

B1. Forced conversions and Expulsion of the Muslims from Spain, 1492-1609

In the Iberian Peninsula (today's Spain and Portugal), Christian kingdoms in the north pushed southward, taking territories from the Muslims who had ruled there since the early 8th century. This process was called the 'reconquista' ('reconquest'). In 1492, when Spanish Christians conquered Granada, the last Muslim kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula, the new government issued the Alhambra Decree, expelling the Jews from Spain and beginning a period of intolerance toward Muslims. (Similarly, Portugal expelled both Jews and Muslims in 1497 – though many Portuguese Muslims relocated to Spain rather than leaving the region.)

At first, Spanish Muslims, known as 'Mudejars,' had some freedom of religion. Within a few years, however, Muslims were being forced – through torture and imprisonment – to convert to Christianity. Many 'Moriscos' (as Muslim converts to Christianity, and later their descendants, were called) continued to practice the Muslim religion in secret, which put them at risk from the Spanish Inquisition (a council that prosecuted anyone who differed from strict Catholic beliefs/practices). Religious intolerance, persecution, and forced conversions – along with frequent attempts to prevent Muslims from emigrating – resulted in several Muslim revolts, such as a revolt from 1499 to 1501, a second revolt in the mid-1500s, and the War of the Alpujarras from 1568 to 1571.

Finally, between 1609 and 1614, the majority of Muslims and their descendants (several hundred thousand people) were forced out of Spain. Most of them settled in North Africa, in what is today Morocco.

Footnote: In 2014, Spain agreed to offer Spanish citizenship to Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. No such provision has been offered to the descendants of the Moriscos.

Assignment: Imagine that you are a Morisco in the 16th century. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

-- In one diary entry, you are living in Spain in 1600. What is your life like there? What difficulties do you face? What stories has your grandfather told you about a revolt 30 years before? What do you hope for your people in the future?

--In another diary entry, it is 1612, and you were forced from your home in Spain the previous year. Now you are living in North Africa (today's Morocco). What difficulties have you faced since you left Spain? What do you miss about your home there? What is

different about the people living in your new home? (Language? Culture?) What do you have in common? How do you feel about what happened to you in Spain?