

*The American Spirit*

# New World Beginnings, 33,000 B.C.—A.D. 1769

... May it not then be lawful now to attempt the possession of such lands as are void of Christian inhabitants, for Christ's sake?

*William Strachey, c. 1620*

**Prologue:** Each ignorant of the other's existence, Native Americans and Europeans lived in isolation on their separate continents for millennia before Columbus's revolutionary voyage in 1492. For the Europeans, the Native Americans were both a wonder and a mystery, unexplained in either the Bible or the classical writings of the ancients that were being revived in the dawning age of the Renaissance. Learned European scholars earnestly debated whether the "Indians" were "true men." For their part, the Native Americans were no less baffled by the arrival of the Europeans, and they looked to their own folklore and traditions in order to understand this new race of people who had suddenly appeared among them. The Europeans, especially the Portuguese and the Spanish, had begun to penetrate and exploit Africa even before they made contact with the New World of the Americas. A fateful triangle was established as Europe drew slave labor from Africa to unlock and develop the riches of the Americas. Spain soon spread its empire over a vast American domain, exciting the jealousy of the English, who began in the late 1500s to launch their own imperial adventure in the New World.

## A. The Native Americans

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### I. Visualizing the New World (1506–1510)

*Early in the sixteenth century, the explorer Amerigo Vespucci wrote a letter detailing his experiences in the New World (a place to which he gave his name—America). The letter was translated and published throughout Europe, accompanied by illustrations that were often drawn by artists who themselves had never seen the newly discovered Western Hemisphere. How did the artists whose work is reproduced here imagine the Indians? What differences between the Indians and the Europeans did they think important? Did the various artists portray a consistent view of the Native Americans? From what sources in the history of European culture might these illustrators have drawn in their effort to understand Native Americans?*

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<sup>1</sup>The British Library, London.



Illustrations to Vespucci (top) 1509, (bottom) c. 1506–1510.

## 2. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda Belittles the Indians (1547)

*Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda was an outstanding example of the “Renaissance man.” A Spaniard who studied in the cradle of the Renaissance, Italy, he achieved fame as a theologian, philosopher, historian, and astronomer. When Emperor Charles V convened a debate in Valladolid, Spain, in 1550–1551 to determine the future of Spain’s relationship with the American aborigines, he naturally turned to Sepúlveda as one of the most learned men in his realm. As a student of Aristotle, Sepúlveda relied heavily on the classical distinction between “civilized” Greeks and “barbarians.” The selection that follows is not a transcript of the debate at Valladolid but an excerpt from Sepúlveda’s book *The Second Democrates*, published in 1547, in which he set forth his basic arguments. What differences does Sepúlveda emphasize between Europeans (especially Spaniards) and the Indians, and on what grounds does he assert the superiority of European culture?*

The Spanish have a perfect right to rule these barbarians of the New World and the adjacent islands, who in prudence, skill, virtues, and humanity are as inferior to the Spanish as children to adults, or women to men, for there exists between the two as great a difference as between savage and cruel races and the most merciful, between the most intemperate and the moderate and temperate and, I might even say, between apes and men.

You surely do not expect me to recall at length the prudence and talents of the Spanish. . . . And what can I say of the gentleness and humanity of our people, who, even in battle, after having gained the victory, put forth their greatest effort and care to save the greatest possible number of the conquered and to protect them from the cruelty of their allies?

Compare, then, these gifts of prudence, talent, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and religion with those possessed by these half-men (*homunculi*), in whom you will barely find the vestiges of humanity, who not only do not possess any learning at all, but are not even literate or in possession of any monument to their history except for some obscure and vague reminiscences of several things put down in various paintings; nor do they have written laws, but barbarian institutions and customs. Well, then, if we are dealing with virtue, what temperance or mercy can you expect from men who are committed to all types of intemperance and base frivolity, and eat human flesh? And do not believe that before the arrival of the Christians they lived in that pacific kingdom of Saturn which the poets have invented; for, on the contrary, they waged continual and ferocious war upon one another with such fierceness that they did not consider a victory at all worthwhile unless they sated their monstrous hunger with the flesh of their enemies. . . . Furthermore these Indians were otherwise so cowardly and timid that they could barely endure the presence of our soldiers, and many times thousands upon thousands of them scattered in flight like women before Spaniards so few that they did not even number one hundred. . . . Although some of them show a certain ingenuity for various works of artisanship, this is no proof of human cleverness, for we can

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<sup>2</sup>Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *The Second Democrates* (1547).

observe animals, birds, and spiders making certain structures which no human accomplishment can competently imitate. And as for the way of life of the inhabitants of New Spain and the province of Mexico, I have already said that these people are considered the most civilized of all, and they themselves take pride in their public institutions, because they have cities erected in a rational manner and kings who are not hereditary but elected by popular vote, and among themselves they carry on commercial activities in the manner of civilized peoples. But see how they deceive themselves, and how much I dissent from such an opinion, seeing, on the contrary, in these very institutions a proof of the crudity, the barbarity, and the natural slavery of these people; for having houses and some rational way of life and some sort of commerce is a thing which the necessities of nature itself induce, and only serves to prove that they are not bears or monkeys and are not totally lacking in reason. But on the other hand, they have established their nation in such a way that no one possesses anything individually, neither a house nor a field, which he can leave to his heirs in his will, for everything belongs to their masters whom, with improper nomenclature, they call kings, and by whose whims they live, more than by their own, ready to do the bidding and desire of these rulers and possessing no liberty. And the fulfillment of all this, not under the pressure of arms but in a voluntary and spontaneous way, is a definite sign of the servile and base soul of these barbarians. They have distributed the land in such a way that they themselves cultivate the royal and public holdings, one part belonging to the king, another to public feasts and sacrifices, with only a third reserved for their own advantage, and all this is done in such a way that they live as employees of the king, paying, thanks to him, exceedingly high taxes. . . . And if this type of servile and barbarous nation had not been to their liking and nature, it would have been easy for them, as it was not a hereditary monarchy, to take advantage of the death of a king in order to obtain a freer state and one more favorable to their interests; by not doing so, they have stated quite clearly that they have been born to slavery and not to civic and liberal life. Therefore, if you wish to reduce them, I do not say to our domination, but to a servitude a little less harsh, it will not be difficult for them to change their masters, and instead of the ones they had, who were barbarous and impious and inhuman, to accept the Christians, cultivators of human virtues and the true faith. . . .

### 3. *Bartolomé de Las Casas Defends the Indians (1552)*

*The Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas was Sepúlveda's great antagonist in the debates of 1550–1551 at Valladolid. As a young man, Las Casas had sailed with one of the first Spanish expeditions to the West Indies in 1502. A humane, sensitive priest, he was soon repelled by his countrymen's treatment of the native peoples of the New World. He eventually became bishop of Guatemala and devoted himself to reforming Spanish colonial policies, for which he was recognized as the "Protector of the Indians." His vivid and polemical account *The Destruction of the Indies* did much to spread the "Black Legend" of Spain's brutal behavior in the New World—a*

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<sup>3</sup>Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Thirty Very Judicial Propositions* (1552).

*legend not without substance, and eagerly exploited by the rival English. How are his views of the Indians different from those of Sepúlveda? What ideas did the two debaters share?*

Now if we shall have shown that among our Indians of the western and southern shores (granting that we call them barbarians and that they are barbarians) there are important kingdoms, large numbers of people who live settled lives in a society, great cities, kings, judges and laws, persons who engage in commerce, buying, selling, lending, and the other contracts of the law of nations, will it not stand proved that the Reverend Doctor Sepúlveda has spoken wrongly and viciously against peoples like these, either out of malice or ignorance of Aristotle's teaching, and, therefore, has falsely and perhaps irreparably slandered them before the entire world? From the fact that the Indians are barbarians it does not necessarily follow that they are incapable of government and have to be ruled by others, except to be taught about the Catholic faith and to be admitted to the holy sacraments. They are not ignorant, inhuman, or bestial. Rather, long before they had heard the word Spaniard they had properly organized states, wisely ordered by excellent laws, religion, and custom. They cultivated friendship and, bound together in common fellowship, lived in populous cities in which they wisely administered the affairs of both peace and war justly and equitably, truly governed by laws that at very many points surpass ours, and could have won the admiration of the sages of Athens. . . .

Now if they are to be subjugated by war because they are ignorant of polished literature, . . . I would like to hear Sepúlveda, in his cleverness, answer this question: Does he think that the war of the Romans against the Spanish was justified in order to free them from barbarism? And this question also: Did the Spanish wage an unjust war when they vigorously defended themselves against them?

