

William Tyler - Conquistadors, the Church and Genocide

- Morning, everybody. Morning, William. Morning Jude.

- Hi.

- How are you?

- I'm fine, and I think hopefully everyone else is fine.

- Yeah, let's hope so.

- Keeping the virus at bay.

- Let hope so. So welcome back William, and we have a new week, and so over to you. Looking forward to your presentation. Thank you.

- Thank you very much, Wendy. Thank you very much, and it's evening here in England. So good evening from Worthing in southern England on the English Channel Coast. It's a bit wild and woolly outside, but I'm well tucked up inside and looking forward to talking to you about conquistadores. There's one thing that every teacher dreads in having prepared a talk in advance and then a new book is published which explodes or seeks to explode the old truths. And that nearly was the case for me in this topic that I'm talking about this evening, conquistadores, because Fernando Cervantes, who's a Mexican by birth and an academic at the University of Bristol in England, has published a new book call "Conquistadores", and you can find the details on my blog if you are interested. And he takes a fresh approach to the subject. And the book had a rave review by Jira DeGroot in the London Times, and DeGroot wrote this, "books about the conquistadors are a customary packed with tales of atrocities.

Children are slaughtered, women raped, natives are tortured, brutalised, and murdered without mercy, or left to die of diseases which they have no immunity. Magnificent cities are burnt, treasures stolen. Now synonymous with genocide, the conquistadors seem to encapsulate the cruelty at the heart of the European colonial endeavour." He says "Fernande Cervantes is in his new book does not discount the brutality, he believes, however, that atrocities have often been exaggerated for political purpose with misguided conclusions." Well, I'm not sure that he manages to argue the case sufficiently in his book to convince me that everything we've known about the conquistadors in the past is dead and buried. Moreover, sometimes it isn't the factual history that matters, it's what people think is the factual history. And I'll come to that as we go through the talk. I don't think anyone can possibly deny the atrocities carried out by the Spanish, and to some degree in Brazil, by the Portuguese conquistadores.

The destruction, for example, by the Spaniards of the Aztec culture of Mexico and the Inca culture of Peru. Two cultures which were extraordinarily interesting cultures and in other

circumstances might have been able to withstand the pressure being put on them by the Spaniards when they arrived. And it's much the same as the story of the Zulu in South Africa, who might, if not for the British and the Boers, the Zulu might have created a large African state in southern Africa, which might well have been able to challenge any outside interference, and so might the Aztecs and the Inca. But that isn't the history. The Spanish conquistadors went like a knife through butter through Central America and South America, what today we call Latin America. So let's start then with some introductions. The word conquistadores in either Spanish or Portuguese languages fairly obviously means conquerors. Okay, that's obvious, but the word has a deeper and longer meaning. For centuries, Christian Spain had sought to recover the southern half of the country from Islamic Spain.

And they called that war which went for centuries against Islamic Spain, they called it the reconquista, the reconquest, and it was of course done in the name of religion, in the name of Christianity, to throw Islam out of the peninsula. And so here they take the word with them to the new world, conquistadors, and they take it with the sword, and they take it with the cross. It is a continuation of what had been happening in Spain itself. They were, as I say, both Portuguese as well as Spanish, but the Portuguese only land up in Brazil. They were soldiers, and they were explorers, and they subsequently became settlers. And that is a distinction with the French, Dutch, and British empires which are to follow in the early part of European expansionism in the 17th and 18th centuries, these people settled. They also intermarried. It was part of what we call the age of discovery, the expansion of Europe across the globe, and the Spanish and the Portuguese ideally placed geographically for that on the Atlantic. After all, the Portuguese held the Azores and Spain held the Canaries. So they had a base from which to set out westwards. They gained this terrible reputation for violence.

And some historians will argue, I think with merit, that this early European expansion in the 16th century by Spain laid down a model, if you like, for the expansion and colonialism of later imperial powers, like the Dutch, the British, and the French, and of course, much later the Americans. One of the books I'm using is also on my blog. This one is by rest Restall and Fernandez-Armesto, called "The Conquistadors", it's in that wonderfully brief, short Oxford series. I love these books. They're very well written, they're terribly erudite, but easy to read, and they're blessedly short, and in this we read, right at the beginning, "other European conquerors in the wider world try to emulate and imitate the conquistadors. Students of Empire Building have seen the Spanish endeavours, especially in Mexico in the Andean world, as models for describing and explaining the outcomes and encounters between invaders and indigenous peoples all over the world."

And of course, if you're listening from North America, from the United States or Canada, the same goes for the indigenous peoples of the Northern Hemisphere, as well as those the Spanish met in the Southern. This is a colonialism, an exploration, a settlement that was marked by brutality, by racism, and by exploitation. And those three dreadful words, brutality, racism, and exploitation, followed the European expansion over the globe, in which we can now look back from the 21st century and talk about the European domination of the globe. And that

domination has now ended, but brutality, racism, and exploitation of it follows us still, whether you are British, Belgian, think of the Congo, French, Dutch, and America, think of the Philippines. It follows us, brutality, racism, and exploitation. But in terms of the conquistadores, they are also accused, not just of plain brutality, but indeed of genocide. Eitan Ginsburg, the historian, has written this, "it was not the original intention of the Spanish to harm the natives they met. The Spanish crown, councils, and church considered the natives free and intelligent vassals entitled to be embraced by Christianity. However, at the same time, it was the Monarchy's decision to exploit the natives as taxpayers and as a reservoir of forced labour." So brutality linked to exploitation, but of course the conquistadors brought something else with them too. They brought European diseases for which the indigenous populations had no resistance. And it's been estimated that during the initial arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in Latin America, upwards of 8 million indigenous people died as a result of disease.

