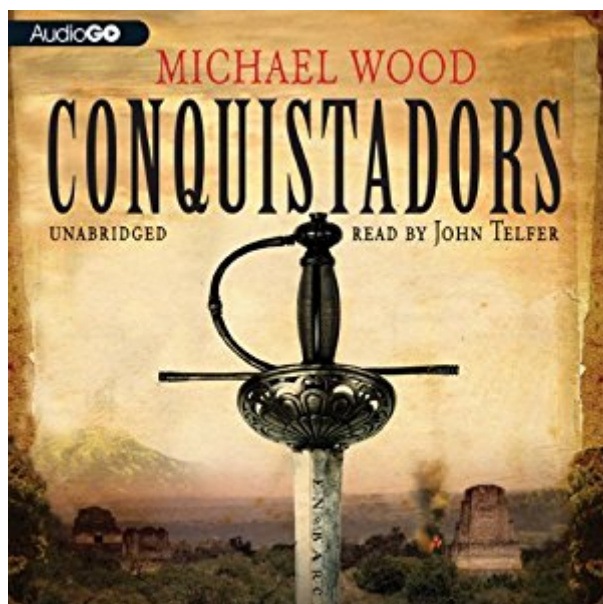


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# Conquistadors



## Synopsis

Following in the footsteps of the greatest Spanish adventurers, Michael Wood retraces the path of the conquistadors from the deserts of North Mexico to the heights of Machu Picchu. As he travels the same routes as Hernán Cortés, Francisco Pizarro, and Gonzalo Orellana, Wood describes the dramatic events that accompanied the epic sixteenth-century Spanish conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires. He also follows parts of Cabeza de Vaca's extraordinary journey across America to the Pacific. Few stories in history match these conquests for sheer drama, endurance, and distances covered, and Wood's gripping narrative brings them fully to life. Wood reconstructs both sides of the conquest, drawing from sources such as Bernal Diaz's eyewitness account, Cortés's own letters, and the Aztec texts recorded not long after the fall of Mexico. Wood's evocative story of his own journey makes a compelling connection with the sixteenth-century world as he relates the present-day customs, rituals, and oral traditions of the people he meets. He offers powerful descriptions of the rivers, mountains, and ruins he encounters on his trip, comparing what he has seen and experienced with the historical record. As well as being one of the pivotal events in history, the Spanish conquest of the Americas was one of the most cruel and devastating. Wood grapples with the moral legacy of the European invasion and with the implications of an episode in history that swept away civilizations, religions, and ways of life. The stories in *Conquistadors* are not only of conquest, heroism, and greed but of changes in the way we see the world, history and civilization, justice and human rights.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 41 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Blackstone Audio, Inc.

Audible.com Release Date: April 5, 2013

Language: English

ASIN: B00C7V5ASC

Best Sellers Rank: #41 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Latin America #362

#931 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe #931 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Specific Demographics > Ethnic Studies

## Customer Reviews

This exciting and well illustrated read traces the incredible expeditions of some of the most famous Spanish Conquistadors. Michael Woods travels along the tropical and to Everglades of Florida in search of the original route of the likes of Cortez and Pizarro. But this is not just an adventure story but also an accurate conveyance of history and the personalities of the time. He also manages to discuss the history on a thematic level - approaching issues such as human rights and colonialism. The illustrations are beautiful and add to the sense of wonder first experienced when viewed for the first time from European eyes. 5 stars - thoroughly worth purchasing for any history buff!

I fully expected this to be another dry, somnolent history book. Was I ever wrong! Michael Wood has written a conversational account of some of the most gripping yet unreported events in this hemisphere. Trust me on this: you will love his style and his expertise. Wood puts you in the mind of Cortes, Pizarro, and de Vaca and passionately paints the history created by these men. This book will make you want to walk in their footsteps.

