

1492 The Play: The Conquest Through Native Eyes

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE RAPPER. He comments on the action and ties the scenes together.

QUEEN ISABEL. Age 41, the wife of king Ferdinand.

KING FERDINAND. Age 40, the Spanish ruler who gave Columbus money for his voyage.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS. Captain who brought three ships to "the New World" in 1492.

GUACANAGARI. The Taino chief who greeted Columbus.

FRAY BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS. The Dominican monk who took up the cause of the indigenous tribes.

ALONSO DE ZORITA. A magistrate in the High Court of New Spain.

ENRIQUILLO.. Escaped slave who became a rebel Indian chief and fought the Spaniards.

HERNANDO DE SAN MIGUEL. Spanish officer who fought Enriquillo.

HERNAN CORTES. The Spanish conqueror of Mexico.

MALINCHE. Aztec slave who served as Cortes's guide and interpreter.

FRANCISCO PIZARRO. The conqueror of Peru.

QHORA CHINPU. Inca princess at the time of the fall of Peru.

LATIFA. African woman enslaved in New Spain, who presides over the Conquistadors Hall of Fame.

CABEZA DE VACA. Explorer shipwrecked in Florida who traveled the southwestern US as a trader, and a faith healer to the native tribes.

ESTEVANICO. Slave who survived a shipwreck and trekked the Southwestern US with Cabeza de Vaca.

NOTE

More characters help tell the story of the Spanish Conquest but these are the major ones.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

Setting: The court of Ferdinand and Isabel, Spain, 1492, day.

Spotlight on a rapper who begins with a drum beat. His function is the narration that ties scenes together, filling in the history.

RAPPER

IN NINETEEN HUNDRED NINETY-TWO
FOLKS EVERYWHERE WERE FIXING TO
CELEBRATE THE TALE OF DISCOVERY,
HOW COLUMBUS SAILED THE UNKNOWN SEA.
YOU READ ABOUT IT IN YOUR HISTORY BOOK,
AND NOW WE'RE GONNA TAKE A CLOSER LOOK.

Spotlight shifts stage left to the chorus, four women who sing mournfully to the tune of "Hi Ho, Nobody Home."

CHORUS

FOURTEEN HUNDRED NINETY-TWO,
A GRIEVOUS YEAR TO BE A JEW.
ISABEL AND FERDINAND
HAVE FORCED THEM OUT OF SPAIN'S FAIR LAND.

Spotlight shift to stage center and illumines an elderly Jew, stooped, leaning on his staff, a pack on his back.

ELDERLY JEW

Oi vey. Ay de mi, que pena! What did I do?

The voices of the monarchs answer him, although we don't see them yet.

FERDINAND

You are a Jew!

ELDERLY JEW

I'm a member of a brilliant race. To have a brain is no disgrace.

ISABEL

Only Christians live here now. All before the cross shall bow!

The elderly Jew shuffles offstage. Spotlight on Chorus, who continue their song.

MUSLIMS, MOORS, AND NOW THE JEWS
ARE LEAVING SPAIN BUT WHO SHALL LOSE?
QUEEN ISABEL? KING FERDINAND?
OR THOSE WHO TOIL ON SPAIN'S RICH LAND?

Lights up on the throne room where the monarchs are seated. Ferdinand's throne says "Aragon." Isabel's says "Castilla."

ISABEL (CONT'D)

My Lord, 'tis a brilliant thing we've done!
Your kingdom and mine have joined as one.

FERDINAND

How strong and brave our armies fight.
We put the Moors and Jews to flight.
(puffs out his chest with
pride)
Our canons are a wondrous sight!

ISABEL

They prove our military might.
And our Spanish navy, mi amor...

FERDINAND

Technologically superior!

The monarchs rise from their thrones, the rap beat begins and they do a congratulatory dance. This is interrupted by the sound of trumpets and they hasten back to their thrones and resume their regal composure. A courtier enters.

COURTIER

If it please your royal Highnesses, one Cristobal Colon wishes to see you.

FERDINAND

Show him in, my good man.

Christopher Columbus enters with two of his sailors. All three bow lol.

COLUMBUS

Good day, your gracious Majesties.

FERDINAND

Arise! And tell us what you please.

COLUMBUS

My name is Cristobal Colon.
I'm a captain and trader of some renown,
with a skill at sailing the ocean seas.
I can reckon my course from the northerly breeze.

SAILOR 1

He can steer a ship's course with marvelous ease.

ISABEL

(whispers to Ferdinand and
addresses Columbus)

But tell us, señor, where do you call home? Do you sail for Spain?

FERDINAND

(suddenly worried)

Or for an enemy throne?

COLUMBUS

I'm glad you asked. Take a look at me.
Would you say I'm Portuguese? Or from Italy?
Well, both are true. I'll serve the monarch who
has the money to pay my voyage to

SAILOR 1

China! India! The mysterious East!

SAILOR 2

Land of the Great Khan, now deceased.
(bows his head in mock
mourning)

FERDINAND

The land of precious gold and spices?

COLUMBUS

(sees his opportunity and
rushes up to the throne)

Yes! A way to forestall your financial crisis!
Your cannons surely cost a lot,
armies, navies, and what-not,
ministers of foreign affairs, nobles with their fancy airs.

SAILOR 2

An empire needs a man who dares!

COLUMBUS

I'll reach the east by sailing west.
Will your Highnesses put me to the test?

*The sailors draw cheerleaders' pom-poms from their
pockets and lead a cheer.*

SAILOR 1 & SAILOR 2

Cristobal Colon in ninety-two!
The sailor with chutzpah and derring-do!

The monarchs exchange private looks, and Isabel rises from her throne and approaches Columbus. She speaks condescendingly.

ISABEL

By the way you speak, one would think you'd seen
a land to the west. But I, your Queen,
have it on high authority.
There's nothing to the west but the endless sea.

Isabel returns to her throne and high-fives Ferdinand.

COLUMBUS

Most Sovereign Lords, come look with me
at Marco Polo's diary.
Right here it says, on page 53.
"The wealth of the Orient waits for thee."

The Monarchs start to show interest and strain forward to see the diary. Columbus sees his opportunity.

COLUMBUS (CONT'D)

And furthermore wouldn't it be grand
to Christianize the Great Khan's land?

Sailors 1 and 2 produce a large cross which they give to Columbus. He extends it to the monarchs and drops to one knee.

COLUMBUS (CONT'D)

In the name of the powers invested in me
by your holy Catholic Majesties,
I'll bring to China the faith of the cross!
Millions of heathen souls, now lost,
will fall to their knees...

SAILOR 1

And the Portuguese...

COLUMBUS

Will get there first if we don't act fast!

As Columbus and the sailors listen anxiously for a reply, Isabel and Ferdinand come stage center and speak to each other in hushed tones.

FERDINAND

This sailor fellow Colon is mad.
His map of the ocean is worse than bad.

Whoever heard of reaching the East
by sailing West? His mind's diseased.

ISABEL

Oh bother me not with mundane things.
But think! What if the Portuguese king.....

FERDINAND

Steals the gold and the glory from Spain?

ISABEL

Yes! Nothing ventured, and there's nothing to gain.

*Isabel sings a song to the tune of America the
Beautiful. Ferdinand joins her on the chorus.*

ISABEL (CONT'D)

OH BEAUTIFUL AND BOUNTEOUS LAND, ACROSS THE WESTERN SEA.
HOW I LONG TO SING A SONG OF YOUR DISCOVERY.

FERDINAND & ISABEL (CONT'D)

A MARINER! A MARINER! WILL CONQUER ALL FOR SPAIN.
OUR NATIONS'S MIGHT WILL MAKE IT RIGHT.
LONG MAY OUR GLORY REIGN!