Next, I call the Spaniards who plunder that unhappy people torturers. Do you think that the Romans, once they had subjugated the wild and barbaric peoples of Spain, could with secure right divide all of you among themselves, handing over so many head of both males and females as allotments to individuals? And do you then conclude that the Romans could have stripped your rulers of their authority and consigned all of you, after you had been deprived of your liberty, to wretched labors, especially in searching for gold and silver lodes and mining and refining the metals? . . . For God's sake and man's faith in him, is this the way to impose the yoke of Christ on Christian men? Is this the way to remove wild barbarism from the minds of barbarians? Is it not, rather, to act like thieves, cut-throats, and cruel plunderers and to drive the gentlest of people headlong into despair? The Indian race is not that barbaric, nor are they dull witted or stupid, but they are easy to teach and very talented in learning all the liberal arts, and very ready to accept, honor, and observe the Christian religion and correct their sins (as experience has taught) once priests have introduced them to the sacred mysteries and taught them the word of God. They have been endowed with excellent conduct, and before the coming of the Spaniards, as we have said, they had political states that were well founded on beneficial laws.

Furthermore, they are so skilled in every mechanical art that with every right they should be set ahead of all the nations of the known world on this score, so

very beautiful in their skill and artistry are the things this people produces in the grace of its architecture, its painting, and its needlework. But Sepúlveda despises these mechanical arts, as if these things do not reflect inventiveness, ingenuity, industry, and right reason. For a mechanical art is an operative habit of the intellect that is usually defined as “the right way to make things, directing the acts of the reason, through which the artisan proceeds in orderly fashion, easily, and unerringly in the very act of reason.” So these men are not stupid, Reverend Doctor. Their skillfully fashioned works of superior refinement awaken the admiration of all nations, because works proclaim a man’s talent, for, as the poet says, the work commends the craftsman. Also, Prosper [of Aquitaine] says: “See, the maker is proclaimed by the wonderful signs of his works and the effects, too, sing of their author.”

In the liberal arts that they have been taught up to now, such as grammar and logic, they are remarkably adept. With every kind of music they charm the ears of their audience with wonderful sweetness. They write skillfully and quite elegantly, so that most often we are at a loss to know whether the characters are handwritten or printed. . . .

The Indians are our brothers, and Christ has given his life for them. Why, then, do we persecute them with such inhuman savagery when they do not deserve such treatment? The past, because it cannot be undone, must be attributed to our weakness, provided that what has been taken unjustly is restored.

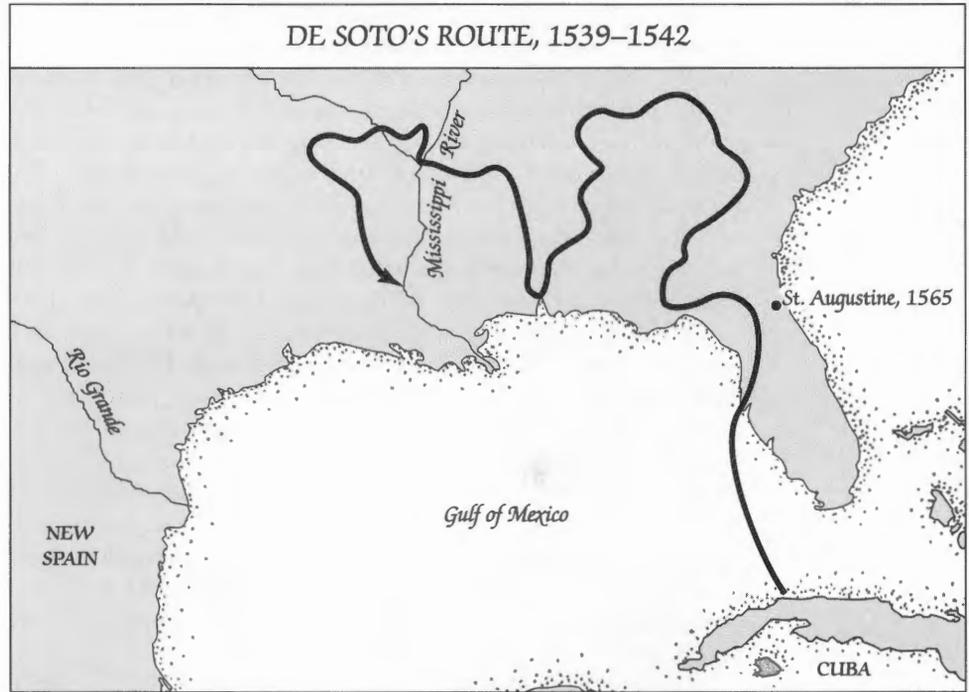
Finally, let all savagery and apparatus of war, which are better suited to Moslems than Christians, be done away with. Let upright heralds be sent to proclaim Jesus Christ in their way of life and to convey the attitudes of Peter and Paul. [The Indians] will embrace the teaching of the gospel, as I well know, for they are not stupid or barbarous but have a native sincerity and are simple, moderate, and meek, and, finally, such that I do not know whether there is any people readier to receive the gospel. Once they have embraced it, it is marvelous with what piety, eagerness, faith, and charity they obey Christ’s precepts and venerate the sacraments. For they are docile and clever, and in their diligence and gifts of nature, they excel most peoples of the known world. . . .

#### **4. Hernando de Soto Encounters the Indians of the Southeast (1539–1542)**

*After serving under Francisco Pizarro during the conquest of Peru, Hernando de Soto was named governor of Cuba with the right to conquer Florida. In 1539, he landed near Tampa Bay and commenced a three-year-long adventure that mixed cruelty, suffering, and disappointment in roughly equal measure. Seeking to duplicate Pizarro’s spectacular victory over the Incas, de Soto led his armed band north from Florida through present-day Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana—but failed to find anything that remotely resembled the riches of Peru. When de Soto died in 1542, his men secretly disposed of his body in the Mississippi River, both to prevent its despoliation by vengeful Indians*

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<sup>4</sup>From Lawrence Clayton et al., *The de Soto Chronicles: The Expedition of Hernando de Soto to North America in 1539–1543*, Vol. 1, pp. 288–294. Copyright © 1993. Reprinted by permission of the University of Alabama Press.



*and to mask the fact that they were now leaderless. Remnants of de Soto's troops made their way down the coast of the Gulf of Mexico and straggled into Vera Cruz in 1543. What does the following contemporary account of de Soto's encounters with various Indian groups suggest about the Spanish attitude toward the New World's indigenous peoples? About those people's regard for the Spaniards? What led de Soto to behave as he did? What factors enabled him to behave as he did?*

... On Sunday, the tenth of October [1540], the Governor [de Soto] entered in the town of Tascaluça [Tuscaloosa], which was called Athahachi, a new town; and the cacique [chief] was on a balcony . . . , seated upon some high cushions, and many principals of his Indians with him. He . . . had a young son as tall as he, but he was more slender. . . . And although the Governor entered in the plaza and dismounted and went up to him, he did not rise but rather was quiet and composed, as if he were a king, and with much gravity. The Governor sat with him a bit, and after a little while he rose and said that they should go to eat and took him with him, and Indians came to dance; and they danced very well in the way of the peasants of Spain, in such a manner that it was a pleasure to see.

At night he wished to go, but . . . [de Soto] told him that he had to sleep there; and he understood it and showed that he scoffed at such a decision, being lord, to give him so suddenly a restraint or impediment to his liberty; and concealing his intentions in the matter, he then dispatched his principal Indians, each one by himself, and he slept there to his sorrow. The next day the Governor asked for tamemes [Indian porters] and one hundred Indian women, and the cacique gave them four hundred

tamemes and said that he would give them the rest of the tamemes and the women in Mabila, the province of a principal vassal of his, and the Governor was content that the rest of his unjust demand would be satisfied in Mabila. . . .

. . . On Monday, the eighteenth of October, the day of St. Luke, the Governor arrived at Mabila, having passed that day through some towns. But these towns detained the soldiers, pillaging and scattering themselves, for the land seemed populous; thus only forty on horseback arrived in advance guard with the Governor, and since they were a little detained, in order for the Governor not to show weakness, he entered in the town with the cacique, and all entered with him. The Indians then did an *areito*, which is their kind of ball with dancing and singing.

