

Slavecatchers in the Land of Giants, Part 3

Written by Laura Von Harten



Previously: Spanish sugar farmers in the Caribbean have depleted their supply of native slaves. They send their slavecatchers north to the Land of Giants – what is now the southeastern U.S. – and find a cheap labor pool in a place called Chicora. Luke de Ayllon, an influential Castillian planter, wants Chicora for himself. So he travels to Spain to meet with King Charles I (or II, III, IV or V, depending on the circumstances.)

Back in colonial times Spain was a franchise.

It was kind of like McDonalds, except those early franchisees expected their golden arches to be made of actual gold. And the up-sell was “Would you like some emeralds with that?”

This is how it worked. Wealthy and well-connected Castillians, with their king’s blessing, went out and conquered the New World under the brand name “Spain.” These guys – including Luke – invested their own money up front. They also had to personally marshal all of the resources – ships, sailors, soldiers and supplies – required to rape and pillage efficiently and effectively.

Because of the mortal danger inherent in the enterprise, there was always the possibility that the conqueror and his entourage would end up having to pay the ultimate price. The bean counters had to make sure this was addressed as a contingency in the business plan.

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The budget for the voyage generally included a line item for death. It was a catch-all category that included malaria, bone break fever, scurvy, man overboard, drunken brawl, pirate fight, jealous sailor, fall from crow's nest, venereal disease, wild animal attack, hurricane, shipwreck, mutiny, and murder (preceded by torture, which was almost as popular then as it is today.)

Spaniards conquerors may also have suffered from moral and ethical deficiencies that proved fatal. At least that's the theory advocated by William Grayson, Beaufort's first literary star. In the introduction to his poem, *Chicora*, he claims that our man Luke de Ayllon succumbed to "disappointed avarice or mortification."

The franchisees of Spain, in return for funding the expeditions and enduring traumatic near-death experiences, were provided with substantial non-monetary corporate support on behalf of the Spanish Crown. The benefits included use of the logo, co-op advertising opportunities and access to state-of-the-art high seas piracy prevention programs.

A savvy franchisee could expect a healthy return on his investment provided he survived the journey to the New World and back. The various compensation formulas were generous and included anything from slaves to treasure to governance of vast tracts of land.

Franchisees did not get to keep all of the loot, though. If they had borrowed money, they had investors to repay. The crew got a portion. And right off the top a percentage of the take was turned over to the Spanish treasury.

It was a win-win for both the Castellians and the Crown. And although it seems counterintuitive, the brutal conquest and indignities of colonization also benefited the natives of *Chicora*.

Sure they had some short-term suffering. The Spanish treated them barbarically. But looking on the bright side, the people of *Chicora* were presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be spared the torments of hell.

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Back in those times Christian evangelizing was a good excuse for bad behavior. Spanish officials told the conquistadors, in so many words, “Anything goes – as long as you also spread the Gospel.” They probably threw in a couple of wink-winks for good measure.

It was not supposed to be that way. In 1512, King Ferdinand (King Charles’ grandfather) issued 35 very specific laws – the Laws of Burgos – to protect the well-being of the Indians. Burgos was the name of the place (in tony Castile, of course) where the laws were issued.

Here is a summary of the Laws of Burgos:

Burn the native’s villages so they can’t go back to them. Put them in concentration camps, and for every 50 natives, provide four dormitories measuring 30 x 15. (King Ferdinand’s advisors thought it necessary to be specific about this.)

Each camp is to be inspected twice a year.

Indians are to spend five months mining gold, then given 40 days off for religious study. Spare time is to be used for the raising of corn and hens.

A colonist can have no less than 40 but no more than 150 native slaves. Slaves go free after two years (yeah, right.)

The colonist was to build a church with a bell to call the natives to prayer. He was to go to church with them EVERY NIGHT and make sure they crossed themselves and sang a few hymns.

The colonist must teach the natives the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Articles of Faith. To ensure the natives make adequate yearly progress in becoming good Christians, the colonist must administer a test to them every two weeks.

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Infants born to slaves are to be baptized within a week. For dying Indian making their last confession, the fee is to be waived.

No sleeping on the ground or running around like naked savages. You have to give your slaves hammocks and a little cash each year for clothing.

No verbal and physical abuse of the Indians, unless they are slaves.

Visitors from Spain have to mind their manners and help teach Sunday School.

The Laws of Burgos were created with good intentions. But colonists ignored their king's commands, just as today's scofflaws exceed speed limits and thumb their noses at recycling mandates.

When there were abuses of the natives, local officials generally looked the other way. But the courts still got clogged up with lawsuits because the Spanish colonists were constantly tattling on each other.

This was the state of affairs when King Charles gave Luke the authority to claim Chicora in the name of Spain.

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