

Name: _____

Biographies: Juan Garrido



Juan Garrido was born in West Africa around 1483. He is famous for being an African conquistador with thirty years of service to the Spanish crown.

Before taking the name Juan Garrido, this young man went from Africa to Portugal; it is not known whether as a slave or as a free man. In Lisbon, Portugal, he converted to Christianity and adopted the name of Juan Garrido. When he arrived in Spain, being a free man, he crossed the Atlantic Ocean sailing from Seville in 1503, as part of an expedition to Hispaniola. Juan Garrido spent six years in Hispaniola.

He participated in the conquest of Cuba with Diego de Velazquez and the conquest of Puerto Rico. He was with Ponce De Leon when Florida was discovered, but they did not have enough strength to conquer the peninsula. Garrido returned with the other members of the expedition and helped in the fight against the Caribbean Indians who had revolted.

The African adventurer spent thirteen years in the service of Ponce De Leon exploring and forcefully conquering Guadalupe and Dominica. Garrido, whom the Spaniards also called Handsome John, joined Marquis del Valle Hernando Cortez. He knew Cortez from the conquest of Cuba. He was with Cortez when the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec Empire.

It is known that the Aztecs were impressed by the vision of Garrido because his skin was dark, like the skin of the local god Tezcatlipoca, ruler of battles, and feared because he was associated with the forces of evil and destruction.

The Spaniards attacked and took the Aztec capital. In July 1520, Juan Garrido helped collect the bodies of some of his dead Spanish companions and built





a small chapel. Hernando Cortez ordered a memorial to be erected there called the "The Martyrs." The church of San Hipolito, St. Hippolytus, stands there today.

In 1522, Cortez gave Garrido some property outside of the Aztec capital for his service in the Spanish army. Wheat would not grow in the Caribbean, but in Mexico, Garrido managed to get two wheat seeds to grow, and one of them produced 180 grains. Juan Garrido was the first to grow wheat in America.

Garrido moved to Mexico City, the new capital under Spanish rule, with his wife and children. In 1525, he was given positions as a doorman, town crier, and watchman of the aqueduct of Chapultepec, which supplied water to the city. As the town crier, he was the executioner, piper, and master for the correct weight of gold and silver. By 1528, he headed an expedition investing his own money to work the gold mines of Zacatula. He returned home empty-handed within a year.

In 1533, he agreed to join Hernando Cortez again, in search of an island full of gold, pearls, and Amazon women. Garrido asked for a loan to pay for the expedition to Baja, California, which failed as they wandered the barren peninsula for two years. Juan Garrido returned to his home in 1535, ruined. He wrote a testimony of his service to the king of Spain requesting a pension for his 30 years of service as a conquistador.

It is because of that letter of testimony that so many things are known about him. This is a small part of what he wrote to Charles V, the king of Spain.

"... I was the first to have the inspiration in this New Spain to plant wheat [...] I did this and experimented at my own expense."

Juan Garrido died around 1550 in complete poverty. During his lifetime, Juan Garrido had seen three continents and fought many battles.



Name: _____

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

1. Garrido's first trip was from Seville to _____.
 - a. Cuba
 - b. Puerto Rico
 - c. Spain
 - d. Florida



2. Who did Juan Garrido work for?
 - a. Diego de Velazquez
 - b. Ponce De Leon
 - c. Hernando Cortez
 - d. All of the above

3. Because of his dark skin, the Aztecs thought that Garrido was sent from _____.
 - a. Tenochtitlan
 - b. Tezcatlipoca
 - c. Quetzacoatl
 - d. None of the above



4. They could never plant wheat in the Caribbean, but in Mexico, Garrido managed to get two of the seeds to prosper and one of them produced 180 grains.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. What position was given to Garrido in 1525?
 - a. Goalie
 - b. Crier
 - c. Vigilante
 - d. All of the above