So you might respond by saying, well, hang on a moment. It's not then brutality and genocide that kills off the indigenous peoples, it's disease. Well, that's not entirely true. They would've been able to recover from disease as Europe had recovered after 1348 and the Black Death. They would've been able to recover. But what really did kill them was the fact that they were enslaved and used as cheap labour, and resistance was met in the most appalling ways. And so we can, I think, make a case of genocide, Aztec's Incas, for example, against conquistadors. They also exploited, they're after gold and silver. There's a quite different piece of history, which I haven't time to do tonight, which is how the gold and silver of Latin America, brought by the Spanish, stolen by the English at sea, people like Francis Drake, changed the entire economy of Europe and of the world. It's what gives a push towards capitalism. It used to be said that capitalism was the result of Protestantism. It's not true. Spain is Catholic.

It's the gold and silver, which was so rare a commodity in Europe in the Middle Ages, that was the problem. Now there's gold and silver in abundance and it all takes off. That's one of the huge consequences of the conquistadores in Latin America. A man who's very interesting, and I'll say a bit more about in a few minutes, a man called Bartolome de las Casas, who is himself Spanish and a clergyman, Catholic, wrote books condemning the actions of the conquistadors at the time. And one of the things he wrote is this quote, "their reason for killing and destroying such an infinite number of souls is that the Christians have an ultimate aim, which is to acquire gold and to swell themselves with riches in a very brief time and thus rise to a higher state disproportionate to their merits." Wow. An early attack, if you like, on untrammelled capitalism. But it comes from a Spanish churchman against the Spanish conquistadors. Now here in the 21st century, when all former European imperial powers have to reexamine their past, come to terms with their past, because we live in multicultural, multi-ethnic European societies, which are themselves of course the product of the same colonialism.

The North Africans in France, the Haitians in England, and the Afro-Caribbeans in England, we have to come to terms with what we have done. And they have come here over the last half century or so, and they are as British and as French as anyone with a white skin whose family go back generation upon generation. And we have to come to terms, and this is a big issue I

think at the moment, of coming to terms with past imperialism, if that imperialism and colonialism, as I've argued, has many and far, far too many examples of brutality, even genocide, think of the Germans in southwest Africa with the Herrera, of brutality, genocide, exploitation, racism, deeply ingrained. I'm pleased to say, and I'm delighted when I talk to my grandson who's eight, that he has friends at school, he goes to school in Brighton, which is a very multicultural society, and he has friends of all colours, all ethnic backgrounds, all religions, and he never thinks about it. If you ask him about a friend who may be Black, he doesn't say my Black friend. He said, my friend who lives over the road.

And that is something to be thankful for. But of course there are those in all our societies that resent that. 1492 is the key year. We all remember, I think probably wherever you are listening from, know the little rhyme, in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and that terrible verb, discovered the Americas. Of course he didn't discover it, there were people there who'd lived there for aeons. But from a European perspective, 1492 kicks off. But of course, 1492 in Spanish history is important for lots of reasons. It's also the year in which Christian Spain finally triumphed under the joint Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, over Islamic Spain. Seeing the surrender of the last Islamic state and its capital at Grenada. It is the end of the reconquista. Incidentally, one of the reasons that extremist Islamic organisation like Al Qaeda have hit Spain is because they believe that any country which is ever being Muslim is perfect game to be Muslim again.

And they see Spain as a Muslim country which has temporarily become a Christian country. Spain's monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, were given the title by the Pope, the Catholic Monarchs. Religion and Politics entwined in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. It's difficult. You can't get a cigarette paper between religion and politics. Think about North America, think about the English Puritan settlers in New England. Politics and religion entwined. And so it was with the conquista in Latin America and the reconquista in Spain itself. As Spain used an institution of the Catholic church called the Inquisition. The Inquisition had been founded in France, not Spain, and long before in the 12th century, but with its dreadful torture and killing for those who were ostensibly Christian, but then rejected it. It was an organisation of horror, and nowhere more so than in Elizabethan England, where Elizabethans didn't refer to the Inquisition, but to the Spanish Inquisition, because they knew that if English Protestant seamen were captured, they would be tortured probably to death. And that was the great fear in 1588 when Philip of Spain sent the armada against Britain.

Oh my goodness, they thought, we're all going to be burnt alive by the Inquisition. It was a huge fear, and that's what spread panic across England in 1588, and Spain and Portugal took the inquisition with them. It took it with them to the new world. They'd used it, of course against Jews and Muslims who'd converted to Christianity, because 1492 is that year of the expulsion, as you all know, and they took it with them and they used it against the indigenous peoples who had been baptised Christian, and most of them probably didn't know what that meant at all. They were baptised en masse and they had no choice about it, it wasn't a conversion in any normal religious sense, and then maybe they continued to worship their own gods and

goddesses, Aztec, Inca and so on, and that would lead to the inquisition intervening, torture and death following. Wherever the conquistadors went, the Catholic church went, and the end result was the same for the indigenous folk. Slavery, inquisitions, death. The European imperial powers have a lot to answer for, for the export of religion around the world. If those of you like writing essays, then I'll give you an essay title. Is India the jewel in the post-imperial crown of Britain as the largest democracy in the world? Is it because the Christian Church failed in India to make headway against Hindus, against Muslims, against Buddhists, against Sikhs?

