Study questions

“The Spanish and the Myths of Conquest” Lecture O’Toole 1b

These discussion questions are organized by the following four themes (bolded below): how does the historian employ primary sources, what were the myths of Spanish conquest, how did the Spanish justify their conquest, and how did indigenous people respond?

1. How does historian Matthew Restall extract evidence from the **primary sources**, or chroniclers? How does he employ evidence, or engage in arguments, with the scholars or the secondary sources?
2. According Restall, what are the **myths** of the Spanish Conquest? Where do these myths come from? What is the myth of native desolation? How does the myth of native desolation serve Europeans? What is Restall’s argument or claim regarding native responses to the Spanish conquest and what followed? Where did the myth of apotheosis come from? How does Restall prove that the Mexica (or the Aztec, or the Nahuas) did not think that the Spanish were gods? How does Restall read his primary sources? What type of evidence counts for Restall? When and how does it matter to a historian when an event was recorded? How does a historian like Restall approach a text?
3. Why and how did Europeans (such as the Spanish) perceive Native Americans, or native peoples of the Americas, as less than fully human, or as utopian? Why did the Spanish need to see Native Americans, or native peoples of the Americas, as innocent and malleable? How did Europeans justify the Conquest? How does the engraving by Jan van der Straet communicate these European perceptions? How was barbarism fundamental to the myth of native desolation? What are the contradictions of European perceptions of native peoples? What did the myth of desolation help to **justify** and explain for Europeans? Why did Europeans in the eighteenth century want to see native peoples of the Americas as desolate? How have Western historians tended to depict the native world?
4. How did native people of the Americas **respond** to the Spanish conquest? Did native people accept the Conquest as a definitive historical event or an indication of Spanish triumph? Why and how would native people *not* have seen the Spanish conquest as a defeat? How did native allies take advantage of the Spanish conquerors?

(If you are feeling confused and confounded by the numbers of different peoples Restall is talking about, you are not alone! Here’s a short explanation of who those people are, merely for your reference: Matthew Restall refers to native peoples of the Americas in a number of different ways. He calls all native or indigenous people of the Americas, “Native Americans” or “natives.” “Indian” or *indio* would be the term that European colonizers employed to describe native peoples of the Americas. Incas were the Quechua-speaking rulers in the Andes of Andeans. The Aztecs (also called Mexica) were the rulers of Central Mexico of Nahuas who speak Nahuatl (including the states of Cholula, Tlateloco, and Tlaxcala), and had complicated imperial relations with the Totonacs of Tobasco and the Mixtecs, but not the resistant Tarascans of Michoacán and reluctant Zapotecs. The Maya (including the Cakchiquel and the Chontal) were the rulers and the inhabitants of what is today the Yucatan, Chiapas in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Belize. The people of Mesoamerica included the Aztecs and the Maya. The Taino were the native people of the Caribbean (including the island of Hispaniola which is today Santo Domingo and Haiti).)

5) According to **Peter Bakewell**, what made Potosi so famous? What was the difference between those who worked mita, or mitayos, and mingas? Why did the city boom after the 1570s? What does the map reveal and what does it hide about Spanish colonization of the Andes?