



Pope Paul III, oil painting by Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), ca. 1543

Courtesy Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali / Art Resource, NY

Native Rights Decree:

AD 1537: Pope Paul III opposes enslaving Native peoples

Pope Paul III issues a decree, “Sublimus Deus,” opposing the enslavement of indigenous peoples and calling them “true men.” This papal bull becomes the policy of Spain’s leaders—but conquistadors and colonists break with it. In the Americas, the Spanish use various official means to subjugate Native peoples: the Royal Encomienda (tribute paid to the Spanish

crowns from profits from forced labor), Repartimiento (forced labor), and Hacienda and Rancho (land grants).

“The said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved; should the contrary happen, it shall be null and have no effect.” —Pope Paul III, “Sublimus Deus”

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/185.html>

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/paul03/p3subli.htm>