FERDINAND (CONT'D)

Summon the Royal Money Man!

*The Royal Money Man appears, balancing a sack of money
on his head. On top of the sack is a crown made of
dollar bills. He removes the crown and bows, the sack
falling at the feet of the king. At a gesture from
Ferdinand, the sailors carry the sack off.*

COLUMBUS

Your Graces won't regret this day. I promise I'll return and
pay my debt to you a thousandfold. Onward for Spain!

ISABEL

For Christ!

FERDINAND

And for gold!

SCENE 2

*Setting: the island of Hispaniola, , present-day
Haiti, the Taino village of Guanahani, day.*

Spotlight on the RAPPER.

RAPPER

NOW CHRIS WAS ONE AMBITIOUS MAN.
 HE WAS NO FOOL, HE HAD A PLAN
 TO MAKE HIMSELF RICH FOR ETERNITY
 AS ADMIRAL OF THE OCEAN SEA.
 BUT FAR AWAY IN GUANAHANI,
 LIVING VERY PEACEFULLY,
 THE NATIVE PEOPLE ARE HOLDING A DANCE.
 LET'S LISTEN TO THE SACRED CHANTS.

The mood is joyous. A celebratory dance is in progress, performed by Tainos to drums and rattles. The cacique (chief), Guacanagari, presides.

TAINOS

Caracaracolesin Taino, giver of life from whom we flow.
 Gifts of praise we humbly raise. To Yucahu all things we owe.

Taino maidens dance in a circle and sing.

GIVE THANKS FOR THE CORN AND YUCCA.
 GIVE THANKS FOR THE WIND AND RAIN.
 GIVE THANKS FOR THE OCEAN CREATURES,
 GIVE THANKS FOR THE CROP OF GRAIN.
 GIVE THANKS! GIVE THANKS! FOR BEAST AND BIRD AND PLANTS.
 GIVE THANKS! GIVE THANKS! FOR YUCAHU WE DANCE.

A Taino girl of about 15 runs into the dance circle, breathless.

GUACANAGARI

What prompts you to interrupt our dance?

MARIEN

Great Chief! Have you seen them yet, by chance?
 The pale-skimmed men with the hairy faces,
 come over the sea from far-off places?

GUACANAGARI

What sort of creature is this you've seen?

MARIEN

And the dogs they have look terribly mean.
 They ride on deer as tall as a house,
 And cover their bodies! In panrs! And a bloude!

The idea of clothed bodies sets the dancers to giggling.

GUACANAGARI

What? They cover themselves? In ninety degrees?

MARIEN

You've never seen such men as these.
Their canoas resemble a floating city.

GUACANAGARI

We must send a welcoming committee.
Bless you, my daughter, for bringing this news.
Now let each of you go home and choose
a spool of thread, a loaf of bread.
We want our guests to be well fed.
And other things that you treasure and love.
We'll fly to the shore as a peaceful dove.

*Guacanagari sings to the tune of America the
Beautiful.*

GUACANAGARI (CONT'D)

O BEAUTIFUL AND PLACID SEA, WHAT HAVE YOU BROUGHT TO ME?
THESE MEN SO ODD MAAY JUST BE GODS.
WE'LL TREAT THEM ROYALLY.
MARIEN, O MARIEN, WILL LEAD US TO THE SHORE.
YUCAHU WILL GUIDE US, TOO. ON WINGS OF LOVE WE'LL SOAR.

SCENE 3

*Setting: The water's edge on Hispaniola, where one of
COLUMBUS's ships is visible, day.*

CHORUS

(to the tune of Onward
Christian Soldiers)

ONWARD SPANISH SAILORS, LOST IM THE CARIB SEA,
THINKING YOU'RE IN INDIA, MOST ERRONEOUSLY.
YOU PLANT THE ROYAL FLAG OF SPAIN ON SAN SALVADOR,
A NAME CHRIS CHOSE ALTHOUGH HE KNOWS TAINOS CAME BEFORE.

Spotlight on the Rapper.

RAPPER

WELL THE GENTLE FOLK WENT DOWN TO MEET
CRISTOBAL AND THE SPANISH FLEET.
CHRIS GAVE THEM BEEDS AND WORTHLESS THINGS
AND ASKED THEM HOW THEY GOT THE RINGS
OF GOLD THEY WORE IN THE NOSE AND EAR.
HE TOLD HIS MEN, "IT WOULD APPEAR
THE GOLD MINE LIES NOT FAR AWAY.
WE'LL FIND THAT GOLD, SOMEHOW, SOME WAY."

*From a distance the Tainos watch the Spaniards'
strange behavior. To establish sovereignty, the
Spaniards plant a cross and the Spanish flag.*

PADRE (a preist) records the momentous occasion. At a sign from Guacanagari, the Tainos come shyly out from behind trees, carrying gifts of bread, fish and spools of cotton thread.

COLUMBUS

(to his men)

They come bearing gifts. Get something to give.

The sailors produce glass beads and a red cap.

COLUMBUS (CONT'D)

(motions his sailors to gather around him.)

On your knees, mariners, and you Indians, too.
A Mass for the subjects of Spanish rule.
PADRE you'll record it officially
that I'm Viceroy of all the lands I see.

SAILOR 1

And Admiral of the Ocean Sea.

COLUMBUS

'Though you Indians call it Guanahani,
San Salvador sounds better to me.

(addresses the Taincs)

Now to the subject of which I'm most fond.
Gold! Where's the court of the Emperor Khan?

MARIEN

There's a place to the west called Cubanakan...

COLUMBUS

Which leads to the fabulous city, Ceylon?
Oh, I can just smell the spices and teas!
Make way for Progress!

(he turns to the PADRE)

That's a capital P.

The group of sailors on the shore - - about 15 men including COLUMBUS and the PADRE--sing to the tune of Onward Christian Soldiers.

ONWARD BRAVE CONQUISTADORES, PRAISE BE TO THE NAMES
OF ISABEL AND FERDINAND AND HOLY CATHOLIC SPAIN!

COLUMBUS)

(abruptly changes his tone)

But wait! Suppose our ships get lost!

SAILOR 1

By lightning struck!

SAILOR 2

By hurricane tossed!

COLUMBUS

We'd better bring some Indian guides.
Quick, grab them before their chief decides
to put a stop to my enterprise.
Come along, PADRE, and you'll baptize
these naked, heathen souls, unshod.
Onward for Spain!

SPANIARDS

(in unison)

For gold and for God!

SCENE 4

Setting: COLUMBUS's room aboard the ship Pinta, day.

RAPPER

WELL, EVERYWHERE COLUMBUS SAILED,
A WELCOME WARM AND KIND PREVAILED.
"I NEVER SAW SUCH FOLK," SAID HE,
"FOR SELFLESS GENEROSITY."
NOW THE ADMIRAL HAD A BANKER'S EYE
AS HE LOOKED AROUND, AND HE HAD TO LIE.
THE AMOUNT OF GOLD WAS NOT THAT GREAT.
HE SETTLED FOR SLAVES AND REAL ESTATE.

*COLUMBUS writes a letter to the monarchs in Spain. He
paces around in his ship's cabin while the PADRE sits
at a desk, taking dictation.*

COLUMBUS

Dear Highnesses who rule in Spain,
I'm on an isle near the Chinese main.
The wonderful things mine eyes have seen!
The loving people and their land so green.
I call them "Indians." Shall we subjugate
these simple souls, devoid of hate?
It wouldn't take but fifty men.
Signed: Your Faithful Servant.

PADRE

(with a great flourish of his
plumed quill pen)

Amen!

SCENE 5

Setting: The shore of Guanahani, day.