It was impossible, pretty well except in South India, for the Christian Church imported by the British to make headway. Where they did make headway in Africa, well, we await the outcome of democracy taking real root across Africa, we've seen in these last few days the election in Uganda where the Church of England is strong. It isn't a good story if one is European, if one is Christian, it is a story of exploitation. It is a story about me, me, me, rather than us, us, us. In an article by Cervantes of Bristol University in the British History magazine, "History Today", he writes of the conquistadors in their religious faith. And he says this, "we can only properly appreciate the conquistadors within the context of the mediaeval religious culture that motivated them." Religion and politics were entwined in this European expansion into Latin America, and I would argue in the European expansion across the globe. And this leads to a fundamental problem facing all historians of culture and empire, particularly in this 21st century, which is reappraising the past in the light of current circumstances. The Black Lives Movement in my home city, which is Bristol in the west of England, some of you I think probably outside of Britain as well as inside, will have seen pictures of the 19th century statue to Edward Colston, a huge benefactor of Bristol, but who made his money as a slaver.

And the Black Lives movement tipped this statue into the dock, and it hasn't been put back, and it's not going to be put back. And there's a big argument about statues, and there's a big argument, as I understand it in America, about Confederacy statues. So there is here about slavery statues, much the same argument. So all of this is important, not just as a story of the past. I suppose when many of us were children, we might have had little books about the conquistadors to read at school or at home, and it was all jolly, and if you were little boys, it was great fun because there were lots of deaths and we never thought really about it. But now we have to think about it, because we no longer can look at it with a superior view, a European view, we have to look at it in a global way, because our own societies have become globalised. Our own societies are not monoliths anymore, and we've learned so much after the end of empire about what our own countrymen had done.

I have to admit that when I first started in adult education at the end of the 1960s, I wouldn't dare to speak to an elderly British audience about how bad the empire was in many respects. I would've been lynched. And now if I was to say how good the empire was in certain respects, I probably face lynching now for that position as well. Cervantes, in his book, refers to mediaeval religious culture, which to modernise, explains the conquistadors actions. They believed they were doing God's work. They believed that they had a mission to take Christianity and Catholic Christianity across the globe to convert everyone. It's no different than the position of

fundamentalist Islam in the 21st century. So we can understand that, but it doesn't excuse some of the actions they took under it, the brutality. Cervantes, in the article from the "History Today" magazine, which I quoted just now, himself quotes from the magazine, "The Economist", and he writes this. If I can find the page, I'll indeed read it to you. Yes, here it is. "'Let's Sue the Conquistadors' was the title of a recent article in 'The Economist' about the plight of the peasants of Peru.

Scattered across rural Peru are the ruins of estate houses reduced to broken port coats and crumbled walls. 'They recall,' says the article, 'the land reforms undertaken to alleviate gross inequality in Landholding and near servile labour relations that had stemmed from the Spanish conquest.'" In other words, those estates established by the Spaniards were, in the late 19 and 20th centuries, dismantled. They've certainly not been dismantled everywhere in South America. So we've got a problem of coming to terms with the conquistadors. In short, the past can be and often is very much alive in the present. That's what makes history so interesting. It just isn't the story of the past, it's also the story of the present. We can't understand who we are if we don't understand the past. Things don't just simply happen in the present without there being a history to it, whether it's Brexit in Britain or Trump in America, it comes with a long history behind it, and if we're going to understand it, we need to understand that history. Then if we're going to deal with these questions in the future, then we also have to understand where we've come from.

The article in "The Economist" argues that present problems in Peru which remain, and in other parts of Latin America, can be laid back at Spain's door. Well, we can't rewrite the past nor its attitudes. The past is what it is, and to take a moral stand against actions of the past, I find difficult. There's a big debate in Britain today about Churchill, that Churchill had imperialistic views. Well, of course he had imperialistic views. He was born in 1874 for goodness's sake. It would've been very odd had he had 21st views in the 1890s. You can't judge like that. But are there certain things that are simply wrong whenever they took place? And that's the argument against the conquistadores. There were things they did that were wrong then, not with the hindsight of the 21st century. They weren't without their critics, as I said just now, back then. So let's take a look at one of these critics, contemporary critics and a Spaniard, of course there were English critics, but they're biased because of the Protestant Catholic divide and because of the Armada and the rest of it. But Spanish, and Spanish Catholic clergy's criticism, now that's something different, and we can't just dismiss it. So this man is so interesting.