While watching this, some soldiers saw them placing bundles of bows and arrows secretly in some palm leaves, and other Christians saw that the huts were filled high and low with concealed people. The Governor was warned, and he placed his helmet on his head and commanded that all should mount their horses and warn all the soldiers who had arrived; and scarcely had they left, when the Indians took command of the gates of the wall of the town. And Luis de Moscoso and Baltasar de Gallegos and Espíndola, Captain of the guard, and seven or eight soldiers remained with the Governor. And the cacique plunged into a hut and refused to come out from it; and then they began to shoot arrows at the Governor. Baltasar de Gallegos entered for the cacique, and he not wanting to leave, he [Gallegos] cut off the arm of a principal Indian with a slash. . . .

During this time Solís, a resident of Triana of Seville, and Rodrigo Rangel, had mounted. They were the first, and for his sins Solís was then shot down dead. Rodrigo Rangel arrived near the gate of the town at the time that the Governor and two soldiers of his guard with him were leaving, and about him [the Governor] were more than seventy Indians, who halted out of fear of the horse of Rodrigo Rangel, and he [the Governor] wishing him to give it to him, a black man arrived with his own [horse]; and he commanded Rodrigo Rangel to aid the Captain of the guard who remained behind, who came out very fatigued, and with him a soldier of the guard, and he on horseback faced his enemies until he got out of danger. And Rodrigo Rangel returned to the Governor, and he drew out more than twenty arrows that he carried hanging from his armor, which was a quilted tunic of thick cotton; and he commanded Rangel to guard [the body of] Solís until he could bring him out from among their enemies, so that they might not carry him within, and so that the Governor might go to collect the soldiers. There was so much virtue and shame this day in all those who found themselves in this first attack and the beginning of this bad day. They fought admirably, and each Christian did his duty as a most valiant soldier. Luis de Moscoso and Baltasar de Gallegos left with the remaining soldiers through another gate. . . .

. . . Then, the [Governor] encircled them on many sides until all the army arrived, and they entered it through three sides setting fire, first cutting through the palisade with axes; and the fire traveled so that the nine arrobas of pearls that they brought were burned, and all the clothes and ornaments and chalices and moulds for wafers, and the wine for saying mass, and they were left like Arabs, empty-handed and with great hardship.

The Christian women, who were slaves of the Governor, had remained in a hut, and some pages, a friar, a cleric, and a cook and some soldiers; they defended them-

selves very well from the Indians, who could not enter until the Christians arrived with the fire and brought them out. And all the Spaniards fought like men of great spirit, and twenty-two of them died, and they wounded another one hundred and forty-eight with six hundred and eighty-eight arrow wounds, and they killed seven horses and wounded twenty-nine others. The women and even boys of four years struggled against the Christians, and many Indians hanged themselves in order not to fall into their hands, and others plunged into the fire willingly. See what spirit those tamemes had. There were many great arrow shots sent with such fine will and force, that the lance of a gentleman, named Nuño de Tovar, which was of two pieces of ash and very good, was pierced by an arrow through the middle from side to side, like a drill, without splintering anything, and the arrow made a cross on the lance.

Don Carlos died this day, and also Francisco de Soto, nephew of the Governor, and Juan de Gamez de Jaen, and Men Rodríguez, a good Portuguese gentleman, and Espinosa, a good gentleman, and another called Velez, and one Blasco de Barcarrota and other very honored soldiers; and the wounded were most of the people of worth and of honor. They killed three thousand Indians, in addition to which there were many others wounded, which they found afterward dead in the huts and by the roads. Nothing was ever learned of the cacique [Tascaluça], either dead or alive; the son was found lanced. . . .

## B. *The Spanish in America*

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### 1. *Hernán Cortés Conquers Mexico (1519–1526)*

*In 1519 the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico and quickly conquered the Aztecs, a powerful people who had long dominated their neighbors in the central Mexican highlands. In the passage below, Cortés, writing to his king in Spain, describes his first encounter with the Aztec ruler Moctezuma, as well as his efforts to suppress the religious practices of the Aztecs, especially those involving human sacrifice. What advantages did Cortés possess in his confrontation with the Aztecs? How did his own cultural background influence his treatment of the native people?*

#### *The Second Letter*

**The Second Despatch of Hernán Cortés to the Emperor: Sent from Segura de la Frontera on the 30th of October, 1520.**

Most High Mighty and Catholic Prince, Invincible Emperor, and our Sovereign Liege:

. . . Mutezuma himself came out to meet us with some two hundred nobles, all barefoot and dressed in some kind of uniform also very rich, in fact more so than the others. They came forward in two long lines keeping close to the walls of the street, which is very broad and fine and so straight that one can see from one end

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<sup>1</sup>Hernán Cortés, *Five Letters, 1519–1526* (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1929), pp. 69–92.

of it to the other, though it is some two-thirds of a league in length and lined on both sides with very beautiful, large houses, both private dwellings and temples. . . . And while speaking to Mutezuma I took off a necklace of pearls and crystals which I was wearing and threw it round his neck; whereupon having proceeded some little way up the street a servant of his came back to me with two necklaces wrapped up in a napkin, made from the shells of sea snails, which are much prized by them; and from each necklace hung eight prawns fashioned very beautifully in gold some six inches in length. The messenger who brought them put them round my neck and we then continued up the street in the manner described until we came to a large and very handsome house which Mutezuma had prepared for our lodging. There he took me by the hand and led me to a large room opposite the patio by which we had entered, and seating me on a daïs very richly worked, for it was intended for royal use, he bade me await him there, and took his departure. After a short time, when all my company had found lodging, he returned with many various ornaments of gold, silver and featherwork, and some five or six thousand cotton clothes, richly dyed and embroidered in various ways, and having made me a present of them he seated himself on another low bench which was placed next to mine, and addressed me in this manner:

“Long time have we been informed by the writings of our ancestors that neither myself nor any of those who inhabit this land are natives of it, but rather strangers who have come to it from foreign parts. We likewise know that from those parts our nation was led by a certain lord (to whom all were subject), and who then went back to his native land, where he remained so long delaying his return that at his coming those whom he had left had married the women of the land and had many children by them and had built themselves cities in which they lived, so that they would in no wise return to their own land nor acknowledge him as lord; upon which he left them. And we have always believed that among his descendants one would surely come to subject this land and us as rightful vassals. Now seeing the regions from which you say you come, which is from where the sun rises, and the news you tell of this great king and ruler who sent you hither, we believe and hold it certain that he is our natural lord: especially in that you say he has long had knowledge of us. Wherefore be certain that we will obey you and hold you as lord in place of that great lord of whom you speak, in which service there shall be neither slackness nor deceit: and throughout all the land, that is to say all that I rule, you may command anything you desire, and it shall be obeyed and done, and all that we have is at your will and pleasure. And since you are in your own land and house, rejoice and take your leisure from the fatigues of your journey and the battles you have fought; for I am well informed of all those that you have been forced to engage in on your way here from Potonchan, as also that the natives of Cempoal and Tlascala have told you many evil things of me; but believe no more than what you see with your own eyes, and especially not words from the lips of those who are my enemies, who were formerly my vassals and on your coming rebelled against me and said these things in order to find favour with you: I am aware, moreover, that they have told you that the walls of my houses were of gold as was the matting on my floors and other household articles, even that I was a god and claimed to be so, and other like matters. As for the houses, you see that they are of wood, stones and earth.” Upon this he lifted his clothes showing me his body, and

said: "and you see that I am of flesh and blood like yourself and everyone else, mortal and tangible."

Grasping with his hands his arms and other parts of his body, he continued: "You see plainly how they have lied. True I have a few articles of gold which have remained to me from my forefathers, and all that I have is yours at any time that you may desire it. I am now going to my palace where I live. Here you will be provided with all things necessary for you and your men, and let nothing be done amiss seeing that you are in your own house and land." . . .