*COLUMBUS's ship, the Santa Maria, has run aground.
COLUMBUS and his sailors sit looking at it dejectedly.*

GUACANAGARI

Great Lord, descended from up above,
what can I offer but brotherly love?
Your ship went down. I mourn it's fate.
'Though we saved your cargo, your loss is great.

*GUACANAGARI bows his head and weeps. COLUMBUS stares,
curious at this unexpected display of emotion. Marien
sings a lament to the tune of Ave Maria.*

MARIEN

SANTA MARIA... AGROUND ON A SHOAL OF TAINA.
THE MIGHTY SHIP LIES ON HER SIDE.
OH WHAT A BLOW TO SPANISH PRIDE.
SANTA MARIA, AGROUND ON A SHOAL OF TAINA.

*Guacanagari takes the headdress from his head and
places it reverently on COLUMBUS's.*

COLUMBUS

I'll be going now, back to my country, Spain.
But I'm leaving some men, since you maintain
the gold in Cibao is very near.
Lord willing, you'll see me within the year.

SAILOR 1

And now for a message of Christmas cheer!

COLUMBUS

We've built a fort near your property.
We call it Navidad, for Nativity,
'cause our ship ran aground at Christmas season.

SAILOR 2

(addresses the audience,
speaking confidentially.)
Hispaniola has gold. That's the real reason!

COLUMBUS

(shouting, threatening)
To mess with our fort is an act of treason!

*A gun is fired. The Tainos drop to the ground and
cower in fear.*

SCENE 6

Setting: Fort Navidad, night.

Four drunken sailors lounge against the exterior of the fort. Inside, imprisoned Tainos weep and demand to be released, and try to see the sailors through small windows.

RAPPER

IN FOURTEEN HUNDRED NINETY-THREE
COLUMBUS WENT BACK ACROSS THE SEA.
HE WAS A HERO IN EVERY VILLAGE AND TOWN
'CAUSE HE FOUND A "NRE" WORLD FOR THE SPANISH CROWN.
BUT THOSE MEN HE'D LEFT TO THEIR OWN DEVICES
AT FORT NAVIDAD GAVE IN TO VICES.
MUCH TO THE HORROR OF THE TAINO NATION,
IT WAS THE START OF THEIR DEVASTATION.

The four sailors link arms and attempt to dance, but fall down drunkenly and sing.

SPANIARDS

ONWARD, BRAVE CONQUISTADORES, ALONE ON THE INDIAN SHORE.
FORSAKEM BY COLUMBUS, WE WAGED A CONSTANT WAR
AGAINST THE LOWLY INDIANS, THEIR WIVES AND DAUGHTERS, TOO.
WE PASSED THE TIME IN HORRID CRIME,
WE PLUNDERED, RAPED AND SLEW.

From inside Fort Navidad the Tainos cry, "We're starving!", "Let us out!", "We're dying!" In response a Spaniard shouts, "Bring us something to eat!" The Spaniards slump against each other, fall asleep and snore. Three Tainos creep stealthily up, spears in hand.

GUACANAGARI

The last of the swine await our spears!
Be brave, Tainos, forget your fears.
Remember when life was noble and free!
And now... An end to our misery!

They thrust their spears into the snoring Spaniards and creep away.

SCENE 7

*Setting: The Taino village of Guanahani, day.
Spotlight up on the RAPPER.*

RAPPER

WHEN COLUMBUS RETURNED, HE SADLY LEARNED
 FORT NAVIDAD HAD ALL BEEN BURNED.
 AND THERE WAS NOT ONE OUNCE OF GOLD.
 THIS IS WHAT THE NATIVES TOLD.

*COLUMBUS, PADRE, SAILORS 1 and 2 and several other
 sailors are angrily trying to get information from the
 natives, with wild gestures and pantomimes.
 GUACANAGARI watches quietly. He's badly bruised from
 many injuries. A young Taino partially dressed in
 Spanish garb steps forward and addresses the
 audience.*

DIEGO COLON

I'm Taino with a Spanish name.
 I was captured and, much to my shame,
 they paraded me through the streets of Spain,
 and taught me Spanish, so I could explain
 the facts and be an interpreter.
 Now they want to know what did occur
 at Fort Navidad where the men were killed,
 and why their Spanish blood was spilled.

COLUMBUS

DIEGO COLON, come do your job!
 Who killed these men? Was it a mob?

SAILOR 1

Or the work of an angry Indian chief?

DIEGO COLON

The cacique expresses his sincere grief.
 He said he was wounded defending your men,
 'though the stories he heard, time and again,
 told of how badly your sailors behaved.
 Their lust for our women was truly depraved!

COLUMBUS

GUACANAGARI is a loyal friend.
 Beg pardon if the ways of my sailors offend.
 PADRE! A mass for the martyred dead.
 Marineros! The gold lies up ahead!
 To the Rio del Oro, the river of gold!
 We'll march in formation, to show how we're bold.
 Sound trumpets! Show banners! Fire guns in the air!
 Let any Tainos who oppose us, beware!

*Sailors 1 and 2 unfurl a banner with the Spanish coat
 of arms, PADRE raises a cross, and gunshots sound.
 The Tainos drop to the ground and cover their heads. A
 trumpet sounds.*

SCENE 8

Setting: A trail near the gold mine of Cibao on Hispanoila, day.

Gold diggers--two ragged sailors--come onstage, loaded down with packs and pickaxes. They sing to the tune of The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

GOLD DIGGERS

MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLITTER OF THE WONDROUS MINES OF GOLD.
THEY HAVE LURED ME TO THE NEW WORLD FROM THE POVERTY OF THE OLD.
I'LL SOON BE RICH AND POWERFUL AND SOMEONE TO BEHOLD!
FOR GOLD WE'RE MARCHING ON!

The gold diggers encounter a lone gold digger going in the opposite direction - - away from the mine. They question him.

GOLD DIGGER 1

Buenos dias, Senor.

LONE GOLD DIGGER

Good day to you, Sir.

GOLD DIGGER 2

You're going the wrong way. Why? May I inquire?

LONE GOLD DIGGER

(as he crosses the stage and exits.)

My food supply's gone and my strength just gave out.
It's damn hard digging gold, if it's there. Which I doubt.

Two more gold diggers, also leaving the mine, appear carrying a body on a makeshift litter. The body groans a few times and then is silent.

GOLD DIGGER 1

(addressing the new arrivals)

Senor, por favor, I don't wish to be rude, but...
That body you're toting...

(he shudders in horror)

Is that...a Spanish dude?

GOLD DIGGER 3

(ignores the question and bends over to feel for a pulse)

By the hair on my chin! I believe he's gone dead.
Praise be. One less mouth to be fed.

*GOLD DIGGERS 3 and 4 unceremoniously tip the litter
and the body rolls onto the ground. GOLD DIGGERS 1 and
2 jump out of the way.*

GOLD DIGGER 2

By the way, how much further 'til we get to the mine?
Will there be any marker? A road, or a sign?

GOLD DIGGER 4

Jus' keep going south to the most torrid zones.
The path will be marked with the Indians' bones.

*The word bones echoes loudly and makes a macabre
cadence with the word Indians, reverberating as the
two gold diggers exit the stage. The corpse remains.
A vulture comes on stage and discovers the corpse.*

VULTURE

Upon my bloodthirsty soul, what's this?
Another meal, thanks to the Admiral Chris?
The corpses these Spaniards throw off of their ships
have caused me to put on some weight in the hips.
And the Indians' bodies are everywhere strewn
on the path to the mines. It looks like quite soon
we vultures will be much too fat to fly.

(she turns and addresses the
audience)

By the hundreds and thousands these Indians die!