Bartolome de las Casas. Las, L A S, Casas, C A S A S. Bartolome de las Casas. He was born in 1484, he died in 1566. So he saw the whole extent of the early advances of Spain in the Latin American world, its colonisation, its settlement. He was in fact made a bishop by Spain and given the title "Protector of the Indians." Well, you might feel that that was somewhat ironic. Well, actually it wasn't entirely. He wrote a lot, a great deal, but his most famous works, first of all was a shorter account of the destruction of the Indies, and the history of the Indies. A shorter count of the destruction of the Indies? Who by? Well by the conquistadores, by his fellow Spanish citizens. He arrived very early in the New world and he went along with the morality of

the day. These people would have to be defeated, they would have to be brought to Christ, and they would serve as slaves to dig the gold and the silver from the mines to send back to Spain, because they weren't quite like us. He saw nothing wrong in that. And then he began to have doubts. He began to have doubts about them being used as slaves. A lot of them were dying. He found it difficult that he was converting indigenous peoples to Christianity and then condemning them to a life of slavery, and so he had an idea, and he sent the idea to the King of Spain, and his idea was that they should no longer use the indigenous peoples as slaves, but they should import Black slaves from Africa. Wow. Think of the double thinking there of Las Casas. It's an extraordinary view. And then he changed that view.

He changed to another position, and his third and final position was, neither the indigenous peoples nor Africans imported across the Atlantic should be used as slaves. He condemned slavery. That's why many regard him as the father of human rights. It's an extraordinary, a quite extraordinary move. This is the 16th century. This is a man saying, we should not have slavery. It hadn't really begun in what is to become the United States at the time he was saying it. This is what he said about the conquistadors. This is his writing. I've selected just a few quotations. "With my own eyes I saw Spaniards cut off the nose and ears of Indians, male and female, without provocation merely because it pleased them to do it. Likewise, I saw how they summoned the caciques, the Chiefs, out to come, assuring them of safety, and when they peacefully came, they were taken captive and burnt. They laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two, or could cut off his head, or spill out his entrails with a single stroke of the pike.

They took infants from their mother's breasts, snatching them by the legs and pitching them headfirst against the rocks, or snatched them by the arms and threw them into the rivers roaring with laughter and saying, as the babies fell into the water, boil there you offspring of the devil." And we wonder, we who are white, European, wonder why others think so badly of us. We should not wonder. "They attack the towns and spared neither the children, nor the aged, nor pregnant women, or women in child bear. Not only stabbing them and dismembering them, but cutting them to pieces as dealing with sheep in the slaughter house." In other words, they did not regard them as human. "With still others, all those they wanted to capture alive, they cut off their hands and hung them around the victim's neck saying, go now, carry the message." Meaning, take the news to the Indians who have fled to the mountains. This isn't some extreme left wing view from Black Lives Matter. This is a white, Spanish, Catholic bishop who saw this with his own eyes. The Indians were totally deprived of their freedom and were put into the harshest, fiercest, most horrible servitude and captivity, which no one who has not seen it can understand. Even beasts enjoyed more freedom when they're allowed to graze in the field. Some people, historians, in the 20th century argued he overdid it.

It wasn't like that. He was writing a polemic. So the stories he told were sexed up, if you like. And the reality wasn't as grim as de las Casas wrote. I don't think that's true personally, but it's impossible to prove one way or the other. But what is true is by replacing their own spirituality with Christianity, he introduced religious colonialism, and that's what I referred to before with all

European imperial powers, religious colonialism. This is Las Casas again, "Christ seeks souls not property. He wants a large part of mankind to be such that he may act like a ferocious executioner toward them, press them into slavery, and through them grow which is a despotic master, not a Christian, a son of Satan, not of God, a plunderer, not a shepherd." So Las Casas is making a distinction. Going after the gold and silver in the way that the Spanish did, and slavery, and all the rest of it is evil, but converting people to Catholicism, and when they fall by the wayside, sending the inquisition as it were. Now there's one thing to be said for the Catholic church in Latin America, quite distinct from the Protestant church of the English, the British in Africa, and that is this concept of blending. The Catholics believed that you could blend Catholicism with local religions in order that people accepted it more easily. One of the oldest Catholic images in Latin America is the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared in 1531 in Guadalupe.

The local Indians used that image of the Virgin Mary to link it with their own mother goddess, Tonantzin, and so today, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a mix of the Aztec Tonantzin and the Christian Virgin Mary. The Christians built their first churches in Latin America from the rubble of the temples of the Aztecs. But it is the borrowing and blending of the indigenous religions they found that was so important to the survival, in the long term, of Catholicism in Latin America, even though that Catholicism is very distinct, often, from that found in Europe. So the conquistadors, the most famous of whom are Cortes and Pizarro, Cortez against the Aztecs, Pizarro against the Inca. I think now most people accept the violence, accept as truthful, as true, the violence, the horror of it. But as I say, Cervantes in the University of Bristol, his book argues that, well, and remember, he's Mexican, he's not European, argues that actually it must be taken in the context of its time and isn't so bad. I'm sorry, I still find that difficult, very difficult. Now I've kept talking about Spain and I have mentioned Portugal.