There are three large halls in the great mosque where the principal idols are to be found, all of immense size and height and richly decorated with sculptured figures both in wood and stone, and within these halls are other smaller temples branching off from them and entered by doors so small that no daylight ever reaches them. Certain of the priests but not all are permitted to enter, and within are the great heads and figures of idols, although as I have said there are also many outside. The greatest of these idols and those in which they placed most faith and trust I ordered to be dragged from their places and flung down the stairs, which done I had the temples which they occupy cleansed for they were full of the blood of human victims who had been sacrificed, and placed in them the image of Our Lady and other saints, all of which made no small impression upon Mutezuma and the inhabitants. They at first remonstrated with me, for should it be known, they said, by the people of the country they would rise against me, believing as they did that to these idols were due all temporal goods, and that should they allow them to be ill used they would be wroth against them and would give them nothing, denying them the fruits of the earth, and thus the people would die of starvation. I instructed them by my interpreters how mistaken they were in putting their trust in idols made by their own hands from unclean things, and that they must know that there was but one God, Lord of all, Who created the sky, the earth and all things, Who made both them and ourselves, Who was without beginning and immortal, Whom alone they had to adore and to believe in, and not in any created thing whatsoever: I told them moreover all things else that I knew of touching this matter in order to lead them from their idolatry and bring them to the knowledge of Our Lord: and all, especially Mutezuma, replied that they had already told me that they were not natives of this land but had come to it long time since, and that therefore they were well prepared to believe that they had erred somewhat from the true faith during the long time since they had left their native land, and I as more lately come would know more surely the things that it was right for them to hold and believe than they themselves: and that hence if I would instruct them they would do whatever I declared to be best. Upon this Mutezuma and many of the chief men of the city went with me to remove the idols, cleanse the chapels, and place images of the saints therein, and all with cheerful faces. I forbade them moreover to make human sacrifice to the idols as was their wont, because besides being an abomination in the sight of God it is prohibited by your Majesty's laws which declare that he who kills shall be killed. From this time henceforth they departed from it, and during the whole time that I was in the city not a single living soul was known to be killed and sacrificed.

The images of the idols in which these people believed are many times greater than the body of a large man. They are made from pulp of all the cereals

and greenstuffs which they eat, mixed and pounded together. This mass they moisten with blood from the hearts of human beings which they tear from their breasts while still alive, and thus make sufficient quantity of the pulp to mould into their huge statues: and after the idols have been set up still they offer them more living hearts which they sacrifice in like manner and anoint their faces with the blood. Each department of human affairs has its particular idol after the manner of the ancients who thus honoured their gods: so that there is one idol from whom they beg success in war, another for crops, and so on for all their needs. . . .

## 2. Aztec Chroniclers Describe the Spanish Conquest of Mexico (1519)

*The Spanish Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún arrived in Mexico in 1529, swiftly mastered the indigenous language Nahuatl, and proceeded to gather from his Aztec informants a history of their civilization. In the selection that follows, one of Sahagún's witnesses describes the encounter between Moctezuma and Cortés from the Aztec perspective. How does this account differ, either factually or interpretively, from Cortés's description?*

. . . The Spaniards arrived in Xoloco, near the entrance to Tenochtitlan. That was the end of the march, for they had reached their goal.

Motecuhzoma now arrayed himself in his finery, preparing to go out to meet them. The other great princes also adorned their persons, as did the nobles and their chieftains and knights. They all went out together to meet the strangers.

They brought trays heaped with the finest flowers—the flower that resembles a shield; the flower shaped like a heart; in the center, the flower with the sweetest aroma; and the fragrant yellow flower, the most precious of all. They also brought garlands of flowers, and ornaments for the breast, and necklaces of gold, necklaces hung with rich stones, necklaces fashioned in the petatillo style.

Thus Motecuhzoma went out to meet them, there in Huitzillan. He presented many gifts to the Captain and his commanders, those who had come to make war. He showered gifts upon them and hung flowers around their necks; he gave them necklaces of flowers and bands of flowers to adorn their breasts; he set garlands of flowers upon their heads. Then he hung the gold necklaces around their necks and gave them presents of every sort as gifts of welcome.

When Motecuhzoma had given necklaces to each one, Cortes asked him: “Are you Motecuhzoma? Are you the king? Is it true that you are the king Motecuhzoma?”

And the king said: “Yes, I am Motecuhzoma.” Then he stood up to welcome Cortes; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: “Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy.

<sup>2</sup>From *The Broken Spears* by Miguel Leon-Portilla. © 1962, 1990 by Miguel Leon-Portilla. Expanded and Updated Edition © 1992 by Miguel Leon-Portilla. Reproduced by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.

“The kings who have gone before, your representatives, guarded it and preserved it for your coming. The kings Itzcoatl, Motecuhzoma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc and Ahuizol ruled for you in the City of Mexico. The people were protected by their swords and sheltered by their shields.

“Do the kings know the destiny of those they left behind, their posterity? If only they are watching! If only they can see what I see!

“No, it is not a dream. I am not walking in my sleep. I am not seeing you in my dreams. . . . I have seen you at last! I have met you face to face! I was in agony for five days, for ten days, with my eyes fixed on the Region of the Mystery. And now you have come out of the clouds and mists to sit on your throne again.

“This was foretold by the kings who governed your city, and now it has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land, my lords!”

When Motecuhzoma had finished, La Malinche translated his address into Spanish so that the Captain could understand it. Cortes replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche: “Tell Motecuhzoma that we are his friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. Tell him that we love him well and that our hearts are contented.”

Then he said to Motecuhzoma: “We have come to your house in Mexico as friends. There is nothing to fear.”

La Malinche translated this speech and the Spaniards grasped Motecuhzoma’s hands and patted his back to show their affection for him. . . .

The Spaniards examined everything they saw. They dismounted from their horses, and mounted them again, and dismounted again, so as not to miss anything of interest. . . .

When the Spaniards entered the Royal House, they placed Motecuhzoma under guard and kept him under their vigilance. They also placed a guard over Itzcuahtzin, but the other lords were permitted to depart.

Then the Spaniards fired one of their cannons, and this caused great confusion in the city. The people scattered in every direction; they fled without rhyme or reason; they ran off as if they were being pursued. It was as if they had eaten the mushrooms that confuse the mind, or had seen some dreadful apparition. They were all overcome by terror, as if their hearts had fainted. And when night fell, the panic spread through the city and their fears would not let them sleep.

In the morning the Spaniards told Motecuhzoma what they needed in the way of supplies: tortillas, fried chickens, hens’ eggs, pure water, firewood and charcoal. Also: large, clean cooking pots, water jars, pitchers, dishes and other pottery. Motecuhzoma ordered that it be sent to them. The chiefs who received this order were angry with the king and no longer revered or respected him. But they furnished the Spaniards with all the provisions they needed—food, beverages and water, and fodder for the horses. . . .

The Aztecs begged permission of their king to hold the fiesta of Huitzilopochtli. The Spaniards wanted to see this fiesta to learn how it was celebrated. A delegation

of the celebrants came to the palace where Motecuhzoma was a prisoner, and when their spokesman asked his permission, he granted it to them. . . .

On the evening before the fiesta of Toxcatl, the celebrants began to model a statue of Huitzilopochtli. They gave it such a human appearance that it seemed the body of a living man. Yet they made the statue with nothing but a paste made of the ground seeds of the chicalote, which they shaped over an armature of sticks.

When the statue was finished, they dressed it in rich feathers, and they painted crossbars over and under its eyes. They also clipped on its earrings of turquoise mosaic; these were in the shape of serpents, with gold rings hanging from them. Its nose plug, in the shape of an arrow, was made of gold and was inlaid with fine stones.

They placed the magic headdress of hummingbird feathers on its head. They also adorned it with an *anecuyotl*, which was a belt made of feathers, with a cone at the back. Then they hung around its neck an ornament of yellow parrot feathers, fringed like the locks of a young boy. Over this they put its nettle-leaf cape, which was painted black and decorated with five clusters of eagle feathers.

Next they wrapped it in its cloak, which was painted with skulls and bones, and over this they fastened its vest. The vest was painted with dismembered human parts: skulls, ears, hearts, intestines, torsos, breasts, hands and feet. They also put on its *maxtlatl*, or loincloth, which was decorated with images of dis severed limbs and fringed with amate paper. This *maxtlatl* was painted with vertical stripes of bright blue.

They fastened a red paper flag at its shoulder and placed on its head what looked like a sacrificial flint knife. This too was made of red paper; it seemed to have been steeped in blood.

The statue carried a *tehuehuelli*, a bamboo shield decorated with four clusters of fine eagle feathers. The pendant of this shield was blood-red, like the knife and the shoulder flag. The statue also carried four arrows.

Finally, they put the wristbands on its arms. These bands, made of coyote skin, were fringed with paper cut into little strips.

Early the next morning, the statue's face was uncovered by those who had been chosen for that ceremony. They gathered in front of the idol in single file and offered it gifts of food, such as round seedcakes or perhaps human flesh. But they did not carry it up to its temple on top of the pyramid.

All the young warriors were eager for the fiesta to begin. They had sworn to dance and sing with all their hearts, so that the Spaniards would marvel at the beauty of the rituals.

The procession began, and the celebrants filed into the temple patio to dance the Dance of the Serpent. When they were all together in the patio, the songs and the dance began. Those who had fasted for twenty days and those who had fasted for a year were in command of the others; they kept the dancers in file with their pine wands. (If anyone wished to urinate, he did not stop dancing, but simply opened his clothing at the hips and separated his clusters of heron feathers.)