*The vulture pounces on the corpse. Light goes out and
spotlight goes on the RAPPER.*

ACT 2

SCENE 1

*Setting: A Dominican monastery in New Spain, the name
the Spanish monarchs have given to the territory
claimed by COLUMBUS.*

RAPPER

EVERY SPANIARD WHO EVER WENT
TO THE INDIES HAD THE SAME INTENT:
TO PICK UP GOLD ON THE TROPICAL SHORE
AND FORCE THE INDIANS TO BRING MUCH MORE.
BY SWORD AND HORSES, DOGS AND GUN,
THE NATIVES PERISHED ONE BY ONE.
MANY DIED IN THE MINES, FOR GOLD.
OTHERS WERE BRANDED AS SLAVES AND SOLD.

Fray Bartolome de las Casas, a Dominican friar and missionary, sits at his desk, clearly troubled. A single candle illumines his cell. He takes up a quill pen and starts to write.

LAS CASAS

Dear Sovereign Lord and Noble King,
I fear you'll deplore the news I bring.
Three million souls have now been slain
in the Indies by our men from Spain.
Three milliom, Sire, or many more,
through cruelty, torture, blood and gore.
Such wickedness! It knows no bounds.
And the natives never gave them grounds!
If you could see the gallows with your own eyes,
or hear the Viceroy's cunning lies.
Who in future times will believe my tale?
The telling of it makes one pale.

LAS CASAS puts his head in his hands and slumps over the desk, asleep. Two native women come softly in, intending to clean. Seeing LAS CASAS asleep, MARIA goes to blow out his cancle. She notices that the unfinished letter is to the King of Spain. She giggles mischeivously and picks it up.

MARIA

It's a letter to the Chief across the sea.
Shall I read it? The monks instructed me
in Spanish. Oh look! It contains a plea.
"Your Highness must set the Indians free!"

ELENA

Fray Bartolome fights a losing battle.
My father and brothers were branded like cattle
and worked to death on a sugar plantation.

MARIA

But ELENA, who cares for our salvation
except this man, and he's so alone.
I pray he'll convince the Spanish throne!

She returns the letter to the desk and the women tiptoe out. LAS CASAS slumbers on.

Spotlights illumine both LAS CASAS and the RAPPER, who directs his words pointedly to LAS CASAS.

RAPPER

LAS CASAS, YOU WEREN'T ALWAYS BLESSED
WITH COMPASSION. YOU, LIKE ALL THE REST,
FOLLOWED THE TRAIL OF CONQUISTADORS
TO CUBA AND THE BLOODY WARS

AGAINST THE NATIVES. THEY WERE MADE YOUR SLAVES.
HOW MANY DID YOU SEND TO EARLY GRAVES?

*LAS CASAS wakes up as if from a dream, looks around,
and answers his invisible interrogator.*

LAS CASAS

I was young. I was blinded by Spanish might.
Yes, I was wrong, but I did see the light.
That sermon I wrote turned me 'round in my tracks.
And ever since then I've collected the facts
about the atrocities Spaniards have done.
I gave up my slaves, to the very last one.

*LAS CASAS falls asleep again and snores. An
apparition in a white robe appears. It's the ghost of
MONTESINOS, the Dominican priest who first began the
struggle for justice in New Spain in 1511, from a
little straw-thatched church.*

MONTESINOS

Las Casas! My spirit lives on in your own!
The seeds of resistance, courageously-sown
by my sermon, through you will bear heavenly fruit.
They forbid me to preach, but you are not mute.
The natives have suffered intolerable pain.
Plead their case to the King and the Council in Spain!

*The ghost disappears. LAS CASAS stirs and rubs his
eyes.*

LAS CASAS

My dreams are so vivid, it seems like bright day.
Was that FRAY MONTESINOS? Was it him I heard pray?

*LAS CASAS fingers his rosary and quietly mumbles a few
devotions before falling back to sleep. A Spaniard
dressed like a Taino enters and stands behind LAS
CASAS.*

CRISTOBAL RODRIGUEZ

FRAY BARTOLOME, listen! Before it's too late!
I'm CRISTOBAL RODRIGUEZ and it was my fate
to live a few years with an Arawak clan.
My respect for their culture was much greater than
that which I hold for my own native one.
The Tainos treated me just like a son.

*At these words LAS CASAS awakes. He rubs his
forehead, remembering.*

LAS CASAS

Were you called by the name of "La Lengua," The Tongue?

CRISTOBAL RODRIGUEZ

I was! Even Spaniards my praises have sung.
 Yet Ovando, the tyrant and gobernador
 expelled me! From that moment on I foreswore
 I'd go to the court of King Ferdinand
 in defense of the Arawak nation and land.
 Will you follow my footsteps, and take up the cause?
 Condemn the Conquista and Spanish outlaws!

During this speech LAS CASAS has been wide-eyed. He rubs his eyes again and when he opens them, the apparition is gone. He rises and comes forward to address the audience.

LAS CASAS

In a dream my mission appeared so clear:
 to rescue the natives from torture and fear.
 Once in Cuba I stopped a tyrant's hand.
 Narvaez betrayed his promise and planned
 to kill those who had my solemn word
 they'd be spared the sword. Is justice absurd?
 And what of human laws? What of devine?
 Lord, send me to Spain! My will is thine.

He clasps his hands in prayer and bows. Lights out on LAS CASAS and up on the CHORUS.

SCENE 2

Setting: A silver mine in Mexico. The CHORUS sings to the tune of Go Down Moses.

CHORUS

WHEN SPANIARDS CONQUERED MEXICO, LET MY PEOPLE GO.
 OH HOW THE NATIVE BLOOD DID FLOW, ALL THROUGH MEXICO.
 GO, FRAY BARTOLOME, BACK ACROSS THE OCEAN SEA.
 PLEAD FOR THEIR LIBERTY. SET THE INDIANS FREE.

Four slaves come onstage with two overseers. They're pausing in the work of mining silver. The heat is extreme and the overseers mop their brows. They crack their whips occasionally.

OVERSEER 1

(pushes the slave nearest him)

You Indian dog! You scum of the earth!
 I swear that you aren't even worth
 the peso or two I paid for you!

OVERSEER 2

(draws his sword, ready to
rush on the slave)

I'll test my blade. May I run him through?

OVERSEER 1

That can wait. Hear the dinner bell?
By God I've a hunger. What is that smell?

OVERSEER 2

It could be the chief of that tribe we subdued.

OVERSEER 1

Ah yes. Our dogs will have plenty of food.
I recall that CORTES had him roasted alive,
along with some nobles who somehow survived.

*The overseers exit in the direction of the bell,
leaving the slaves alone. The man threatened by
Overseer 1 raises his head dejectedly.*

SLAVE 1

Companeros, it's over for me. Tell my wife
that I prefer death. It's less painful than life.

SLAVE 2

I've no heart to stop you.

SLAVE 3

Nor I. Let us chew the poison casava, and die!

SLAVE 4

Goodbye, oh my sons and my daughters! Goodbye.

*Just as the slaves are about to chew the casava
poison, the chief ENRIQUILLO rushes in.*

ENRIQUILLO

Stop, my brothers! I come with good news!
Where's your guard, is he gone? There's no time to lose.
Quickly! To the rebellion that I have begun.
Our tribe has fought Valenzuela and won.
He stole my mare. He raped my wife
and he surely intended to end my life.
But I fled to the hills and gathered some men.
When the Spaniards pursued us, we beat them again!
Now softly! And swiftly as strength will permit.
To resistance! Rebellion! Let no Indian quit
'til we've won back our freedom. Shhh! Carefully now.
while they're gorging themselves, through the jungle we'll
plough.