Now as all of you know, the only Portuguese part of Latin America is Brazil, and there's a reason for that, and it's a religious reason. In the treaty of Tordesillas, which was signed between Portugal and Spain in 1494, and set up by the Pope, the world was divided into two, one half Portuguese, one half Spain. To hell with England, France, anywhere else. This was going to be a Catholic world dominated by Spain and Portugal, and there was an imaginary line drawn to the west of the Cape Verde islands. It gave Portugal the land to the east of the line and Spain the land to the west. And Brazil is the bit that sticks out of Latin America. So it's the bit the Portuguese got. And so today, Brazil is Portuguese, and the reason, incidentally, that Portugal is one of the most used languages on the internet, and Spain got the rest of South America. All but the French, Dutch, and British little bits up in Guyana. Everything else is Spanish. A later talk that I'm going to be doing for Lockdown University says, or answers the question, why then did they not move into North America? And the answer is they did, but were thrown out. But today, today we know the Hispanic vote is important, but we also know of the demographic changes in the United States with Spanish speakers.

Another fascinating aspect, but that's a different relationship than Latin America. Although of course it will raise interesting questions, once we get a Hispanic in the White House, in terms of



deals with South America. South America's economy of riches are, yes, they are being exploited by the United States, but there's far more economic links that can be forged. It's going to be fascinating to see that, but of course you answer very quickly, but South America is hardly, William, Democratic. No, it isn't. And there's an interesting question. I said I gave you one essay question, maybe you didn't like it, you'd like another one. Another question will be, how far can you attribute the authoritarianism in Latin America to the presence of the hierarchical Catholic church? Answer in 5,000 words. It's an interesting question. Many dictators in South America have claimed to be good Catholics. Very interesting. So the treaty of Tordesillas is important, and it's important for another reason.

And the other reason is, it's the first example of treaties made by European powers about indigenous people, in which indigenous people have no say at all. Nobody consulted the indigenous peoples of Latin and South America about the Treaty of Tordesillas. No one. Or you get unbalanced treaties like those in North America, in the United States and Canada with indigenous peoples, treaties that were meaningless, and the British wherever the British went, and the French. We discussed these peoples without them being present. Today is the anniversary of the first meeting of the peace of Versailles after the end of the First War, and there peoples around the world were moved around as though they were chess pieces on a board by the European and American victors of the war. No one asked them what they thought. Not even Woodrow Wilson, a hero of mine, but even Woodrow Wilson didn't go as far as to say, they themselves should have a voice.

So the Treaty of Tordesillas is another example of how the conquistadors period provided this template for all European imperialism and colonialism over the decades to come. But as always, with history and talking to adults, you don't have to agree with me. It would be a sad world if everyone agreed with me. So as ever, the final verdict is yours. You must decide what you think. You must decide what you think about the issues that are raised today. They're not easy to resolve and there's genuine opinions on all sides. But I think it beholds all of us to actually formulate an opinion, and to formulate it as far as we can on the facts that we know and understand. But your interpretation of the same facts and mine may be different, but fair enough, that's called democracy. In the "History Today" article I referred to, I wanted to quote two things to you. First of all, this one. "The uncritical ease with which we tend to condemn the conquistadors often tells us much more about our modern sense of shame in the face of the devastating effects of European expansion than it does about the people who first initiated those processes without an inkling of where they would lead."

So don't blame the conquistadors, they had no idea that by the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century as it were, half the globe is painted British red, no idea. And then Cervantes makes another point right at the end of his article. "The need to learn from the legacy of a group of men who, with all their undeniable failures, still have much to teach a world increasingly prone to condemn from a self-righteous but blinkered perspective." And that's the choice. We mustn't be self-righteous in condemning the past. That's silly. But there are many who would. On the other hand, we cannot be blind to the effects of that past on our present. I wrote on my blog a piece

about the statue in Bristol when it was thrown into harbour, and I tried to say that I agreed that the statue should come down. Why? Because Bristol is not the Bristol I was born in in the 1940s, Bristol is now a very multicultural, multi-ethnic society with large numbers of people who came from the Caribbean. And their views must be taken into account. Their views are as valid as mine. And what I think should have happened is that the council should have taken it down a long time previously, and agreed to, just agreed that this was part of a past, which did not resonate well with a large percentage of the city. And now they've been forced to do it. How much better if they had done it? That that's my view. Your view may be that the past should remain the past and it should perhaps just have, as many have said, the statue should have remained with a little plaque on it. He gave all this money to Bristol, but all the money came from the slave trade. We have to come to terms with it, because we have to all live together. We've seen what happens in the United States with a division within society and those appalling pictures from the Capitol, but there, for the grace of God, go the rest of us.

It's not an American phenomenon alone, it's a 21st phenomenon of a globalisation where we are all mixed up together in a way that wasn't perhaps so a hundred years ago. And some people are being left behind, many people are being left behind, and America isn't the only place. In a post-industrial Europe and America where people are being left behind without the skills to function in a 21st century it raises all sorts of questions. My joy with teaching history, my joy with reading is to try and understand, and to try and understand how it affects people's decisions today. Why are those people carrying confederate flags into the Capitol? What's behind that? It's not just, it's not Trump in that sense. It's a whole history, a long line. A long line, and the same is true here in Britain. The same is true in France. It's everywhere. We have to come to terms with history. If you like, I might go as far as to say that history is the most important topic to teach in schools in the 21st century. But the problem then comes, what sort of history do you teach? How, for example, do you teach the American Civil War? How do you teach it? How do the Germans teach the Second Reich? Big questions at the moment in Germany about teaching about the Second Reich. So that's why I'm interested, but I've got a final thought. You don't get away as easily as that.

