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## Chapter 1

Gonzales starts off the first chapter of *Mexicanos* by introducing the origins of the Spaniards and how their culture emerged from a group of people known as the Moors who inhabited the Iberian Peninsula after coming to power in 711 during a religious crusade, converting the peninsula's inhabitants to Islam. Time passed and religious intolerance was introduced to the people in 1146. Three centuries later brought the final unification of Spain in 1492 with the removal of the Moors and other religious groups. The chapter then goes on to describe Columbus' desire to follow the example of the Portuguese and gain wealth through spice trading with India, but instead sails West, thinking he can reach India faster that way, but discovers North America. This in turn sparks the Spanish Monarch's desire to expand their influence in the name of "God, Gold, and Glory". Gonzales then goes on to talk about the various pre-Columbian civilizations including the Olmecs, the Mayans, and the Aztecs, the later having been conquered by Hernan Cortes.

The majority of this chapter was brand new information for me. I had known about the Mayan and Aztec cultures prior to reading the text, but not to the extent that this chapter touches upon. It was a fascinating read for me as I enjoy learning about other cultures especially ancient ones. Of course I had know about Christopher Columbus as well, but again there was new information I gained about him reading through this chapter. I had never known that his actual Italian name was Cristoforo and that upon reaching the Bahamas he had returned to Spain with natives as evidence of what he had discovered, which is what sparked the Spaniards conquest of the New World. The one thing that I did know is that it is because of his mistake in believing that he had found India that Native Americans are referred to as Indians.

The part of the chapter that discussed about how advanced the Mayans were for their time is something that really grabbed my attention. This classical period civilization was able to perform simple brain operations way before modern medicine and surgical procedures. They even tracked the stars and had a more accurate calendar than the Europeans at the time. I find that so incredible for a civilization that existed so long ago, before science as we know existed.

Another new piece of information for me was the story in which Cortes sought to conquer the city of Tenochtitlan by taking advantage of the priests' prophecy causing the natives to revere the Spaniards as gods. I was never taught this information in school and if I had been I can't remember it because it was touched upon in fourth or fifth grade. For certain I know that I was never taught about la noche triste of 1520 when Cortes and his troops attempted to sneak out of the city, having stolen a fair amount of gold, causing a bloody battle to break out between Cortes and the inhabitants of the city.

I feel that Gonzales did a wonderful job of keeping his interpretation factual. In the introduction he stated that this is due to the fact that he is an outsider of Chicano culture and perspective and therefore wanted to "construct a realistic portrait of Mexicans in this

country” and “build on the efforts of maligned colleagues”. Each section of the chapter was kept factual without biased opinion, which helped me to see the historical events for what they were without being swayed with negative or positive emotions towards any particular person or event. There was however an instance when he began to defend Christopher Columbus and his actions that seemed out of place to me. He began to explain how Columbus is not seen in such positive light nowadays because of actions that he took against native people that were violent and abusive marking it off as simply “typical of his age” and calling him a “mixture of vices and virtues like the rest of us”. In my opinion, neither Columbus’ nor anyone’s action at the time be dismissed for being typical in “an age of barbarism and intolerance”. As I see it, Columbus should not be celebrated for what he did. His methods brought the death of many native people who tried their best to fight back from I interpreted from the book. Students should be given the facts about what the Spanish conquistadors brought to the New World, not the glorification of discovery and expansion.

## Chapter 2

The following chapter continued on from the fall of the Aztec empire to the building of pueblos and missions in the Northern American territories. Here Gonzales continues to talk about the Spanish’s desire to expand their influence in search of God, Gold, and Glory creating the territory of New Spain. The territory expanded from Central America up into the modern day territories of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. But with the discovery of new land came new competition in the desire to expand national territory. The French and English had heard news of Spain’s successful trips to the New World and desired to claim land for themselves. A Frenchman by the name of Rene Robert Cavelier managed to successfully trek down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico claiming the territory for France and naming it Louisiana after their monarch. The Spanish saw this as troublesome for their plans of further settlements. However, the encampments in Baja California were having trouble journeying north, while the Spaniards in the New Mexico territory were constantly fighting off Apache Indians and Pueblo revolts. With the designation of Junipero Serra as the man in charge of the “Sacred Expedition” that chapter ends with his journey up the coast of California and the establishing of missions from San Diego to San Francisco.

This chapter had so much information to offer that I had never learned in depth about before, again which was also likely to me having it learned about it so long ago that I simply forgot. As every California student learns about the missions and Father Junipero Serra in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, so had I. But this chapter had also taught about the other religious groups that had moved into the more central areas of North America, like Texas. While those who moved through the Southern states required the help of local natives to establish themselves and fight off other indigenous people, the Spaniards following along the coast of California were able to trek forward simply by religion and conversion of the native people.

Again the facts were presented in straightforward and easy to comprehend manner and I enjoyed reading through everything, even the end that discussed about gender roles and how they differed among Hispanic people at the time and English settlers.