

Documenting United States History

DOCUMENT 1.4 | CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, Journal 1492

Italian explorer Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) sought a westerly route to Asia but landed in the Western Hemisphere in October 1492. The sovereigns of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, funded Columbus's voyages in hopes of expanding Spanish trade routes to Asia. This excerpt from his Journal is the first recorded contact between Europeans and native peoples.

They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse, almost like hairs of a horse's tail. They wear the hairs brought down to the eyebrows, except a few locks behind, which they wear long and never cut. They paint themselves black, and they are the color of the Canarians, neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and others of what color they find. Some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only Oil the nose. They neither carry nor know anything of arms, for I showed them swords, and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their darts being wands without iron, some of them having a fish's tooth at the end, and others being pointed in various ways. They are all of fair stature and size, with good faces, and well made. I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to ask what it was, and they gave me to understand that people from other adjacent islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they defended themselves. I believed, and still believe, that they come here from the mainland to take them prisoners. They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion

Christopher Columbus, John Cabot, and Gaspar Corte Real, The Journal of Christopher Columbus (during His First Voyage, 1492-93) and Documents Relating the Voyages of John Cabot and Gaspar Corte Real, ed. and trans. Clements R. Markham (London: Hakluyt Society, 1893). 38.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 1. Identify:** One way to determine significance is to look for patterns in reading. Patterns – or breaks in patterns – create emphasis. Identify and explain the significance of three details that Columbus communicates about his first encounter with Native Americans.
- 2. Analyze:** Making an inference is an important part of any historical analysis. When historians make an inference, they make an educated guess based on available evidence. From the three details you identified above, what can we infer about Columbus's interests in this venture?
- 3. Evaluate:** Based on your inference of Columbus's interests in this venture, how might later Spanish settlements affect native populations?

DOCUMENT 1.7 | BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS, Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies, 1542

Dominican priest Bartolome de las Casas (1484-1566), one of the first settlers in New Spain, protested the treatment of Indians by the Spanish in this address to Prince Philip, the future king of Spain. In this passage, Las Casas advocates for the rights of native peoples and rejects the encomienda system.

They are by nature the most humble, patient, and peaceable, holding no grudges, free from embroilments, neither excitable nor quarrelsome They are also poor people, for they not only possess little but have no desire to possess worldly goods. For this reason they are not arrogant, embittered, or greedy.... They are very clean in their persons, with alert, intelligent minds, docile and open to doctrine, very apt to receive our holy Catholic faith, to be endowed with virtuous customs, and to behave in a godly fashion. And once they begin to hear the tidings of the Faith, they are so insistent on knowing more and on taking the sacraments of the Church and on observing the divine cult that, truly, the missionaries who are here need to be endowed by God with great patience in order to cope with such eagerness....

Yet into this sheepfold, into this land of meek outcasts there came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravaging wild beasts, wolves, tigers, or lions that had been starved for many days

Bartolome de las Casas, The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account, ed. Bill M. Donovan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 28.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 4. Identify:** A historian's summary can provide a short but accurate account of the original text. Summaries include key details and feature general statements of fact, attitude, or purpose. Summarize Las Casas's presentation of native peoples and the actions of the Spaniards.
- 5. Analyze:** What portrayals of native peoples here might make a historian skeptical of their accuracy?
- 6. Evaluate:** What European beliefs and values might have led Las Casas to portray native peoples in this way?

DOCUMENT 1.12 | JOHN SMITH, *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, 1624

*Captain John Smith (1580-1631) was commissioned by the British Crown to oversee "all things abroad." Here he reflects on an encounter with native peoples in the Virginia Colony, Great Britain's earliest successful settlement in North America. This excerpt is from Smith's book *The Generall Historie of Virginia*.*