My last words are to say, if you wish to understand Latin America today, Central and South America, with all its insecurities, all its uncertainties, then you need to start with an understanding of the conquistador period. And if you wish to understand the current critical agenda in the western world of European imperialism and colonialism, you also need to start with the conquistadors. It's a good starting place. If I was drawing up a curriculum for schools, then the conquistadors as the beginning of modern history might be a splendid place to start that history. I'm going to finally finish with a quotation. It's from an American sociologist and historian who wrote in the late 1930s, 20th century, called W.E.B. DuBois, D U capital B O I S, DuBois. And DuBois wrote, "we can only understand the present by continually referring to and understanding the past. When problems arise, we must always remember that, while their solution lies in the present, their cause and their explanation lie in the past." Let me read that last bit again. "Always remember that while their solution lies in the present, their cause and their explanation lie in the past." Thank you ever so much for listening. I hope that has broken,

those of you in lockdown, I hope it's taken your minds off it, at least for an hour or so. Thanks for listening.

- Thank you, William. That was excellent.

- Thanks, I've got some questions coming up on my.

- Good.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Did horses give an advantage in battle?

A: Whoa, what a fantastically good question. Yes, they did. But the interesting, yes they did is the simple answer to that question. But there has been a lot of academic debate on whether the technology of European weapons, superiority over Aztec and Inca weapons, was the determining factor, and there's a lot of argument which says it wasn't. But if you think about horses, think about North America, think that the indigenous tribes of North America did not have horses, but they very soon acquired them, and very soon became extraordinarily proficient, the indigenous people of the plains in the United States became extremely able horseman, and it helped to prolong those wars in the States. So, I think the answer has to be yes, but yes, but. It is true that the Aztecs and the Incas were rather frightened of these horses. I don't think there's, unless an American friend tells me otherwise, I don't think the Native Americans were so worried about them. But of course that's a story of the slow advance across the continent by them.

Q: What years are you talking about?

A: I'm talking about the years, roughly the first half of the 16th century. Devora asked that. First half of the 16th century. Oh, I love that. Hang on, what's their name? That's a very good. Justin, what a fantastic comment.

Q: The syphilis, was this a counter attack by the indigenous?

A: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. Well that's a really interesting point. "A New History of the Aztecs." Yes, absolutely, by Camille Townsend. Thanks for bringing people's attention to that. And then, oh yes, you've got some really interesting points tonight. I'm not just buttering you up. I think they're really interesting.

Isn't it ironic, Rochelle writes, that today Spain offers free land to South Americans if they will come to farm. This is a result of such a low birth rate in Spain. Yes, I mean, the links in the 21st century between former imperial past and former imperial peoples is an extraordinary one, and this is but the latest of that, of South Americans going back. I don't think if I was South American

I'd go back to farm in Spain, I definitely would sign for Real Madrid if I had any ability as a footballer.

Q: Yes, were the Aztecs and Incas brutal?

A: Yes, they were. Yes they were, and they were to the peoples they conquered. Yes, all of that is true. It's not a question of of right and wrong, it's degrees of wrong. The point about the wrongness of the conquistadors, which I've tried to emphasise, is that it created this template for European expansion and that that's been a problem, and is a problem for all of us in the 21st century. Yes, absolutely right. In 1492, the Spanish Inquisition acted against Jews. Absolutely, and took their wealth, yes, did all of that. Do you want some good news about 1492 in Spain? In 1492, the Spanish produced the first ever dictionary in Europe, a dictionary as you and I know it, with words, English dictionary, English words, and then a definition of what they meant.

It was the Spanish who did that, before the English, before the French, before the Italians, before everybody, and it was the same year, 1492. So culture is a funny thing. At the same time as they've been horrendous to Jews and Muslims, and in the new world they're going to be horrendous to Inca and Aztecs, they're producing this fantastic cultural artefact. Culture isn't either good or bad, it's always mixed.

Q: Do I support the pulling down the statues of those who've fallen out of favour?

A: I'm not sure, Robert, what you might mean by fallen out of favour. If I think it affects people living today, like in my city of Bristol, those from the Caribbean who were only in the Caribbean because of slavery, they're now in Bristol, which is a great slave port. Then I do think, I don't want to pull them down in the sense of letting a mob pull them down. I think that council should democratically remove them. That's what I think. But I think you can go too far. The idea that the national trust in Britain wants to produce Churchill's house at Chartwell and to emphasise his imperialism is sort of, in a negative way, is I think nonsense. Maybe it's a question of how far away it is. I mean, the slave trade is now a long, long way back in time in Britain. Whereas Churchill is still someone that was alive in my lifetime, in 20 years of my life.

Q: What do you suggest we do with the toppled statues of the Confederacy?

A: Now, well, you've answered your own question. Should we toss them? No. Build museums? Yes, and explain. History doesn't have to be wonderful, and doesn't have to be, what should I say, we don't have to agree with the history. We have to understand the history. So putting statues of the Confederacy, and no one doubts, for example, that Robert E. Lee was one of the greatest generals we've seen in the 19th century, and wider than that. So we can't take away his generalship from him, nor should we forget of the slaves held by politicians in the north. You've got to present it warts and all, if you like. But I would be strongly in favour of housing museum, in my city of Bristol, there was a commonwealth museum established, and they had a whole section on slavery, and I went in, I was on my own, I was wandering around and I went and sat

and watched a video presentation, and two other Bristolians came in, with very strong Bristol accents, and we three, there was a husband and wife, we three watched it.