If anyone disobeyed the leaders or was not in his proper place they struck him on the hips and shoulders. Then they drove him out of the patio, beating him and shoving him from behind. They pushed him so hard that he sprawled to the ground, and they dragged him outside by the ears. No one dared to say a word about this

punishment, for those who had fasted during the year were feared and venerated; they had earned the exclusive title “Brothers of Huitzilopochtli.”

The great captains, the bravest warriors, danced at the head of the files to guide the others. The youths followed at a slight distance. Some of the youths wore their hair gathered into large locks, a sign that they had never taken any captives. Others carried their headdresses on their shoulders; they had taken captives, but only with help.

Then came the recruits, who were called “the young warriors.” They had each captured an enemy or two. The others called to them: “Come, comrades, show us how brave you are! Dance with all your hearts!”

At this moment in the fiesta, when the dance was loveliest and when song was linked to song, the Spaniards were seized with an urge to kill the celebrants. They all ran forward, armed as if for battle. They closed the entrances and passageways, all the gates of the patio: the Eagle Gate in the lesser palace, the Gate of the Canestalk and the Gate of the Serpent of Mirrors. They posted guards so that no one could escape, and then rushed into the Sacred Patio to slaughter the celebrants. They came on foot, carrying their swords and their wooden or metal shields.

They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor.

They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.

They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen, and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape.

Some attempted to force their way out, but the Spaniards murdered them at the gates. Others climbed the walls, but they could not save themselves. Those who ran into the communal houses were safe there for a while; so were those who lay down among the victims and pretended to be dead. But if they stood up again, the Spaniards saw them and killed them.

The blood of the warriors flowed like water and gathered into pools. The pools widened, and the stench of blood and entrails filled the air. The Spaniards ran into the communal houses to kill those who were hiding. They ran everywhere and searched everywhere; they invaded every room, hunting and killing. . . .

### **3. *Francisco Coronado Explores the American Southwest (1541)***

*In 1540–1542 Francisco Coronado led a Spanish expedition from Mexico into the present-day territory of Arizona and New Mexico and as far east as Kansas. Seeking*

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<sup>3</sup>George Parker Winship, trans. and ed., *The Journey of Coronado, 1540–1542* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1904), pp. 213–220.

*fabled cities of gold, he found instead the modest villages of the Pueblo Indians, who urged him to continue eastward to a region they called Quivira. As he struggled across the vast and forbidding American wilderness, the truth gradually dawned on Coronado that Quivira held no more gold than did the land of the Pueblos. How does Coronado describe the landscape? How does his cultural background influence what he sees and how he estimates its usefulness?*

... While I was engaged in the conquest and pacification of the natives of this province, some Indians who were natives of other provinces beyond these had told me that in their country there were much larger villages and better houses than those of the natives of this country, and that they had lords who ruled them, who were served with dishes of gold, and other very magnificent things; and although, as I wrote Your Majesty, I did not believe it before I had set eyes on it, because it was the report of Indians and given for the most part by means of signs, yet as the report appeared to me to be very fine and that it was important that it should be investigated for Your Majesty's service, I determined to go and see it with the men I have here. I started from this province on the 23d of last April, for the place where the Indians wanted to guide me.

After nine days' march I reached some plains, so vast that I did not find their limit anywhere that I went, although I traveled over them for more than 300 leagues. And I found such a quantity of cows in these, of the kind that I wrote Your Majesty about, which they have in this country, that it is impossible to number them, for while I was journeying through these plains, until I returned to where I first found them, there was not a day that I lost sight of them. And after seventeen days' march I came to a settlement of Indians who are called Querechos, who travel around with these cows, who do not plant, and who eat the raw flesh and drink the blood of the cows they kill, and they tan the skins of the cows, with which all the people of this country dress themselves here. They have little field tents made of the hides of the cows, tanned and greased, very well made, in which they live while they travel around near the cows, moving with these. They have dogs which they load, which carry their tents and poles and belongings. These people have the best figures of any that I have seen in the Indies. They could not give me any account of the country where the guides were taking me. I traveled five days more as the guides wished to lead me, until I reached some plains, with no more landmarks than as if we had been swallowed up in the sea, where they strayed about, because there was not a stone, nor a bit of rising ground, nor a tree, nor a shrub, nor anything to go by. . . .

It was the Lord's pleasure that, after having journeyed across these deserts seventy-seven days, I arrived at the province they call Quivira, to which the guides were conducting me, and where they had described to me houses of stone, with many stories; and not only are they not of stone, but of straw, but the people in them are as barbarous as all those whom I have seen and passed before this. . . .

The province of Quivira is 950 leagues from Mexico. Where I reached it, it is in the fortieth degree. The country itself is the best I have ever seen for producing all the products of Spain, for besides the land itself being very fat and black and being very well watered by the rivulets and springs and rivers, I found prunes like those of Spain [or I found everything they have in Spain] and nuts and very good sweet

grapes and mulberries. I have treated the natives of this province, and all the others whom I found wherever I went, as well as was possible, agreeably to what Your Majesty had commanded, and they have received no harm in any way from me or from those who went in my company. I remained twenty-five days in this province of Quivira, so as to see and explore the country and also to find out whether there was anything beyond which could be of service to Your Majesty, because the guides who had brought me had given me an account of other provinces beyond this. And what I am sure of is that there is not any gold nor any other metal in all that country, and the other things of which they had told me are nothing but little villages, and in many of these they do not plant anything and do not have any houses except of skins and sticks, and they wander around with the cows; so that the account they gave me was false, because they wanted to persuade me to go there with the whole force, believing that as the way was through such uninhabited deserts, and from the lack of water, they would get us where we and our horses would die of hunger. And the guides confessed this, and said they had done it by the advice and orders of the natives of these provinces. . . .

#### 4. *Don Juan de Oñate Conquers New Mexico (1599)*

*Don Juan de Oñate, inspired by tales of Coronado's expedition some fifty years earlier, led a heavily armed expedition into present-day New Mexico in 1598 and proceeded to impose Spanish rule on the native Pueblo Indians. The Indians of the village of Acoma inflicted a humiliating defeat on Oñate's forces on December 4, 1599, prompting a swift and harsh reprisal from the Spanish. In the selection that follows, Oñate instructs his officers on how to deal with the Indians at Acoma (eventually they severed one foot of every adult male survivor). What motives prompted Oñate? In what ways did he try to promote the cause of Christianity among the Indians? How did he justify his action?*

. . . Instructions to you, Vicente de Zaldívar, sargento mayor [sergeant-major] of the expedition to New Mexico, my lieutenant governor and captain general for the punishment of the pueblo of Acoma for having killed Don Juan de Zaldívar Oñate, my maese de campo [second-in-command], ten other captains and soldiers, and two servants, which resulted in disrupting the general peace of the land, which is now in serious danger of revolting if the offenders are not properly punished, as their villainess would be emulated by other savages whenever they wished; in this situation one can see the obvious danger of slavery or death for the innocent people entrusted to my protection and care by his majesty; these innocent ones are the ministers of the holy gospel, whom the Indians would not spare any more than they did others in the past, and they would also kill the many women and children in the expedition, who would suffer without cause once the natives overcame their fear of rebelling. The greatest force we possess at present to defend our friends and

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<sup>1</sup>From *Don Juan de Oñate: Colonizer of New Mexico, 1595–1628*, by George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, pp. 456–459. Copyright © 1953. Reprinted by permission of The University of New Mexico Press.

ourselves is the prestige of the Spanish nation, by fear of which the Indians have been kept in check. Should they lose this fear it would inevitably follow also that the teaching of the holy gospel would be hindered, which I am under obligation to prevent, as this is the main purpose for which I came. For the gospel is the complete remedy and guide for their abominable sins, some of them nefarious and against nature. For the following just cases, such as general peace in the land, protection of the innocent, punishment of those who transgress against their king and his ministers and against their obligations to him as ruler of these Indies, to whom they voluntarily swore obedience, and furthermore to obtain redress for such serious offenses as the killing of such worthy persons, disregarding the recovery of the goods they took from us, and finally to remove such pernicious obstacles and open the way for the spreading of the holy gospel, I have determined that in the discharge of your commission to the pueblo of Acoma, you should make more use of royal clemency than of the severity that the case demands, take into serious consideration the stupidity (*brutalidad*) and incapacity of the Indians, if that is what they showed in this case rather than malice, and observe the following instructions:

First: On receiving your commission and the instructions that follow, you will acknowledge receipt of them before the secretary. With these you will have sufficient authority for what you are to do and you must bind yourself to observe and obey exactly what you are ordered, as we expect from you.