The new president and Martin, being little beloved, of weak judgment in dangers, and less industry in peace, committed the managing of all things abroad to Captain Smith: who by his own example, good words, and fair promises, set some to mow, others to bind thatch, some to build houses, others to thatch them, himself always bearing the greatest task for his own share, so that in short time, he provided most of them lodgings, neglecting any for himself. ... [Smith] shipped himself in the shallop to search the country for trade. The want [lack] of the language, knowledge to manage his boat without sails, the want [lack] of a sufficient power (knowing the multitude of the savages), apparel for his men, and other necessaries, were infinite impediments, yet no discouragement. Being but six or seven in company he went down the river to Kecoughtan, where at first they [the natives] scorned him, as a famished man, and would in derision offer him a handful of corn, a piece of bread, for their swords and muskets, and such like proportions also for their apparel. But seeing by trade and courtesy there was nothing to be had, he ... [I]et fly his muskets, ran his boat on shore, whereat they all fled into the woods. So marching toward their houses, they might see great heaps of corn: much ado he had to restrain his hungry soldiers from present taking of it, expecting as it happened that the savages would assault them, as not long after they did with a most hideous noise. Sixty or seventy of them, some black, some red, some white, some party-colored, came in a square order, singing and dancing out of the woods, with their okee (which was an idol made of skins, stuffed with moss, all painted and hung with chains and copper) borne before them: and in this manner being well armed, with clubs, targets, bows and arrows, they charged the English, that so kindly received them with their muskets loaded with pistol shot, that down fell their God, and divers lay sprawling on the ground; the rest fled again to the woods, and ere long sent one of their ... [own] to offer peace, and redeem their okee. Smith told them, if only six of them would come unarmed and load his boat, he would not only be their friend, but restore them their okee, and give them beads, copper, and hatchets besides: which on both sides was to their contents performed: and then they brought him venison, turkeys, wild fowl, bread, and what they had, singing and dancing in sign of friendship till they departed....

*John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2006), 93--94, originally printed in 1629, transcribed into modern English by Jason Stacy.*

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 7. Identify:** What economic activities does Smith describe? What impediments did Smith list that interfered with his attempts to trade?
- 8. Analyze:** Is Smith's account more favorable or unfavorable to the native peoples? Explain. In what ways are Smith's descriptions of native peoples similar to those of Columbus or Las Casas?
- 9. Evaluate:** In what ways might this document be a useful primary source for historians? In what ways might this document pose challenges for historians?

Working with Secondary Sources – Short Answer Questions (SAQ)

Section I, Part B of the AP U.S. History Exam consists of four short-answer questions. Students are required to answer the first and second questions and then answer either the third or the fourth question. The first question primarily assesses the practice of analyzing secondary sources, asking students to respond in writing to a historian's argument. This question addresses content from Historical Periods 3–8 of the course. As practice, we'll try one written for Period 1 below.

Native Americans, Europeans, and the Exchange of Misconceptions

From 1492 to 1754, profound changes took place on the North American continent. Over this period, diverse Native American societies that had existed for hundreds of years encountered and interacted with Europeans. The effects of the interactions between Europeans and Native Americans are the subject of intense study by historians. You already have had the opportunity to study a variety of sources that deal with both Native American and European perspectives on these interactions. Now read the two passages below and consider how different historians have sought to explain the encounter of these two cultures.

The soldiers of Christ were entering a world of deeply held religious beliefs every bit as complex and sophisticated as their own, but one they would rarely fathom or even try to understand. Native religions did not possess a specific theology; nor did they require that "believers" give verbal confessions of faith and live in obedience to a set of religious tenets stipulated by the church. Nevertheless, religion and ritual permeated the everyday lives of Indian peoples. European missionaries, convinced that there was only one true religion and it was theirs, tended to see things as black or white, good or evil. Indians who converted to Christianity must demonstrate unquestioning faith; Indians who resisted were clinging to heathen ways. For Christian missionaries, conversion was a simple matter: Indian people who had been living in darkness and sin would receive the light and accept salvation. It proved to be not that simple.

Colin G. Galloway, New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 69.

Before the arrival of the French, it is unlikely that there was an Indian market for scalps, for the practice of scalping seems to have been linked to rites of passage rather than to commerce. One eighteenth-century visitor recalled that among the neighboring Creeks, boys took their first scalps to establish their manhood.... Later in life, men took scalps to establish their bravery and to rise in the estimation of their families and communities By the 1730s, scalps had become commodities. Responding to market incentive..., Choctaws adopted the practice of cutting enemy scalps into several pieces so as to receive more than one payment for a single scalp.... For a brief period, French officers closely inspected their grisly purchases, paying for pieces in proportion to the whole, but this cost-saving measure soon had to be abandoned when Choctaws objected to such market regulation.

Claudio Saunt, "Our Indians' European Empires and the History of the Native American South," in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Eric R. Seeman, eds., The Atlantic in Global History, 1500-2000 (Upper Saddle River, NJ Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2007), 70.

Based on the two interpretations above, complete the following three tasks:

- 10.** Briefly explain the main point made by the first passage.
- 11.** Briefly explain the main point made by the second passage.
- 12.** Identify one specific example not mentioned in the passages and explain how it supports the interpretation of either passage. Your example should come from your knowledge or readings outside the two passages.

DOCUMENT 2.1 | SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN, Description of the French Fur Trade, 1608

Samuel de Champlain (1574-1635) founded the French colony of Quebec in 1608. In this document, he describes the beginning of the fur trade between the French and native peoples of modern Canada. Although Champlain refers to himself in the third person in this document, he is its author.