*As the slaves and ENRIQUILLO stealthily exit, the
spotlight illumines the RAPPER.*

RAPPER

DID YOU THINK THAT THE SPANIARDS WERE ALWAYS AHEAD
 IN THE STRUGGLE TO CONQUER? WELL, YOU WERE MISLEAD.
 ENRIQUILLO WAS RAISED BY THE MONKS AND COULD READ.
 HE PLEADED HIS CASE IN THE COURTS, AND THIS DEED
 CAUSED HIS MASTER, VALENZUELA, TO CRY,
 "THAT BRASH, UPSTART INDIAN BY MY HAND SHALL DIE!
 I WON'T REST 'TIL HE HANGS FROM A GALLOWS OR TREE.
 BY GOD IT DOES IRK ME THAT HE SHOULD ROAM FREE!"

SCENE 3

Setting: Mexico, the High Court of New Spain.

*Behind a high bench sits the Viceroy or ruler, flanked
 by two magistrates. The presiding judge, ALONZO DE
 ZORITA, paces the floor in anticipation of the first
 case of the day. A new King, Phillip, now sits on the
 throne of Spain, and we hear his voice admonishing the
 High Court.*

KING PHILIP

I order you to do justice and in all things be fair.
 Abuse not the natives God gave to your care!

VICEROY

I, Luis de Velasco, Viceroy of New Spain
 by decree of King Phillip, long may he reign,
 do open this Court. The presiding judge,
 ALONSO DE ZORITA, will hear the first grudge.

ZORITA

I call Pedrarias Davila, governor of Panama.

*The conquistador PEDRARIAS DAVILA swaggers onstage,
 accompanied by his slave who fans him as he speaks.*

PEDRARIAS

Your Honor, most worthy judges and court.
 As the heat is oppressive, I'll try to be short.
 I'm charged with the deaths of hundreds of slaves.
 On my honor, the reason they went to their graves
 is the pox, the disease that disfigures and kills.
 How can I be blamed for the Indians' ills?

ZORITA

The fame of your tyranny precedes you here.
 Your very name evokes trembling and fear.
 For barbarism, sir, you have no rival
 in Panama, where even survival
 is forbidden fruit for the Indian tribes.
 You made a fortune through wars and bribes.

VICEROY

Objection! Davila has served well the Crown.
This smallpox has hit every Indian town.
Return to your encomienda and fire
the men who accused you!

PEDRARIAS

Thank you, Sire!

*PEDRARIAS struts offstage, still fanned by his slave.
ZORITA mops his brow.*

ZORITA

I call the encomendero VALENZUELA.

*VALENZUELA strides directly up to the judges. He's
young and hot-tempered and spits out his words.*

VALENZUELA

Learned judges, I beg you, hear my plea!
An affront to Spanish authority
is this rebel dog, ENRIQUILLO by name.
He must be stopped. Therefore I came
to ask for soldiers to hunt down my slave
in his jungle hideout. Kill the knave!

*VALENZUELA gets carried away at his last words and
draws his sword, stabbing at his imagined foe.*

ZORITA

ENRIQUILLO has cause to resist your command.
He received only injury by your hand.
Did you not desecrate his marriage, too,
by raping Dona Lucia who
is an Indian lady of noble birth?

VALENZUELA

By God I did, and for what it's worth
I'd do it again. I've a perfect right
to do as I please on my own plantation.

VICEROY

The court understands your indignation
and awards you soldiers to wage your war,
which appears quite just. One hundred? Or more?

VALENZUELA

One hundred men? Can you make it two?
This rascal is crafty, through and through.

VICEROY

Two hundred men. Next plaintiff, please.

ZORITA, visibly agitated by a second decision that overrides his own, mops his brow again and consults a paper.

ZORITA

The VICAR OF POPAYAN.

The VICAR OF POPAYAN is carried in on a litter held by two slaves. When the litter is set ddown before the judges, the VICAR raises his arms to be lifted. He's quite fat and the slaves struggle to bring him to standing.

VICAR

The charges against me are a fanrasy.
As a man of God I've been pleased to see
the conversion of oh, so many souls
to our Catholic faith. And it consoles
the Pope to know of our diligent preaching.

ZORITA

Sir, you have not spent your time in teaching.
Your piety has ben tepid, at best.
With strong, fleshly appetites you've been blessed.
While other clergy bury the dead,
you dig them up! And it is said
you rob the ancient Indian graves,
the digging done of coursee by your slaves,
for ornaments of silver and gold.

VICAR

Lies! All lies! What else were you told?

ZORITA

Your sinful pleasures know no bounds.
You are charged with training your own hounds
in the barbarous sport of giving chase
to helpless Indians. You disgrace
the Church and Crown. You make me ill!
How many natives did your dogs kill?

VICAR

I object to this unjust accusation.

VICEROY

Objection sustained. The Court knows your vocation
is a difficult one in these times of strife.

VICAR

A man can't be blamed for improving his life.

VICEROY

Return to the province of Popayan.

VICAR

(turns to the audience and
gloats)

The Spanish Court is so easy to con!

(turns back to the VICEROY)

Blessings upon thee, gentlemen!

May the saints preserve thee 'til we meet again.

The VICAR, puffed up with his success, forgets he came on a litter and flounces offstage, followed by his slaves dragging the litter. ZORITA comes forward and addresses the audience.

ZORITA

Now that you've seen Spanish justice at work,
and that barbarous VICAR with his loathsome smirk,
would you say that an honest judge has a chance?
This is justice by fire, by gallows, and lance.
Alas, truth has no place in this land of New Spain.
Those who defend the slaves, do so in vain.

Lights out and the spotlight's on the RAPPER.

RAPPER

ALONSO DE ZORITA TRIED VERY HARD
BUT AS A JUDGE HE WAS ALWAYS BARRED
FROM DOING JUSTICE FOR THE NATIVE FOLK.
THE HIGH COURT TREATED THEM LIKE A JOKE.

Spotlight shifts to the chorus, who sing to the tune of "Go Down, Moses."

CHORUS

WHEN JUSTICE WAS A FOREIGN WORD, ALL THROUGH MEXICO,
IN ASHES LAY THE QUETZAL BIRD, THE SACRED TEMPLES GLOWED.
BURNING! BURNING! THE SACRED MAYAN BOOKS ARE BURNING.
GONE FOR ETERNITY, THEIR WISDOM AND THEIR LEARNING.

SCENE 4

Setting: A plantation in Mexico worked by Mayan slaves. The VICEROY is visiting and a MAYAN seizes the opportunity to petition the VICEROY about his grievances.

MAYAN

Honored Chief! You see before you a man
who's mined for gold and tilled the land,
and endured my wretched servitude...

VICEROY

Get to the point!

MAYAN

Without being rude, I must protest the tribute I pay.
My land is being taken away,
and the maize I grow has come to harm
by the cattle that overrun this farm.
The master's rich. You see I'm not.
Yet he takes the little that I've got.
He steals the water from my stream...

VICEROY

Is this some sort of lazy scheme
to shirk your duty to His Majesty?
Be gone! Or I'll squash you like a flea!
Be sure to pay before you go.
I've doubled the tribute that you owe.

The MAYAN sinks to his knees, thunderstruck. At a signal from the VICEROY, two slaves haul him away.

SCENE 5

Setting: The VICEROY's sumptuous residence. He's entertaining four judges of the province. A servant girl serves tea. A male servant interrupts to say that a local landowner insists on seeing the VICEROY and won't leave. The landowner, SENOR ENCOMENDERO, follows him in.