And when it was over, I started talking to them, and they were Black. And I thought, this is really what it's about. Because it enabled us to talk. We'd all been brought up in Bristol. They were roughly my age. We knew the history and we saw this video together and we could discuss it quite sensibly and positively, and I came away feeling, I'm really rather proud of my city that it's managed to do that, and given me and them an opportunity to talk together. The Church of England failed in China, yes. But the problem with Britain and China is not Christianity. The problem with Britain and China is we introduced opium, and that was the problem. That was, we introduced opium from India to China. We made China, by 1900, to a drug-fueled nation, and I can't forget that Prime Minister Cameron happened to be in China around the 11th of November, remembrance Sunday in Britain where we wear the poppy. And he stupidly wore a poppy, okay, a red poppy, not a white opium poppy, but he wore a poppy. I mean, how crass can you be?

That's the sort of thing that really makes me cross as a historian. Surely someone could have told Cameron that it is not sensible or even polite to wear a poppy. But then Cameron was introduced and was educated in Eaton. And I've long come to the view that their teaching of history at Eaton must be appalling if it produces people like Boris Johnson. But that's a British, my British friends won't agree with me, let alone anybody else this day. But the issue with China, seriously, the issue with China is opium.

Q: Should, oh gosh, should US and European colonial powers pay reparations?

A: No, I don't think that's helpful. I don't think I believe in reparations. Is Britain going to sue Denmark for the Viking invasions? I don't think it gets you anywhere. I think we have to look forward and be more positive than that, nor do I think we should give aid quite in the way that we do. I have a friend, an African friend in Tanzania. She and her husband worked for the United Nations, and I once talked about post Colonial Africa and talked about aid, and she said, can I say something? Which she then did, and said, "I think it's a big mistake for the West to give aid because it doesn't get to the right people, and it leads to even more corruption, and it leads to African countries leadership saying, well, it's all the fault of the empire, when the empire hasn't been there for 60 years."

She says they have to own their own problems, and if we are going to give aid, it should be very focused aid on things like water, medicine, not huge grants without accountability. Now since she talked like that, I've been totally convinced of that argument. So I don't think reparations, I think we need to work together as equals, and I'm pleased that in Britain we're going to make the Oxford vaccine available at cost, and I think we're even going to pay for it in some very poor countries, and that's excellent. So I'm sure other countries will be doing the same.

Can those statues not be better used to teach about horrible aspects. Yes, I think I answered that.

Q: Is it not surprising that the indigenous peoples of South America, Central America, and Mexico have, after freeing themselves from European political and social oppression, continue to embrace the religion of their European oppressors?

A: Oh, that's a very interesting question. You have really, these questions are quite challenging to answer, and there's not an easy answer to that. In some ways, the Catholic church in Latin America has changed. So you've got the church, you've got two aspects of the church, you've got the church hierarchy, but you've also got individual priests working in the most appalling conditions and doing enormous good work. So there's two aspects to it, but if they jettison it, they aren't going back to some pre 15th century religion, that clearly won't happen. But maybe, I mean, the Catholic church is declining across the world, and it is declining in parts of South America quite rapidly, and I think what will happen in South America will mirror what is happening to the Catholic church across the world.

I mean, in Spain, for example, since the overthrow of Franco, the Catholic church's membership has dropped dramatically. There you are again. Franco the fascist used the Catholic church to bolster his authoritarian view. So did Mussolini. So did the Portuguese use the Catholic church. The Catholic church has been too associated with authoritarianism, and it's going to be really interesting when the papers are finally released by the Vatican of the Vatican's involvement with Nazism. I'll just tell you one quick story. I went on a counsellor of Europe jolly to Assisi in Italy, and we were given a tour of the Great Cathedral monastery at Assisi, it was fascinating. And so we all went, except a Frenchman who was a socialist. He was a civil servant in Paris, and I asked him, I said, Jar, why didn't you come with us? And he said, I can't. So I said, why not? Are you so anti-Catholic? I said, because it was so interesting, the architecture and et cetera, et cetera. And he said, no, no, it's nothing to do with that. It's that Assisi was used by the Catholic church as a way to get Nazis out of Europe after 1945, and I won't go into it, and I didn't know that at the time. And what he said was true.

Q: Oh, somebody said, would I recommend two other books?

A: Yes, of course I would. Buddy Levy's book, "River of Darkness." and his book "Conquistador." Yeah, I'm happy to do that.

Q: Yes, a quick time trip, did not the vast riches of Spain and Portugal taken to here evaporate?

A: Yes, it did, and that's fascinating. What I said about the golden silver coming, being the spur to capitalism is correct, but you are correct that Spain was a basket case. Indeed, Spain has been a continuing basket case. It's been rescued by the EU, but it's always been a basket case, and why it was a basket case with all this gold and silver coming in is for two reasons. One, the Dutch and the English whipped it away from them on the high seas. People like Drake. We call them adventurers or buccaneers, they were pirates. They were pirates stealing from Spain. But the real reason is that Spain got so much money, it spent more than it had. It borrowed from

Italian banks on the basis of the money that would come, they sent the gold and silver in annual fleets.

