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## Chapter 4: “1492 - Conquest of Paradise”

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### **1492: CONQUEST OF PARADISE (1992)**

**Rated “PG-13”: 155 minutes**

#### **Related Class Units of Study**

- Exploration and Discovery
- Columbus in the New World
- Revisionist History vs. Textbook Versions

#### **Film Synopsis:**

*1492: Conquest of Paradise*, starring Gerard Depardieu, depicts Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas and the effects it had on the Native Americans there. The film begins with his attempt to obtain support for his exploration amid a European world filled with skepticism and superstition. After finally receiving the backing and blessing of Queen Isabella, he departs on a journey that will change his life and that of the rest of the world forever. Much of the film covers the relationship between the Spanish explorers and the indigenous people of America. Some of the scenes are violent but they depict the reality of what actually happened in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, as the explorers became the conquerors. The film also depicts the politics that existed in Spain at the time and the role that politics played in Columbus’ fall from grace.

#### **Related Class Activities:**

This film could be used as a stand-alone supplement to the unit on Exploration and Discovery. However, I would recommend using it in conjunction with a discussion of the viewpoint of revisionist historians vs. the standard historical material we find in many textbooks.

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1. Begin by assigning the students reading from their textbooks which deals with Columbus’ voyages and his experiences in the Americas.
2. Explain to the students that “revisionist history” is writing that challenges official or orthodox portrayals of the past. Howard Zinn’s *A Peoples History of the United States: 1492-Present*, makes for an excellent starting point for discussion and comparison. In class, assign students excerpts from the first chapter of Zinn – “Columbus, The Indians and Human Progress”.

You will also find this same information online at

[http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/Columbus\\_PeoplesHx.html](http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/Columbus_PeoplesHx.html).

3. Ask the students to compare their textbook version of Columbus and his relationship with the indigenous people living in America to Zinn. What similarities did they find and what major differences between the two? Comparisons will vary, depending on the textbook being used by each class.
4. Distribute copies of **4:1 Film Note sheet: 1492-Conquest of Paradise**. The students should answer the questions on the Note sheet in preparation for a discussion comparing the film to Zinn and their textbook.
5. After viewing the film, hold a seminar discussion and ask individual students to share their answers to the film Note sheet.