SENOR ENCOMENDERO

Esteemed judges, estimado Virrey,
I need more slaves! Give ear to what I say.
Let me go and get some on the African Coast.
Black people work harder and they're taller than most
of these Indians who are about all gone.
Black slaves are the future. It's a deal? Are we on?

VICEROY

SENOR ENCOMENDERO, you are a bit crass,
but rather typical of your class.
This deal you mention, where do I fit in?

SENOR ENCOMENDERO

For you, twenty slaves and as many again
if you'll put up the money for two ships or three.
Slaves are what make a man rich, d'you see?

JUDGE 1

We do see, of course. You're a genius, Senor.

JUDGE 2

I'm good for one ship. Is that ten slaves? Or more?

JUDGE 3

To Africa! That's where our fortunes all lie!

VICEROY

As your VICEROY I expect I'll be priveleged to buy the pick of the lot for my sugar plantation.

SEÑOR ENCOMENDERO

We'll be the envy of all the colonial nation! Richer than lords. As rich as the King! Think of the money the slave trade will bring!

A servant brings a bottle of brandy and the men toast their future wealth.

SCENE 6

Setting: A mountainside in Hispaniola. ENRIQUILLO, the rebel chief, has successfully fought the Spaniards with his band of escaped slaves, both Arawak and black. His foe, HERNANDO DE SAN MIGUEL, has caught up with him, but the men are separated by a deep crevasse. In this predicament, their only weapons are words.

ENRIQUILLO

Saludos, Capitan. We meet at long last. The distance between us is small, and yet vast.

SAN MIGUEL

Give in, ENRIQUILLO!

ENRIQUILLO

What, and suffer more harms? Why do you think we first took up arms? You taught us to steal, to kill and to lie, and if we obey you, we still have to die.

SAN MIGUEL

This land belongs to the King of Spain. You're all his vassals!

ENRIQUILLO

You're all insane! I may be the only Indian chief who dares to avenge his countrymen's grief. My people and yours are light years apart. We live on the earth with a loving heart, and we do not believe that land can be sold. Your obsession and greed for silver and gold have made you into ravening beasts. And all of you, from captains to priests,

have a single thought: to enslave my nation!
You brought us starvation, and degradation.

SAN MIGUEL

The High Court sends me to negotiate
a truce. We just wish to communicate
the terms of a peace accord. Will you agree?

ENRIQUILLO

Perhaps. But have I a guarantee
this isn't more Spanish treachery?
You see that my men are both brown and black.
Neither Indian nor African will ever go back
to being your slaves. We will die in the fight!
We, the oppressed, are entitled to right
Spanish wrongs, where justice is lacking.
You have my word. We won't be attacking
your men. We'll only provide our defense.

SAN MIGUEL

I hold the provision that represents
the King's authority, through the High Court.
Ten terrible years you've gathered support
from every runaway vassal and slave.
As a chief you're exceptionally clever, and brave.
Can we now, in accord, lay our weapons down?
I pledge my respect, on behalf of the Crown.

*ENRIQUILLO turns to his men and speaks to them in
their languages. They raise their spears and shout
their agreement.*

ENRIQUILLO

(to SAN MIGUEL)

I pledge, for my part, to suspend all strife.

SAN MIGUEL

I'll respect your freedom, your Native ways. Your life.

ACT 3

SCENE 1

*Setting: Tenochtitlan, Mexico. The Aztec capital has
fallen to HERNAN CORTES.*

RAPPER

ENRIQUILLO LED HIS MEN TO VICTORY
BUT THE SPANISH NEVER CEASED THEIR TRICKERY
AND DECEIT. THEY WENT FORTH IN THE LAND,

TURNING TRIBE AGAINST TRIBE AND MAN AGAINST MAN.
THE MIGHTY AZTEC NATION FELL THAT WAY.
THIS IS WHAT THE HISTORIANS SAY.

Spotlight shifts to the CHORUS, who sing to a Calypso beat.

CHORUS

HERNAN CORTES THE CONQUISTADOR
ENTERED MEXICO WITH A CORPS
OF MEN AND HORSES SIX HUNDRED STRONG.
IT DIDN'T TAKE THEM VERY LONG
TO KILL THE NATIVES AND BURN THE CITY,
TENOCHTITLAN. GREAT WAS THE PITY
THAT ALL OF THE BEAUTY WENT UP IN SMOKE,
WITH THE WISDOM OF THE AZTEC FOLK.

A captured Aztec woman bends over her cooking pot, stirring. Her aspect is utter defeat. HERNAN CORTES enters with MALINCHE, the Aztec woman who served as an interpreter, advisor and intermediary for CORTES. CORTES addresses the audience boastfully.

CORTES

A job well-done, now wouldn't you say?
When conquering it will always pay
to bring an interpreter. I was smart.
Mine was captured right at the start
of my great campaign into Mexico.
It was true, a little blood had to flow.

MALINCHE

(steps forward to correct
CORTES)

A little blood? He understates the case!
He nearly wiped out the Aztec race!
(to CORTES)
And let's give credit where credit is due.
Moctezuma would never have listened to you.
But I persuaded him, oh so sweetly,
to come to your quarters, and then discreetly
advised he submit to your commands.
You had some rather outrageous demands!

The Aztec cook stops stirring and rises to tell her story.

AZTEC COOK

I survived the holocaust and, terrified,
I ran everywhere for a place to hide.
But the soldiers captured me with a chain
and marched me back through all the slain

to this place where I've been ordered to cook.
 But I ask you, where should I go look
 for food? Our crops have all been hit.
 And the Spaniard's stomach is a bottomless pit.
 What we eat in a month, they eat in a day!
 You can't fill them up, not even halfway.

CORTES has been swaggering to and fro while the women speak, utterly self-absorbed. Now he comes stage center and boasts. The women flank him, remarking how the Conquest is affecting them.

CORTES

Conquest does wonders for manly pride.

MALINCHE

Conquest is rough on the Indian guide.

AZTEC COOK

Conquest means too many people have died.

CORTES

Life has meaning if a person has gold.

MALINCHE

Life had dignity in days of old.

AZTEC COOK

I am a slave, and a slave can be sold.

CORTES

Will history treat me kindly, I hope?
 Will I be as famous and rich as the Pope?
 Who else had the nerve to sink his ships,
 so none could set sail and attempt any trips
 back to Spain? We marched on full force,
 and conquered each town as a matter of course.

MALINCHE

You'd have been nothing without your translator,
 diplomat, theoretician and fellow crusader.
 It's I who'll go down in the history books
 as the one with the brains. And of course, with the looks.

AZTEC COOK

And what of me and my powerful nation?
 Are we doomed to oblivion, as well as damnation?
 Oh, the glorious temples we built with our hands!
 The sumptuous palaces, the fertile lands!
 Wiped out in the flash of a horse and a lance
 and weapons of iron. We stood no chance
 against the dread white man's disease,
 the smallpox you brought us from overseas.

AZTEC COOK (CON'T) (CONT'D)

Oh, I too am stricken. Look! On my face!
Come death! You'll be my saving grace.

The AZTEC COOK slumps to the ground, clutching the sides of her head. MALINCHE drops to the ground beside her and cradles her head on her lap. CORTES ignores the drama entirely.

CORTES

I must get word to the Sovereign King
that we beat Moctezuma, and everything
he had that was silver or gold or a treasure
will be shipped to Spain for his Majesty's pleasure.
As for my reward, he can honor me
with land and slaves and the title "Marquis."
On with the Conquest! I've barely begun!
Let's go tear down some idols!
Where's the Temple of the Sun?

CORTES draws his sword and strides offstage, leaving the women weeping.

SCENE 2

Setting: The Inca Empire, Tahuantinsuyu, after the fall of Cuzco to the conquistador PIZZARO.