Since the good success of the undertaking depends on the pleasure of God our Lord in directing you to appropriate and effective methods, it is right that you should seek to prevent public or private offenses to Him in the expedition. You must exercise particular care in this respect, admonishing and punishing in exemplary fashion those who cause them, so that one may readily see that you take special interest in this matter.

You will proceed over the shortest route to the pueblo of Acoma, with all the soldiers and war equipment. At the places and pueblos that you pass through on the way you will treat the natives well and not allow any harm to be done them, and to this end you may issue whatever proclamations that seem desirable or necessary.

When you come to the pueblo of Acoma, you must weigh very carefully and calmly the strength of the Indians, plant at once your artillery and musketry at the places that seem most practical, and assign the captains and soldiers to their posts in battle formation, without making any noise or firing an harquebus [heavy musket].

This done, you will, in the presence of Juan Velarde, my secretary, and with the help of Don Tomás and Don Cristóbal, Indian interpreters who are expert in the language, or with the aid of any other interpreters that you may deem suitable, summon the Indians of Acoma to accept peace, once, twice, and thrice, and urge them to abandon their resistance, lay down their arms, and submit to the authority of the king our lord, since they have already rendered obedience to him as his vassals.

You will ask the people of Acoma to surrender the leaders responsible for the uprising, and the murderers, assuring them that they will be justly dealt with.

The Acomas must abandon at once the fortified place in which they live and move down into the valley, where the ministers of the holy gospel who were sent

to these kingdoms and provinces by his majesty for this purpose may be able to teach them more easily the matters of our holy Catholic faith.

The Indians must deliver up the bodies of those killed, their personal belongings and weapons, and the horseshoes and other iron that they had dug up three leagues from the pueblo. You must record their answers before my secretary in the presence of as many as can conveniently be brought together to hear them. If the Indians should do all that is prescribed above and come down and submit peacefully, you will establish them in the valley at a safe place where they will not run away and disappear. You will keep them under strict guard and bring them before me in order that we may hear their pleas and administer justice.

After the Indians have been removed from the pueblo and placed under custody, you will send back to the pueblo as many soldiers as you deem necessary, burn it to the ground, and leave no stone on stone, so that the Indians may never be able again to inhabit it as an impregnable fortress.

If the Indians are entrenched and should have assembled many people and you think there is danger of losing your army in trying to storm the pueblo, you will refrain from doing so, for there would be less harm in postponing the punishment for the time being than in risking the people with you and those left here for the protection of the church of God, its ministers, and me. In this matter you must exercise the utmost care and foresight.

If the people should have deserted the pueblo, you will burn it to the ground and destroy it. You will then consult with the council of war as to whether or not it is desirable to pursue the natives, since the council must consider the matter. This must be handled with much discretion.

If God should be so merciful as to grant us victory, you will arrest all of the people, young and old, without sparing anyone. Inasmuch as we have declared war on them without quarter, you will punish all those of fighting age as you deem best, as a warning to everyone in this kingdom. All of those you execute you will expose to public view at the places you think most suitable, as a salutary example. If you should want to show lenience after they have been arrested, you should seek all possible means to make the Indians believe that you are doing so at the request of the friar with your forces. In this manner they will recognize the friars as their benefactors and protectors and come to love and esteem them, and to fear us. To execute this punishment as you may see fit, I grant you the same powers I myself hold from his majesty.

And since all matters properly discussed and thought out lead to a happy and successful end, you already know that I have named as members of the council of war of this expedition, Alonso Sánchez, contador of the royal treasury; Diego de Zubía, captain of cavalry and purveyor general; Marcos Farfán de los Godos, captain of my guard; Captain Gaspar de Villagrán, procurator general; Pablo de Aguilar Inojosa, captain of cavalry; and Gerónimo Márquez, captain of artillery. All six of them are men of much experience and well informed in all that pertains to warfare. You will hold councils of war whenever it seems desirable to you, to them, or to the majority of them. Whatever is agreed upon by all or by the majority in council must be observed. The councils held are to be attended by my secretary who will record what may be determined. I have given these men the appropriate commissions as members of the council of war.

All of the aforesaid you will fulfill with proper diligence and care in order that God and his majesty may be served, and this offense punished.

Stamped with the seal of my office at the pueblo of San Juan Bautista on January 11, 1599. Don Juan de Oñate. By order of the governor, Juan Gutiérrez Bocanegra, secretary.

## C. The African Slave Trade

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### 1. Mungo Park Describes Slavers in the African Interior (c. 1790)

*Mungo Park, a Scottish explorer, spent nearly two years in the 1790s in the interior of Africa—still terra incognita to most Europeans. Although his description dates from nearly three centuries after the initial European development of the African slave trade, it provides a rare and probably reliable glimpse of the practices of the African slave traders with whom the Europeans made contact in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Does Park's account suggest any differences between the African and European slavers? What inferences might be drawn from Park's narrative about the influence of the Europeans on those interior tribes, far from the coast, that never came into direct contact with the whites?*

... The slaves which Karfa [a slave trader] had brought with him were all of them prisoners of war; they had been taken by the Bambarran army in the kingdoms of Wassela and Kaarta, and carried to Segou, where some of them had remained three years in irons. From Segou they were sent, in company with a number of other captives, up the Niger in two large canoes, and offered for sale at Yamina, Bammakoo, and Kancaba, at which places the greater number of the captives were bartered for gold dust, and the remainder sent forward to Kankaree.

Eleven of them confessed to me that they had been slaves from their infancy; but the other two refused to give any account of their former condition. They were all very inquisitive; but they viewed me at first with looks of horror, and repeatedly asked if my countrymen were cannibals. They were very desirous to know what became of the slaves after they had crossed the salt water. I told them that they were employed in cultivating the land, but they would not believe me; and one of them, putting his hand upon the ground, said, with great simplicity, "Have you really got such ground as this to set your feet upon?" A deeply-rooted idea that the whites purchase Negroes for the purpose of devouring them, or of selling them to others, that they may be devoured hereafter, naturally makes the slaves contemplate a journey towards the coast with great terror, insomuch that the Slatees are forced to keep them constantly in irons, and watch them very closely to prevent their escape. They are commonly secured by putting the right leg of one, and the left of another into the same pair of fetters. By supporting the fetters with a string, they can walk, though

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<sup>1</sup>Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior of Africa* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, North Bridge, 1860), pp. 291–293.

very slowly. Every four slaves are likewise fastened together by the necks with a strong rope of twisted thongs; and in the night an additional pair of fetters is put on their hands, and sometimes a light iron chain passed round their necks.

Such of them as evince marks of discontent, are secured in a different manner. A thick billet of wood is cut about three feet long, and a smooth notch being made upon one side of it, the ankle of the slave is bolted to the smooth part by means of a strong iron staple, one prong of which passes on each side of the ankle. All these fetters and bolts are made from native iron; in the present case they were put on by the blacksmith as soon as the slaves arrived from Kancaba, and were not taken off until the morning on which the coffle [slave caravan] departed for Gambia.

In other respects, the treatment of the slaves during their stay at Kamalia was far from being harsh or cruel. They were led out in their fetters every morning to the shade of the tamarind tree, where they were encouraged to play at games of hazard, and sing diverting songs, to keep up their spirits; for though some of them sustained the hardships of their situation with amazing fortitude, the greater part were very much dejected, and would sit all day in a sort of sullen melancholy, with their eyes fixed upon the ground. In the evening their irons were examined and their hand fetters put on, after which they were conducted into two large huts, where they were guarded during the night by Karfa's domestic slaves. But notwithstanding all this, about a week after their arrival, one of the slaves had the address to procure a small knife, with which he opened the rings of his fetters, cut the rope, and made his escape; more of them would probably have got off had they assisted each other; but the slave no sooner found himself at liberty than he refused to stop and assist in breaking the chain which was fastened round the necks of his companions. . . .