Near the spot which had thus been selected for a future settlement, Champlain discovered a deposit of excellent clay, and, by the way experiment, had a quantity of it manufactured in bricks, of which he made a wall on the brink of river. . . . In the meantime, Champlain had been followed to his rendezvous by a herd of adventurers from the maritime towns of France, who, out of proportion to the amount of furs which they could hope to obtain from the wandering bands of savages that might chance to visit the St. Lawrence [River]. The river was lined with . . . [Frenchmen] anxiously watching the coming of the savages, all impatient and eager to secure as large a share as possible of the uncertain and meager booty for which they had crossed the Atlantic. Fifteen or twenty barques [sailing vessels with three masts] were moored along the shore, all seeking the best opportunity for the display of the worthless trinkets for which they had avariciously [greedily] hoped to obtain a valuable cargo of furs.

Samuel de Champlain, Voyages of Samuel de Champlain: 1567-1635, trans. Charles Pomeroy Otis, vol. 11 (Boston, MA: Prince Society, 1880), 107-108.

DOCUMENT 2.2 | JOHN ROLFE, Letter on Jamestown Settlement, 1618

John Rolfe (1585-1622), one of the first British colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, perfected a mild strain of tobacco that proved so popular among European consumers that by the 1620s, tobacco became Jamestown's primary export. This letter was recorded in Captain John Smith's The Generall Historie of Virginia (Doc. 1.12).

An industrious man not other ways employed, nay well tend four acres of corn, and 1,000 plants of tobacco, and where they say an acre will yield but three or four barrels, we have ordinarily four or five, but of new ground six, seven, and eight, and a barrel of peas and beans, which we esteem as good as two of corn,... so that one man may provide corn for five [people], and apparel for two [people] by the profit of his tobacco... had we but carpenters to build and make carts and ploughs, and skillful men that know how to use them, and train up our cattle to draw them,... yet our want of experience brings but little to perfection but planting tobacco, and yet of that many are so covetous to have much, they make little good....

John Smith, The Generall Historie of Virginia (London: Printed by I. Dawson and I. Haviland for Michael Sparkes, 1632), 125-126, transcribed into modern English by Jason Stacy.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 13. Identify:** According to Rolfe, what economic advantages and social problems did tobacco pose for the colony?
- 14. Analyze:** Rolfe wanted "skillful men" who could grow corn and wheat and build carts and ploughs. What does Rolfe's vision of ideal colonists tell us about the reality of the colonists who settled there?
- 15. Evaluate:** Compare this document to Samuel de Champlain's description of the French fur trade (Doc.2.1). What were some similarities and some difference between these French and English enterprises?

DOCUMENT 2.3 | The Mayflower Compact, 1620

William Bradford (1590-1657) joined a group of Separatists who left the Church of England and escaped with them to Leiden, Holland, where they lived in self-imposed exile for over ten years. After receiving permission to settle in British North America, members of the group set sail from Plymouth, England, The Mayflower Compact, signed aboard the ship Mayflower after it was anchored in waters off Cape Cod in what is now Massachusetts, was an unofficial agreement for governance made by these English migrants.

We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc., having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof, to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, Acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names, at Cape Cod, the 11th day of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini, 1620.

Albert Stickney, Democratic Government: A Study of Politics (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885), 162.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 16. Identify:** What justification does Bradford provide for the formation of this government?
- 17. Analyze:** In what ways is this document a declaration of independence, and in what ways does it declare its allegiance to Great Britain?
- 18. Evaluate:** What does the organization of this document tell us about the values of the signatories?

DOCUMENT 2.4 | JOHN WINTHROP, "A Model of Christian Charity", 1630

John Winthrop (1587-1649) led the first wave of English Protestant "Puritans" to New England a decade after William Bradford and his Separatists. On board the ship Arbella, Winthrop, who served as the first governor of New England, gave this sermon as a way to situate Puritan New England within the framework of God's plan.

Now the only way to... provide for our posterity... is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man.... We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.... We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when he shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "The Lord make it likely that of New England." For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are agoing....

Edmund Clarence Stedman and Ellen Mackay Cortissoz. eds., A Library of American Literature from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time. vols. 1-2. Colonial Literature, 1607-1764 (New York: Charles Webster and Co., 1891), 306-307.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

- 19. Identify:** What kind of society does Winthrop envision? What will be the result if that society fails to come to pass?
- 20. Analyze:** Winthrop presents his social vision in religious terms. What secular advantages also might underlie his appeal to build a society "knit together... as I one man"?
- 21. Evaluate:** Compare this document to The Mayflower Compact. Describe the similarities and differences between them. How were the societies that they sought to create different from the one that John Rolfe describes in Jamestown (Doc. 2.2)?