So they borrowed money against the next fleet, and if the next fleet was taken by the English or the Dutch, or sank through bad weather, they then couldn't pay, and in the end, they simply couldn't pay the interest. I think in the reign of Philip II, Spain went bust, bankrupt more than once. It's some, I can't remember the exact number of times, but it's something like half a dozen times in his reign it went bust. So they've always not coped, and as I said, Spain has been a basket case.

And so one of the questions there is, why is Spain a basket case? Is it because the Catholic church never had a counter reformation, it remained mediaeval? Is it because of the nature of land ownership in Spain that the peasantry remained peasants? And even today it's Catalonia, and Catalonia which is trying to break away from Spain. Catalonia is the heart blood of Spain. I mean the south of Spain is, we'll leave that unsaid. There'll be somebody Spanish listening to this who's already sharpening their knives. That's a very good point.

Who said this, sorry? Dido, but thinking badly of whites is a racist answer to racist injustices of the past. Neither I nor any of my ancestors bear guilt, true. The fundamental problem is thinking of people not as individuals, but as members of a group. Absolutely. I agree completely with that, and that's why I say in Bristol, I think the statue should have been taken down because Bristolians are now thinking of people as individuals, there's so many individuals in Bristol who are not white, Bristolian British. That's my point.

No, we should not think in racist terms, as I'm saying, my grandson doesn't. I think it's absolutely fantastic that the young don't think of people in those racist terms, and they do think of people as individuals, and perhaps our generation, my generation, I'm 75, my generation have had to fight hard to reject our racist views that we were brought up in. I was brought up in 1940s, 1950s, and undoubtedly racism was absolutely everywhere, and we've learned, but some people find it difficult, particularly if they're at the bottom of society, and that's America or, oh, I've lost it. Where have I lost it? Hang on. Gosh, I, Wendy, these questions go on forever.

- I know, I know. You know what? Whenever you feel that you already to stop, do you have another four minutes until quarter past one?

- Yeah, yeah.

- [Wendy] Okay, four minutes.

Q: Would you say South Africa as a country has come to terms with its past?

A: I guess that's probably someone from South Africa asking me, and it would be impertinent of me to say, and there are South Africans listening anyhow, even if that question wasn't from

South Africa, is a country that's come to terms with its past? I'm not sure any country has come to terms with its past. America certainly hasn't come to terms with the American Civil War and here in Britain, well, I'm not, let me tell you another silly story. I used to live in Essex, north of London, and in rural Essex I met a lady who'd been a head mistress of a village school. So this is in about the 1970s when she was a head mistress, and she had two boys fighting, I mean really fighting in the playground. I mean really hurting each other. Then she separated them and she said, why are you, what are you fighting over?

And it turned out one boy came from one village and another from another that, in the 1640s, were on the opposite side of the English Civil War. One village was Parliamentary, one was Royalist, and we're talking then about over 300 years later, two children were fighting over it. So are we surprised that 150 years after the events in America, people are still fighting? Maybe it'll be 300 years and it'll be children fighting, but adults will have stopped. The past is difficult. But all of it in the end, for me as an educator, comes down to what we teach and how we teach it. It's not easy, and I can't imagine how difficult it would be for a educator from, shall we say from New England, to go down and start talking about the Civil War deep in Mississippi? That must be quite tricky. But I think nations have to find a way of living together.

They have to find a way of having a history curriculum that looks as objectively as possible at the past and learns from the lessons of the past. Because otherwise, we may be condemned to repeat them. Not exactly the same, but repeat them again. Well, thank you ever so much. Rochelle says, I've not got a question, but I love your jumper. Those are the questions I really like. Fantastic. Good, I'm glad you do.

Q: Oh, Martin's asked a question about North America and about United States, well United States and Canada, about British, French and Spain.

A: Watch out because I'm going to do a talk about that for lockdown in the not too distant future, looking at how United States could have ended up being Spanish, it may yet do so, and that the United States could have landed up being French, that would've been beyond everything to an Englishman, and how it landed up being English. It is really interesting and there's a lot of answers to that. But basically the English who were in the United States couldn't go home, after all, God had sent them to places like Boston to build a city upon a hill. How could they go back to England and say God had let them down? They couldn't. They had to stay. It's interesting just to remember for a moment that George Washington was a colonel fighting in the English army, British army, against the French, and learned how to be a successful senior officer by fighting for the British. It's wonderful.

- William, I'm going to jump in and say thank you very much. I think we should take a break now, because we have another session in 45 minutes.

- And I'm exhausted.



- Yes, exactly. For that reason, first of all, you're exhausted and it's bedtime. And I just want to give everybody a break, and Judy a break, and I want to say thank you for a very enlightening and excellent presentation, as usual.

- That's very sweet of you, Wendy. Thank you very much. I've enjoyed it, I hope everyone listening has got something out of it, and as I say, don't agree. And if you go to my blog, you can find some books that you might be interested to read.

- Thank you.

- [William] Thanks very much.

- And also, just to say to our participants, we have put, for those people who are hard of hearing, we have the additional text underneath on the iPad or the TV. So just to make it easier for those people who are struggling to hear you. So thank you Judy very much for organising that extra aid. All right everybody, thanks for joining us and we will see you later.

- Bye, bye-bye.

- [Wendy] Take care, night night.