RAPPER

"PERHAPS WITH WORDS YOU WILL BE PIERCED,
BROKEN TO UNDERSTAND."
THUS SPOKE AN AZTEC POET AFTER THE CONQUEST OF HIS LAND.
THE SWEEPING PLAGUE OF SPANISH LUST CONTINUED, UNABATED.
IN JAMAICA AND IN CUBA TOO, THE COLONISTS WERE HATED.
MORE AND MORE EXPLORERS CAME, AND NEVER PAUSED FOR BREATH.
EVERYWHERE THE SPANIARDS WENT, THE NATIVES MET THEIR DEATH.

The CHORUS sings a mournful song.

CHORUS

TUMBALA AND NOW... CUZCO TOO.
LIFE WAS ANCIENT HERE IN PERU.
NONE COULD SAVE US FROM PIZZARO.
OH, INCA! OH, WOE!

Qhora Chinpu, an Inca princess, sits at her loom, weaving.
Her daughter watches.

QHORA CHINPU

We Inca princesses saw it all:
civil war, smallpox and the fall
of our once grand and glorious empire.

Cuzco burns! And in the bonfire,
 all the magnificence of our past,
 the sacred Quechua lore is cast.
 Children of the Sun, lament!

DAUGHTER

Children of the Sun, lament!

QHORA CHINPU

With these threads I weave the story
 of Inca harmony and glory.
 I weave the symbols of our universe,
 our ancient cosmos, and the curse
 that fell upon our native land.
 I weave the Inca nobles and
 old Manco Capac, King of Kings.

DAUGHTER

We weave the hope each new day brings.

QHORA CHINPU

Children of the Sun, be strong!
 The struggle ahead may be very long.

PIZZARO enters with some of his men. He passes the spot where the women are seated and unrolls a large sheet of paper. With grand gestures, he explains to his men his plan for the rebuilding of Cuzco.

PIZZAO

When the last idolatrous temple is down,
 we'll build a road right through this town.
 I want a house that's twice as grand
 as Atahuallpa's palace, planned
 to hold a hundred slaves, at least!
 Oh, I'm so pleased to have increased
 the Spanish Empire, one more time.
 Three cheers for Conquest!

QHORA CHINPU

We call it crime!

The Spaniards, startled, notice the women for the first time.

SCENE 3

Setting: Mexico City, the Conquistadors Hall of Fame.

RAPPER

YOU THINK THE SPANIARDS NEVER FOUGHT AGAINST EACH OTHER?
 AH NO! THEY'D POISON AND DENOUNCE THEIR SON OR BROTHER.

WITH INTRIGUES AND EXECUTIONS, EVEN REGULAR CRUSADES.
 THEY UNDERVALUED WOMEN--SISTERS, MOTHERS, AUNTS AND MAIDS.
 AND A PROPOS OF WOMEN, WHERE HAVE ALL THE WOMEN BEEN?
 WAS CONQUEST JUST A MALE AFFAIR? NO FEMALES ENTERED IN?

Spotlight shifts to the CHORUS who sing to a Calypso beat.

CHORUS

THE STAKES WERE HIGH. A WHOLE CONTINENT
 WAS UP FOR GRABS, AND FOR THIS EVENT
 SPAIN SENT HER WORST AND HER VERY BEST.
 LET'S SEE IF THE WOMEN ARE IMPRESSED.

The Conquistadors Hall of Fame is a cross between a courtroom drama and a game show. It's a room with a dais on one side where 7 women are seated. Each has suffered trauma in the Conquest. Their task is to judge the individual conquerors as to their worthiness to be in the Conquistadors Hall of Fame. Presiding over this drama is Queen Latifa, an African who was captured and enslaved in New Spain.

LATIFA

Welcome to the Conquistadors Hall of Fame.
 Who is worthy to present a claim?
 Let each come forward and say his name,
 and how he played the Conquest game.

Opposite the women and on a lower level stand seven men, each hoping to be inducted for his heroic discovery or conquest. QUEEN LATIFA motions COLUMBUS to come forward. He bows to all.

COLUMBUS

Cristobal Colon.
 I really deserve the number one spot
 in the Hall of Fame. It was my lot
 to discover the Indies and explore them, too.
 All that followed was clearly due
 to the bravery of my brothers and I.

From the sideline BALBOA, the next to be called, pipes up.

BALBOA

He found a New World! What a talented guy!

Some of the women make notes as BALBOA comes forward, smiling and bowing.

BALBOA (CONT'D)

Basco Nunez de Balboa.
Ladies, I found the Pacific Ocean,
and if I speak with some emotion,
it's because I went on foot overland.
My eyes were the first that ever scanned
that vast expanse of heavenly blue!

PONCE DE LEON

You were so bold! Yes, and daring! Three cheers for you!

PONCE DE LEON replaces BALBOA in front of the women.

PONCE DE LEON (CONT'D)

Buenos dias, senoras. How lovely you look.
(pauses to flirt with
CATALINA)

Juan PONCE DE LEON is my name, and I took
a trip from San Juan
(Puerto Rico these days)
and, sailing north through the tropical haze,
I discovered Florida, pure and pristine.

CORTES

Explorers like you are few and far between!

QUEEN LATIFA calls HERNAN CORTES.

CORTES (CONT'D)

HERNAN CORTES. I'm the richest man in all Mexico.
If you find one richer, I'd like to know.
King Charles was the man who made me that way.
I conquered Mexico and for my pay
he made me Marquis. So I built a few castles,
with help from my fifteen thousand vassals.

LATIFA

Your claim has been heard and recorded, senior.
May we please have the next conquistador?

*CORTEZ isn't happy that the women remain
expressionless. The men however pat him on the back
and high-five him when he returns to the line. PEDRO
DE ALVARADO comes forward.*

PEDRO DE ALVARADO

Can you guess my name? It rhymes with "bravado."
I'm Capitan PEDRO DE ALVARADO.
I've been everywhere in this land of New Spain.
I fought hard for my place in the Hall of Fame.
Mexico! Guatemala! Peru! And more.
I'm Spain's most reckless conquistador!

NARVAEZ

He's not afraid of danger, blood or gore.

At these words several of the women don't conceal their disgust. NARVAEZ begins his speech.

NARVAEZ (CONT'D)

Well, ladies, you've heard a lot of claims.
But of all these worthy, illustrious names,
remember PANFILO DE NARVAEZ, my dears.
I chased CORTES to allay the fears
of the VICEROY: his power was out of hand.
I led an expedition to that unknown land
called Florida.

LATIFA

Will the final conquistador step to the fore
and tell us what you wish to be remembered for?

PIZZAO

FRANCISCO PIZZARO. I am of humble birth,
but for that very reason, my claim is worth
twice as much. You see, I neither write nor read,
yet the conquest of Peru was a splendid deed.
Through the dense jungles we trudged, without eating,
and never turned back, 'though my men were entreating
me every step of the way. It was great!

COLUMBUS

The Inca conquest is our greatest to date!

LATIFA

(rises and regards the line of
men.)

Gentlemen, you've all had your say,
and it's clear there's been a price to pay.
Your successes came at quite a cost.
All of you were at some point lost
as you wandered through unknown territory.
But one more man would tell his story.
Come forth, ALVAR NUNEZ, please.

ALVAR NUNEZ CABEZA DE VACA enters. He was one of four Spanish sailors who survived the NARVAEZ expedition to Florida in 1528. He was one of the first white men to meet the native North American tribes, on a trek from Florida to Mexico.

