type, or print out the topic you prefer; (b) make an extra copy; (c) show it to your TF and secure his or her approval; (d) persuade your TF to sign and date your copy of the topic sheet and retain it just in case.

**Due date: Wednesday, October 13 2004 (beginning of class)**
Paper Topic #1 -- The impact of the conquest on the indigenous population

Discuss the following statements: The Black Legend of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico is false and exaggerated. Most of the harm done to the indigenous population was inadvertent, unanticipated, or uncontrollable. No one, least of all the Spaniards, wanted the Indians to die in such huge numbers.

Bibliography


Paper Topic #2 -- Social differentiation in colonial Mexico

Discuss the following statements: Though subordinate to Europeans, the indigenous population derived benefits as well as burdens from their status. Nonetheless, the caste system became progressively weaker over time, especially in cities and mining centers. By the end of the colonial era, class divisions based on occupation and income had already become more important than caste distinctions.

Bibliography


Paper Topic #3 -- Late colonial economic conditions and social tensions

Discuss the following statements: Social tensions increased in Mexico after 1763 because economic conditions deteriorated. Spanish efforts to reform the empire failed to reverse this decline and may have made things worse. Economic decline and the failure of the Bourbon reforms made some kind of revolt of upheaval almost inevitable.

Bibliography