## 2. *A Slave Is Taken to Barbados (c. 1750)*

*Olauda Equiano was a remarkable African, born in 1745 in present-day Nigeria. After his capture as a boy by slave traders, he was taken to Barbados. He eventually bought his freedom and became a leading spokesperson for the cause of antislavery. His book *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, from which the following selection is taken, was a best seller in both Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although Equiano's narrative, like the preceding selection by Mungo Park, dates from nearly three centuries after the beginnings of large-scale European slave trading in Africa, it affords a unique perspective on the experience of slavery through the eyes of an African slave. Equiano's account is probably faithful, at least psychologically, to the experiences of millions of Africans in the centuries before him. What differences does Equiano see between slavery as practiced in Africa and as practiced in Barbados? What is the most difficult part of his experience as a slave?*

. . . I grew up till I was turned the age of 11, when an end was put to my happiness in the following manner. . . . One day, when all our people were gone out to

<sup>2</sup>Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels: His Autobiography, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1967; first published 1789), pp. 8–32.

their works as usual and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and without giving us time to cry out or make resistance they stopped our mouths and ran off with us into the nearest wood. . . . The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced, for my sister and I were then separated while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me and immediately carried away, while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually, and for several days I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. At length, after many days' travelling, during which I had often changed masters, I got into the hands of a chieftain in a very pleasant country. This man had two wives and some children, and they all used me extremely well and did all they could to comfort me, particularly the first wife, who was something like my mother. Although I was a great many days' journey from my father's house, yet these people spoke exactly the same language with us. . . .

Soon after this my master's only daughter and child by his first wife sickened and died, which affected him so much that for some time he was almost frantic, and really would have killed himself had he not been watched and prevented. However, in a small time afterwards he recovered and I was again sold. I was now carried to the left of the sun's rising, through many different countries and a number of large woods. . . .

All the nations and people I had hitherto passed through resembled our own in their manner, customs, and language: but I came at length to a country the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars. I was very much struck with this difference, especially when I came among a people who did not circumcise and ate without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots and had European cutlasses and crossbows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists amongst themselves. Their women were not so modest as ours, for they ate and drank and slept with their men. . . . At last I came to the banks of a large river, which was covered with canoes in which the people appeared to live with their household utensils and provisions of all kinds. I was beyond measure astonished at this, as I had never before seen any water larger than a pond or a rivulet: and my surprise was mingled with no small fear when I was put into one of these canoes and we began to paddle and move along the river. . . . Thus I continued to travel, sometimes by land, sometimes by water, through different countries and various nations, till at the end of six or seven months after I had been kidnapped I arrived at the sea coast.

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship which was then riding at anchor and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew, and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition

with that of the meanest slave in my own country. When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. When I recovered a little I found some black people about me, who I believed were some of those who had brought me on board and had been receiving their pay; they talked to me in order to cheer me, but all in vain. I asked them if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and loose hair. They told me I was not, and one of the crew brought me a small portion of spirituous liquor in a wine glass, but being afraid of him I would not take it out of his hand. One of the blacks therefore took it from him and gave it to me, and I took a little down my palate, which instead of reviving me, as they thought it would, threw me into the greatest consternation at the strange feeling it produced, having never tasted such any liquor before. Soon after this the blacks who brought me on board went off, and left me abandoned to despair.

I now saw myself deprived of all chance of returning to my native country or even the least glimpse of hope of gaining the shore, which I now considered as friendly; and I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo. I was not long suffered to indulge my grief; I was soon put down under the decks, and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life: so that with the loathsomeness of the stench and crying together, I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat, nor had I the least desire to taste anything. I now wished for the last friend, death, to relieve me; but soon, to my grief, two of the white men offered me eatables, and on my refusing to eat, one of them held me fast by the hands and laid me across I think the windlass, and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely. I had never experienced anything of this kind before, and although, not being used to the water, I naturally feared that element the first time I saw it, yet nevertheless could I have got over the nettings I would have jumped over the side. . . . In a little time after, amongst the poor chained men I found some of my own nation, which in a small degree gave ease to my mind. I inquired of these what was to be done with us; they gave me to understand we were to be carried to these white people's country to work for them. I then was a little revived, and thought if it were no worse than working, my situation was not so desperate: but still I feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among my people such instances of brutal cruelty, and this not only shewn towards us blacks but also to some of the whites themselves. . . .

At last we came in sight of the island of Barbados, at which the whites on board gave a great shout and made many signs of joy to us. . . . Many merchants and planters now came on board, though it was in the evening. They put us in separate parcels and examined us attentively. They also made us jump, and pointed to the land, signifying we were to go there. We thought by this we should be eaten by these ugly men, as they appeared to us; and when soon after we were all put down under the deck again, there was much dread and trembling among us, and nothing but bitter cries to be heard all the night from these apprehensions, insomuch that at last the

white people got some old slaves from the land to pacify us. They told us we were not to be eaten but to work, and were soon to go on land where we should see many of our country people. This report eased us much; and sure enough soon after we were landed there came to us Africans of all languages. We were conducted immediately to the merchant's yard, where we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold without regard to sex or age. . . . We were not many days in the merchant's custody before we were sold after their usual manner, which is this: On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamour with which this is attended and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers serve not a little to increase the apprehensions of the terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them never to see each other again. I remember in the vessel in which I was brought over, in the men's apartment there were several brothers who, in the sale, were sold in different lots; and it was very moving on this occasion to see and hear their cries at parting. O, ye nominal Christians! might not an African ask you, Learned you this from your God who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain? Must every tender feeling be likewise sacrificed to your avarice? Are the dearest friends and relations, now rendered more dear by their separation from their kindred, still to be parted from each other and thus prevented from cheering the gloom of slavery with the small comfort of being together and mingling their sufferings and sorrows? Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.

### 3. *A Young African Boy Is Taken into Slavery (c. 1735)*

*Venture Smith was the English name given to the West African author of the following account. Born in 1729, Venture was captured as a boy and brought to Rhode Island. He lived first as a slave, owned by several masters in succession, and later as a free man in Connecticut. His ancestral people, the Dukandarra of present-day Mali, were cattle and goat herders, and Venture worked with livestock as a youth in New England. He dictated this account to a scribe, Elisha Niles, in the 1790s. What must have been the most disconcerting features of Smith's forced removal from Africa to New England? What factors helped him to adjust to life in his new world?*

. . . [A] message was brought . . . to my father, that [we were about to be] invaded by a numerous army, from a nation not far distant, furnished with musical instruments, and all kinds of arms then in use; that they were instigated by some white nation who equipped and sent them to subdue and possess the country. . . .

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<sup>3</sup>H. M. Selden, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa* (Middletown, Conn.: J. S. Stewart, 1897; originally published 1798).

They then came to us in the reeds, and the very first salute I had from them was a violent blow on the head with the fore part of a gun, and at the same time a grasp around the neck. I then had a rope put about my neck, as all the women in the thicket with me, and were immediately led to my father, who was likewise pinioned and haltered for leading. In this condition we were all led to the camp. The women and myself, being submissive, had tolerable treatment from the enemy, while my father was closely interrogated respecting his money, which they knew he must have. But as he gave them no account of it, he was instantly cut and pounded on his body with great inhumanity, that he might be induced by the torture he suffered to make the discovery. All this availed not in the least to make him give up his money, but he despised all the tortures which they inflicted, until the continued exercise and increase of torment obliged him to sink and expire. He thus died without informing his enemies where his money lay. I saw him while he was thus tortured to death. The shocking scene is to this day fresh in my memory, and I have often been overcome while thinking on it. He was a man of remarkable stature. I should judge as much as six feet and six or seven inches high, two feet across the shoulders, and every way well proportioned. He was a man of remarkable strength and resolution, affable, kind and gentle, ruling with equity and moderation.

The army of the enemy was large, I should suppose consisting of about six thousand men. Their leader was called Baukurre. After destroying the old prince, they decamped and immediately marched towards the sea, lying to the west, taking with them myself and the women prisoners. . . .

. . . On a certain time, I and other prisoners were put on board a canoe, under our master, and rowed away to a vessel belonging to Rhode Island, commanded by Captain Collingwood, and the mate, Thomas Mumford. While we were going to the vessel, our master told us to appear to the best possible advantage for sale. I was bought on board by one Robertson Mumford, a steward of said vessel, for four gallons of rum and a piece of calico, and called VENTURE on account of his having purchased me with his own private venture. Thus I came by my name. All the slaves that were bought for that vessel's cargo were two hundred and sixty. . . .

The vessel then sailed for Rhode Island, and arrived there after a comfortable passage. Here my master sent me to live with one of his sisters until he could carry me to Fisher's Island, the place of his residence. I had then completed my eighth year. After staying with his sister some time, I was taken to my master's place to live. . . .