CABEZA DE VACA

Ladies, I am on my knees with gratitude for your invitation.
It was a blessing for our nation
that I and three men survived a trip
to Florida on NARVAEZ's ship.
When the sea had swallowed our finest and best,

The inland journey devoured the rest.
 Eight years we wandered, the sole white men
 in North America. And finally, when
 we found our way to Mexico,
 the Spaniards dealt us the cruelest blow.
 Our Indian guides were put in chains!
 The very tribes who crossed the plains
 and saved our lives! And loved us so!
 I now call... ESTEVANICO!

*ESTEVANICO was a Moor from Spain who sailed on
 NARVAEZ' ship with CABEZA DE VACA and was shipwrecked
 in Florida. He's dressed in native finery--feathers,
 beads and deerskin. He took the lead in establishing
 friendly relations with the native North Americans.*

ESTAVANICO

(addresses the conquistadors,
 unlike CABEZA DE VACA who
 addressed the women.)

You conquistadors think that you're so fine
 'cause you kept the native peoples in line
 with your guns and swords. But I tell you now
 that CABEZA DE VACA and I knew how
 to pacify tribes by talking and trading
 and healing the sick, and gently persuading
 the Indian people to guide us along
 on our journey westward. By God it was wrong
 to enslave the natives and betray their trust!

*ESTEVANICO's voice has risen in indignation at these
 last words, and CABEZA DE VACA nods agreement. QUEEN
 LATIFA rises.*

LATIFA

Senor, your conduct appears to be just.
 Ladies, the decision lies in your hands.
 Who are the true heroes?

COLUMBUS

(steps forward to interrupt
 her)

Is that not a man's affair, madam, the Hall of Fame choices?

*The first of the six women judges to speak is
 ANACAONA, who answers COLUMBUS.*

ANACAONA

It seems clear to me that the women's voices
 are long overdue. And, sir, but for you,
 I'd have lived a long life as an Arawak queen.
 You? In the Hall of Fame? That is obscene!

As the men gasp in astonishment, ANACAONA's voice rises.

ANACAONA (CONT'D)

Great and warm was my hospitality.
In thanks, you ordered me hanged from a tree.

She takes her seat and BEATRIZ rises.

BEATRIZ

Almirante Colon, I charge that you
made your trips with money ill-gotten through
confiscating the wealth of Jews!

COLUMBUS scowls in contempt.

LATIFA

Next on our list is BASCO NUNEZ DE BALBOA?

CATALINA, a Castillian lady, rises.

CATALINA

Certainly not!
My husband and sons sailed off, and a lot
of misery came upon Spanish homes
when our men were gone. What woman roams
on foot through unknown land. And then...
(dissolves in tears)

I never saw my sons again!

MALINCHE puts her arm around CATALINA, then rises and singles out CORTES. He comes forward eagerly, confident of praise.

MALINCHE

HERNAN CORTES!
The Marquis of Oaxaca sounds terribly grand.
You made me rich and gave me land.
But do riches make immortality?
Would you buy what others are given, free?
No! You cannot enter the Hall of Fame
with a sword or a bribe or a selfish aim.

CORTEZ staggers backward, thunderstruck, and then recovers and charges MALINCHE. The other conquistadors restrain him. IXCHEL, the Mayan goddess, calls out to PEDRO DE ALVARADO. She's an imposing woman, six feet tall. ALVARADO is startled at hearing his name.

IXCHEL]

Capitan ALVARADO, you would enter this Hall?
I charge you with unsurpassed cruelty in all

the native lands you invaded. Your men killed Indian people for sport! And then it was you who slew Chief Tecum Uman, Guatemala's great hero. In Tenochtitlan the Aztec dancers were killed in cold blood, which action of yours unleashed a flood of violence continuing unto this day. You would enter the Hall of Fame, *senor*? No way!

ALVARADO draws his sword but the other conquistadors shake their heads and he gets the picture.

QHORA CHINPU

FRANCICO PIZARRO, come forward, please. We Incas remember you very well. These are the gifts you bestowed on our ancient empire: smallpox, beheadings, and death by fire! Sure, we had riches of silver and gold, but the wealth we prized were traditions of old. You stripped us of both! And for this you'd be praised? Why, if you're called a hero, I'll be quite amazed.

PIZARRO is the last to petition the women and he wisely retreats with just a few cuss words muttered under his breath. QUEEN LATIFA wraps up the proceedings.

LATIFA

You remaining two can expect the worst. PONCE DE LEON, you claimed to be first in Florida. But PIZARRO also explored that "virgin" land. And you both ignored the fact that the folks with the prior claim were the hunting and gathering tribes. It's a shame that you never considered cooperation. You might have learned much from their civilization!

RAPPER

FOURTEEN HUNDRED AND NINETY-TWO,
THE YEAR IT ALL BEGAN. AND WHO
DESERVES TO BE ELECTED TO
THE CONQUISTADORS HALL OF FAME?

LATIFA

We African peoples are proud that our race was represented. And in first place, the explorer and guide, the star of our show, the former slaves from Spain, ESTEVANICO!

ESTEVANICO dances up to the ladies, all smiles, and bows low before them. BEATRIZ and CATALINA rise and come forward.

BEATRIZ

In spot number two, a man of our race
 who easily could have become a disgrace
 like the villains and tyrants he followed from Spain.

CATALINA

But through shipwreck, misfortune, hunger and pain,
 this man learned to live like the native tribes do.
 ALVAR NUNEZ CABEZA DE VACA, thank you!

*Amidst an uproar from the conquistadors' side, LATIFA
 raises her hand for quiet.*

LATIFA

There's one more voice that should be heard.
 FRAY BARTOLOME has the final Word.
 (LAS CASAS makes a stately
 entrance in his monks robes.)

LAS CASAS

I cannot be called a conquistador,
 for the battle I fought was to deplore
 all that the Spaniards did in the name
 of our holy Lord and the Kings of Spain.
 You won't find me in a history book,
 but I tell you, ladies, it certainly took
 tremendous courage to launch an attack
 against the Conquest. And as I look back,
 God gave me long life and the strength for the fight.
 Resistance to tyranny! Might does not make right!

*The whole cast comes on stage for the finale. The
 RAPPER kicks it off.*

RAPPER

LA CONQUISTA WAS A BLOODY GAME.
 NO ONE IT TOUCHED WAS EVER THE SAME.
 WE CELEBRATE IN STORY AND SONG
 THOSE WHO LEARNED TO GET ALONG.
 WE'VE Elected THEM TO OUR HALL OF FAME,
 'THOUGH YOUR HISTORY BOOK DOESN'T MENTION THEIR NAME.
 HISTORY IS WRITTEN BY THE VICTORS, YOU SEE,
 BUT IT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

All the cast sings the refrain.

CAST

VICTORS WRITE THE HISTORY BUT IT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

RAPPER

LAS CASAS TRIED TO STOP THEM THEN
 BUT THE KILLING WENT ON, AGAIN AND AGAIN.
 WHOLE CIVILIZATIONS DISAPPEARED.

CONQUISTADORS WERE LOATHED AND FEARED.
THOUGH SOME BOOKS PRAISE THEIR BRAVERY,
IT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

CAST

VICTORS WRITE THE HISTORY
BUT IT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

RAPPER

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS WAS LONG AGO,
BUT THAT'S NOT THE END OF THE STORY, YOU KNOW.
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE EVERYWHERE TODAY
ARE STILL BEING PUSHED AND SHOVED OUT OF THE WAY.
THEY SAY IT WAS COLUMBUS'S DISCOVERY,
BUT THAT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

CAST

VICTORS WRITE THE HISTORY,
BUT IT'S ONLY HALF THE REALITY.

CAST (CONT'D)

(speaks rather than sings the
refrain-- a crescendo of
voices rising in unison)

The victors write the history but it's only half the reality.

THE END