

DBQ 3: Motives and Impact of Exploration (Chapter 14)

Question: Examine and explain the attitudes of European explorers toward Native Americans, and assess the impact that exploration had on the "New World."

Document 1

Source: Christopher Columbus, journal extracts, written during his exploration of the area now known as the Bahamas, 1492.

Tomorrow morning before we depart, I intend to land and see what can be found in the neighborhood. Here is no village, but farther within the island is one, where our Indians inform us we shall find the king, and that he has much gold. I shall penetrate so far as to reach the village and see or speak with the king, who, as they tell us, governs all these islands, and goes dressed, with a great deal of gold about him. I do not, however, give much credit to these accounts, as I understand the natives but imperfectly, and perceive them to be so poor that a trifling quantity of gold appears to them a great amount. This island appears to me to be a separate one from that of Saomete [modern Crooked Island], and I even think there may be others between them. I am not solicitous to examine particularly everything here, which indeed could not be done in fifty years, because my desire is to make all possible discoveries, and return to your Highnesses, if it please our Lord, in April. But in truth, should I meet with gold or spices in great quantity, I shall remain till I collect as much as possible, and for this purpose I am proceeding solely in quest of them.

Document 2

Source: Antonio de Montesinos, Dominican friar, *The Sermon*, criticizing the Spanish colonists who had enslaved the people of the Caribbean, 1511.

On what authority have you waged a detestable war against these people, who dwelt quietly and peacefully on their own land? Why do you keep them so oppressed and weary, not giving them enough to eat, not taking care of them in their illness? For with the excessive work you demand of them they fall ill and die, or rather you kill them with your desire to extract and acquire gold every day. And what care do you take that they should be instructed in religion? Are these not men? Have they not rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourself?

Document 3

Source: Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, whose father was one of the native allies of Cortés, 1520.

On the day that Tenochtitlán was taken, the Spaniards committed some of the most brutal acts ever inflicted upon the unfortunate people of this land. The cries of the helpless women and children were heart-rending. The Tlaxcaltecas and the other enemies of the Aztecs revenged themselves pitilessly for old offenses and robbed them of everything they could find. Only Prince Ixtlilxóchitl of Texcoco, ally of Cortés, felt compassion for the Aztecs, because they were of his own homeland. He kept his followers from maltreating the women and children as cruelly as did Cortés and the Spaniards. . . . The anguish and bewilderment of our foes was pitiful to see. The warriors gathered on the rooftops and stared at the ruins of their city in a dazed silence, and the women and children and old men were all weeping.

Document 4

Source: Aztec depiction of the stages of the smallpox epidemic that struck soon after the Spanish had fled, c. 1520.



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Document 5

Source: King Ferdinand and his daughter Juana of Spain, to be communicated to the Taino/Arawak (Native Americans) of Hispaniola, c. 1520.

The late Pope gave these islands and mainland of the ocean and the contents hereof to the above-mentioned King and Queen. . . . Therefore, we request that you . . . recognize the Church and its highest priest, the Pope, as rulers of the universe, and in their name the King and Queen of Spain as rulers of this land, allowing the religious fathers to preach our holy Faith to you. You own compliance as a duty to the King. . . . [We] shall not compel you to baptism unless you, informed of the Truth, wish to convert to our holy Catholic Faith as almost all your neighbors have done in other islands, in exchange for which Their Highnesses bestow many privileges and exemptions upon you.

Should you fail to comply, or delay maliciously in so doing, we assure you that with the help of God we shall use force against you, declaring war upon you from all sides and with all possible means, and we shall bind you to the yoke of the Church and of Their Highnesses; we shall enslave your persons, wives and sons, sell you or dispose of you as the King sees fit; we shall seize your possessions and harm you as much as we can as disobedient and resisting vassals.

Document 6

Source: Michel de Montaigne, French Renaissance essayist, *On Cannibals*, 1580.

I do not find that there is anything barbaric or savage about this nation [the "New World"], according to what I've been told, unless we are to call barbarism whatever differs from our own customs. Indeed, we seem to have no other standard of truth and reason than the opinions and customs of our own country. There at home is always the perfect religion, the perfect legal system—the perfect and most accomplished way of doing everything. These people are wild in the same sense that fruits are, produced by nature, alone, in her ordinary way.