

**Course Title:** History of Minorities in the United States

This course examines the experiences of men, women, and children deemed “minorities” in US history. It explores the challenges they faced, with an emphasis on the last one hundred years. It considers the dynamics of U.S. colonialism, slavery, immigration, gender discrimination, and struggles for civil rights. We will consider how race, ethnicity, gender, sex, and other categories of identity have affected Americans from all walks of life and shaped the political, social, and economic world in which we live.

**Class Topic** Cabeza de Vaca

**Lesson Goals students will:**

- see how historians use colonial Spanish sources (in translation) to help us better understand Native American and early Latino life in what will become the U.S. West.
- understand and analyze Native medical practices & ideas about exchange and gifting.
- explore how Native societies far away from points of initial Spanish contact were affected by Europeans even before they encountered Spanish people.
- learn about Spanish ideas about the New World, exploration, conquest, and native peoples.
- engage with primary and secondary sources.

**Description:** This two-part exercise is designed to happen over two course sessions. In the first session, students will examine the assigned secondary source carefully in small groups. They will be asked to answer questions about the source in order to deepen their understanding of Native/Spanish relations in the 16th century and examine how the author of the book, Andrés Reséndez, used primary sources to make claims. In the second session, students will remain in the same small groups and will look together at Cabeza de Vaca's writings, a primary source. They will compare what they learned by engaging each kind of text (secondary and primary sources).

**Step One :** Students will be assigned chapters 7 and 8 of the book, *A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca*, by Andrés Reséndez. They will come to class having read these two chapters.

**Step Two :** Students should divide into four groups. Each group will be assigned one section of the secondary source: Group 1 pages 157-167, Group 2 pages 167-178, Group 3 pages 188-196, Group 4 pages 196-204. Each group should consider the following:

Reséndez uses Cabeza de Vaca's narrative to describe life and practices among native peoples in the area that is now the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. In the section assigned to your group find an example of a distinct native practice or way of life that Cabeza de Vaca described and answer the following questions:

1. What is the practice and how does Cabeza de Vaca understand it?
2. Does he find it strange?
3. Did he see it as quite different from Spanish society? Are his judgments value-laden? If so, how? And how does he communicate this?

4. What does this tell you about Native American experiences and life before European contact that is unfamiliar or new?

**Step Three:** Each group should write one or two sentences in response to these questions and then generate a thesis statement about Cabeza de Vaca's view of the societies he encountered as if they were going to write a paper on this topic. The whole class will then discuss responses to the above questions and the thesis statements.

**Step Four:** During the next class period, students explore primary documents in the same small groups. Each group will consider a passage from *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca* (edited and translated by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (1999). Group 1 – p. 64, Group 2 – p. 92, Group – 3 p. 104, and Group 4 – p. 142.

Based in the excerpts from *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca* each group should answer the following questions:

1. What can you learn about Native American life in the 1530s by examining Cabeza de Vaca's original text?
2. What story can you tell using this text?
3. How is this description filtered through Cabeza de Vaca's Spanish understanding of Native Americans?

**Facilitation and Wrap up:**

After each group generates its answers to the assigned question, members will present their ideas to the larger class. After all of the presentation are complete, students will be asked to discuss what they have learned about Native American life in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from the Cabeza de Vaca reading.

**List of Materials :** Book chapters to distribute before the first class session, or in a course packet. Copies of primary sources.

**Comments or Additional Thoughts :** I see this as coming out of a student-centered pedagogy, one that encouraged students to mine ideas from texts and produce new knowledge through those engagements. Small groups allow students to bounce ideas off of each other and generate knowledge together. This also emerges out of writing pedagogy -- encouraging students to write a short paragraph collectively helps them see how the process of writing works for others and also facilitates writing.