

European & American Indian First Encounters DBQ

Directions: Using the documents of “first encounters,” determine the initial impressions that the Europeans and non-Europeans created of the other, reaching some conclusions about how these initial impressions and attitudes might have influenced the ways each group chose to deal with each other in the New World.

Document #1

Columbus' letter to the sovereigns, 1503, 4th voyage

“Exhausted, I fell asleep, groaning. I heard a very compassionate voice saying: “O fool and slow to believe and to serve they God, the God of all! Since thou wast born ever has He had thee in His most watchful care...Of the barriers of the Ocean sea, which were closed with such mighty chains, He gave thee they keys. What did He more for the people of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt? Or for David whom from a shepherd He made to be king in Judaea? He spoke to me ended, saying: “Fear not; have trust; all these tribulations are written upon marble and are not without cause.”

Document #2

Juan gines de Sdepulveda (1490-1575), a Spanish aristocrat, from “The Just War Against the Indians”

“It is established then, in accordance with the authority of the most eminent thinkers, that the dominion of prudent, good and humane men over those of contrary disposition is both just and natural...If you are familiar with the character and morals of the two peoples, that it is perfectly right that the Spaniards exercise their dominion over those barbarians in the New World and its adjacent lands. For in prudence, talent, and every kind of virtue they are as inferior to the Spanish as children to adults, or women to men, or the cruel and inhumane to the gentle...

Document #3

Indian Account of Cortes' Conquest, 1530s

And our messengers told him [Motecuhzoma] “the strangers' bodies are completely covered, so as only their faces can be seen. Their skin is white as if it were made of lime. They have yellow hair, though some have black and their beards are long and yellow. Their dogs are enormous, with flat ears and long dangling tongues. The color of their eyes is a burning yellow; their eyes flash fire and shoot off sparks. They bound here and there, panting, with their tongues hanging out. And they are spotted like an ocelot. Their deer carry them on their backs wherever they wish to go. These deer, our lord, are as tall as the roof of a house.”

Document #4

Aztec Poetry

“Flowers and Songs of Sorrow”

Nothing but flowers and songs of sorrow
Are left in Mexico and Tlatelolco,
Where once we saw warriors and wise men.
We know it is true
That we must perish,
For we are mortal men.
You, the Giver of Life,
You have ordained it.
We wander here and there
In our desolate poverty.
We are mortal men.
We have seen bloodshed and pain
Where once we saw beauty and valor.
We are crushed to the ground;
We lie in ruins.
There is nothing but grief and suffering
In Mexico and Tlatelolco,
Have you grown weary of your servants?
Are you angry with your servants,
O Giver of Life?

Document #5

Cortez pretends he can control thunder. From Jill Lepore, Encounters in the New World, 1999

Cortez...answered [the Indians]...that they deserved to be put to death, they and all the people of their towns, but that as we were the vassals of a great King and lord named Emperor Don Carolos...that if they were not as well disposed as they said they were, that we would take this course, but that if they were not, some of the Tepustles [iron beings] would jump out and kill them for some of the Tepustles were still angry because they had made war on us. At this moment the order was secretly given to put a match to the cannon which had been loaded, and it went off with such a thunderclap as was wanted, and the ball went buzzing over the hills, and it made a great noise, and the Caciques [chiefs] were terrified on hearing it. As they had never seen anything like it they believed what Cortes had told them was true.

Document #6

The Spread of Disease...Afred Crosby, "The First New World Pandemic and the Fall of the Great Indian Empires", 1967

These killers came to the New World with the explorers and the conquistadors. The fatal diseases of the Old World killed more effectively in the New and the comparatively benign diseases of the Old World turned killer in the New. There is little exaggeration in the statement of a German missionary in 1699 that "the Indians die so easily that the bare look and smell of a Spaniard causes them to give up the ghost." The most spectacular period of mortality among the American Indians occurred during the first hundred years of contact with The Europeans and Africans. Almost all of the contemporary historians of the early settlements, from Bartolome de las Casas to William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation, were awed by the ravages of epidemic diseases among the native populations of the Americas...

Document #7

Dutch artist, Theodore de Bry, 16th century, depicting Spanish cruelty in the New World



Document #8

Drawings by Guaman poma de Ayala, a Peruvian Indian who traced his lineage to the Inca. He was a Christian and hoped his reports would reach King Phillip II of Spain, who might end Spanish abuses- (early 1600s)

The Inca asks what the Spaniard eats. The Spaniard replies, "Gold."



Name: _____

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Document #1

What is Columbus' impression of the New World? _____

Document #2

What is Sdepulveda's impression of the New World? _____

Document #3

What is the Aztec impression of the Spaniards? _____

Document #4

What is the Aztec impression of the Spaniards? _____

Document #5

What is Cortez's (Cortes's) impression of the Native Americans? _____

Document #6

What was the impact of the Spaniards arrival in the New World? _____

Document #7

How does this engraving done by a Dutch artist help you to understand the Spanish impression of the Indians?

Document #8

How does this drawing made by a Peruvian Indian help you to understand his impression of the Spaniards?