This is an extremely well-written book that gives a cursory history of the Spanish conquest of Latin America. We read of the fall of the Aztecs and the Incas, as well as other trips of discovery undertaken by the Spanish explorers in the early part of the 16th century. The book is too short to give a detailed discussion of each of these events, but it does "hit the highlights", as it were. For anyone interested in further reading or study, there are a multitude of works available, but for the casual reader, this is an excellent introduction to what may be considered the beginnings of European-style civilization on this continent.

This was the book that really ignited my passion and interest in New World exploration. Woods combines contemporary quotes and descriptions with his own modern-day journeys in detailing the adventures of four seminal Spanish explorers - Hernan Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, and Francisco Orellana. This book was written as a companion piece to Woods' PBS documentary, but it stands alone fine without the video. While recounting the adventurers and their adventures, Woods (and his crew) follow parts of their routes and finds connections with each journey. While this device isn't all that unique, it provides a very modern connection with these distant stories. It's a reminder that these events didn't actually occur very far away in either time or place. He blends the historical with the modern and all of the stories read very smoothly. Accompanying each tale are a series of color images - historical artwork, as well as photos from the

trips that followed in the footsteps of these conquerors. The book isn't intended to dive deeply into each adventure. But the detail is more than adequate and certainly whetted my desire to learn more. I highly recommend this book.

This is a very good summary of the principal conquistadors and their exploits, but loses its way in trying to find modern meaning. It's fine to condemn the brutal Spanish, but Mr. Wood links the history to capitalism, consumerism, new age sensibilities, etc. and the links are tenuous and distracting.

Some books you read and toss; others you read and give away; and then others you read & keep, This is a book you will read & keep. Michael Wood has captured the history of the sixteenth century conquest of the Aztecs (Mexico) by Hernan Cortez, and conquest of the Incas (Equador to Chile) by Francisco Pizarro. This is not history for the faint of heart. Michael Wood writes critically about both Cortez and Pizarro. He discredits the false bravado that is so often built around the Conquistadors. For Wood the Pizarro clan (Francisco and his three half-brothers) were nothing more than "ruthless opportunists" who blatantly butchered, tortured, raped, and destroyed the Inca civilization in the name of the King Charles V and militant Catholicism. His commentary about Cortes was not much better. Wood takes space to give the reader a glimpse into the pathology of both Cortes and Pizarro. It is a psychological nibble and one wishes for more. For both men were psychopaths and considered the gold rich Aztecs and Incas as undeserving of any human rights, and no more than subhuman heathens. Wood captures the historical side of the Aztec and the Inca - soul-rending . The vanquished were filled with despair and dread, for they saw only an insatiable hunger for gold and women in the conquistadors' souls. They watched the rape and murder of their people under the shadow of the crucifix. In reality Cortes, Pizarro and their colleagues committed nothing short of genocide. When you read Wood's historical account of the conquistador, these men make the war atrocities of the 20th century pale in comparison. But, there are two judgements that history has passed on these Conquistadors. The first judgement is in regards to their inhuman treatment of the Inca's and Aztecs. The second judgement is regarding them as warriors. These Conquistadors were: bold, courageous, fanatical fighters. They were, on all accounts, superior tacticians. They had state-of-the-art steel swords and armor, horses (mobility) and fearful weapons (harquebus & mechanical crossbows) and knew how to use them. In reality, the Spanish were the greatest soldiers of their age; for a century and a half no Spanish army was ever defeated in pitched battle. And, in the history of war, never have so few conquered so much, so fast. It stuns one to

consider that Spaniards were outnumbered by perhaps a 1000 to 1 (in the case of Pizarro). How could Pizarro (or Cortez) conquer vast empires with a small band of Spanish soldiers? The ethno-historian Nigel Davies stated best in his book, 'The Inca', "These men thrived on adversity and always displayed an absolute resolve to retain the initiative." Wood also writes about Orellana's two year voyage from Quito, down the , and Cabeza de Vaca's eight year journey to Mexico City. Nearly every page has photos, maps and illustrations and the bibliography lists key books, including Indian narratives. This is a must read for anyone traveling to Mexico, Ecuador or especially Peru, and especially for students of Latin America. Highly recommended.

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