

The Conquest on Trial: Carvajal's Complaint of the Indians in the Court of Death (Latin American Originals)

By Carlos A. Jáuregui

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Michael de Carvajal's fascinating and unusual play—published by Luis Hurtado de Toledo in 1557—is a rare sixteenth-century theatrical piece about the conquest of the New World. It is a long-ignored but fundamental source for the study of Latin American cultural history. A theatrical version of the Spanish Conquest clearly influenced by Bartolomé de Las Casas, the play centers on a group of American natives filing a complaint against the Spanish conquistadors—before a tribunal presided over by Death. They denounce the horrors and crimes committed against them by the conquistadors and colonizers in their idolatrous greed for gold. The play constitutes an allegorical summary of the debates of the day about the emergence of the Spanish Empire, the justification of conquest, the right to wage war against the Indians, the evangelization of the natives, the discrimination against the newly converted peoples of the New World, the exploitation of Indian labor, the extent of the emperor's sovereignty, and the right to resist tyranny. The translation by Carlos Jáuregui and Mark Smith-Soto is the first English edition of this important work. It is presented in an annotated, bilingual edition, with a critical introduction that discusses the origins and ideological significance of the play.

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About the Author

Carlos Jáuregui is Associate Professor of Latin American Literature and Anthropology at Vanderbilt University.

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