The first of the time of living at my master's own place, I was pretty much employed in the house, carding wool and other household business. In this situation I continued for some years, after which my master put me to work out of doors. After many proofs of my faithfulness and honesty, my master began to put great confidence in me. My behavior had as yet been submissive and obedient. I then began to have hard tasks imposed on me. Some of these were to pound four bushels of ears of corn every night in a barrel for the poultry, or be rigorously punished. At other seasons of the year, I had to card wool until a very late hour. These tasks I had to perform when only about nine years old. Some time after, I had another difficulty and oppression which was greater than any I had ever experienced since I came into this country. This was to serve two masters. James Mumford, my master's son, when his father had gone from home in the morning and given me a stint to

perform that day, would order me to do *this* and *that* business different from what my master had directed me. . . .

After I had lived with my master thirteen years, being then about twenty-two years old, I married Meg, a slave of his who was about my own age. . . .

[Eventually] I hired myself out at Fisher's Island, earning twenty pounds; thirteen pounds six shillings of which my master drew for the privilege and the remainder I paid for my freedom. This made fifty-one pounds two shillings which I paid him. In October following I went and wrought six months at Long Island. In that six month's time I cut and corded four hundred cords of wood, besides threshing out seventy-five bushels of grain, and received of my wages down only twenty pounds, which left remaining a larger sum. Whilst I was out that time, I took up on my wages only one pair of shoes. At night I lay on the hearth, with one coverlet over and another under me. I returned to my master and gave him what I received of my six months' labor. This left only thirteen pounds eighteen shillings to make up the full sum of my redemption. My master liberated me, saying that I might pay what was behind if I could ever make it convenient, otherwise it would be well. The amount of the money which I had paid my master towards redeeming my time, was seventy-one pounds two shillings. The reason of my master for asking such an unreasonable price, was, he said, to secure himself in case I should ever come to want. Being thirty-six years old, I left Colonel Smith once more for all. I had already been sold three different times, made considerable money with seemingly nothing to derive it from, had been cheated out of a large sum of money, lost much by misfortunes, and paid an enormous sum for my freedom.

## D. New Worlds for the Taking

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### I. John Cabot Voyages for England (1497)

*John Cabot was a Genoese (like Columbus) who became a naturalized Venetian and then took up residence at the port of Bristol, England. Inspired by the Columbian discovery and commissioned by Henry VII, he sailed into the stormy North Atlantic in 1497 with a single ship and eighteen men. Seeking the territory of the Grand Khan of China, he landed on or somewhere near Newfoundland, Labrador, or Cape Breton Island. A proud fellow Venetian dwelling in London wrote to his brothers in Venice describing the excitement. What does this account foreshadow about the future of English colonizing, especially the quality of the participants?*

The Venetian, our countryman, who went with a ship from Bristol in quest of new islands, is returned, and says that 700 leagues hence he discovered land, the territory of the Grand Cham [Khan]. He coasted for 300 leagues and landed; saw no human beings, but he has brought hither to the King certain snares which had been

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<sup>1</sup>Rawdon Brown, ed., *Calendar of State Papers . . . Venice . . .* (London, 1864), vol. 1, p. 262. Published by the authority of the Lords Commissioners of her majesty's treasury, under the direction of the master of the rolls.

set to catch game, and a needle for making nets. He also found some felled trees, wherefore he supposed there were inhabitants, and returned to his ship in alarm.

He was three months on the voyage, and on his return he saw two islands to starboard, but would not land, time being precious, as he was short of provisions. He says that the tides are slack and do not flow as they do here. The King of England is much pleased with this intelligence.

The King has promised that in the spring our countryman shall have ten ships, armed to his order, and at his request has conceded him all the prisoners, except such as are confined for high treason, to man his fleet. The King has also given him money wherewith to amuse himself till then, and he is now at Bristol with his wife, who is also Venetian, and with his sons. His name is Zuan Cabot, and he is styled the Great Admiral. Vast honor is paid him; he dresses in silk. And these English run after him like mad people, so that he can enlist as many of them as he pleases, and a number of our own rogues besides.

## 2. Richard Hakluyt Calls for an Empire (1582)

*Richard Hakluyt, a remarkable clergyman-scholar-geographer who lies buried in Westminster Abbey, deserves high rank among the indirect founding fathers of the United States. His published collections of documents relating to early English explorations must be regarded as among the "great books" of American history for their stimulation of interest in New World colonization. (Hakluyt even gambled some of his own small fortune in the company that tried to colonize Virginia.) Passionately concerned about England's "sluggish security," he wrote the following in the dedicatory letter of his first published work (1582). It was addressed to Sir Philip Sidney—scholar, diplomat, author, poet, soldier, and knightly luminary of Queen Elizabeth's court. What were Hakluyt's various arguments for settling the Atlantic Coast north of Florida? Which ones probably appealed most strongly to Sidney's patriotism and religious faith?*

I marvel not a little, right worshipful, that since the first discovery of America (which is now full four score and ten years), after so great conquests and plantings of the Spaniards and Portuguese there, that we of England could never have the grace to set fast footing in such fertile and temperate places as are left as yet unpossessed of them. But . . . I conceive great hope that the time approacheth and now is that we of England may share and part stakes [divide the prize] (if we will ourselve) both with the Spaniard and the Portuguese in part of America and other regions as yet undiscovered.

And surely if there were in us that desire to advance the honor of our country which ought to be in every good man, we would not all this while have forsown [neglected] the possessing of those lands which of equity and right appertain unto us, as by the discourses that follow shall appear most plainly.

Yea, if we would behold with the eye of pity how all our prisons are pestered

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<sup>2</sup>Collected and published by Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent. . . . in the year 1582*. Edited and with notes and an introduction by John Winter Jones (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1850), pp. 8–18.

and filled with able men to serve their country, which for small robberies are daily hanged up in great numbers, . . . we would hasten . . . the deducting [conveying] of some colonies of our superfluous people into those temperate and fertile parts of America, which, being within six weeks' sailing of England, are yet unpossessed by any Christians, and seem to offer themselves unto us, stretching nearer unto Her Majesty's dominions than to any other part of Europe. . . .

It chanced very lately that upon occasion I had great conference in matters of cosmography with an excellent learned man of Portugal, most privy to all the discoveries of his nation, who wondered that those blessed countries from the point of Florida northward were all this while unplanted by Christians, protesting with great affection and zeal that if he were now as young as I (for at this present he is three score years of age) he would sell all he had, being a man of no small wealth and honor, to furnish a convenient number of ships to sea for the inhabiting of those countries and reducing those gentile [heathen] people to Christianity. . . .

If this man's desire might be executed, we might not only for the present time take possession of that good land, but also, in short space, by God's grace find out that short and easy passage by the Northwest which we have hitherto so long desired. . . .

Certes [certainly], if hitherto in our own discoveries we had not been led with a preposterous desire of seeking rather gain than God's glory, I assure myself that our labors had taken far better effect. But we forgot that godliness is great riches, and that if we first seek the kingdom of God, all other things will be given unto us. . . .

I trust that now, being taught by their manifold losses, our men will take a more godly course and use some part of their goods to his [God's] glory. If not, he will turn even their covetousness to serve him, as he hath done the pride and avarice of the Spaniards and Portuguese, who, pretending in glorious words that they made their discoveries chiefly to convert infidels to our most holy faith (as they say), in deed and truth sought not them, but their goods and riches. . . .

Here I cease, craving pardon for my overboldness, trusting also that Your Worship will continue and increase your accustomed favor toward these godly and honorable discoveries.

### **3. An English Landlord Describes a Troubled England (1623)**

*England's prosperity in the early sixteenth century had been built on the backs of bleating sheep, as exports of raw wool and finished woolen cloth boomed. Beginning about 1550, however, a severe depression descended on the woolen districts. Thousands of sheepherders and weavers were pitched out of work and onto the roads of England. England suddenly seemed to be overflowing with paupers and vagabonds, as described in the following letter by a Lincolnshire landlord. What did he find most alarming?*

Right honourable brother, the best news I can send you is that we are all in good health God be praised. I am now here with my son to settle some country af-

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<sup>3</sup>*Lincolnshire Notes and Queries* (Horncastle, England: W. K. Morton, 1888), vol. I, no. 1, pp. 15–16 (a quarterly journal devoted to the antiquities, parochial records, family history, folklore, quaint customs, etc., of the county).

fair, and my own private, which were never so burdensome unto me as now. For many insufficient tenants have given up their farms and sheepwalks, so as I am forced to take them into my own hands and borrow money upon use to stock them. It draweth me wholly from a contemplative life, which I most affected, and could be most willing to pass over my whole estate to the benefit of my children so as I were freed of the trouble. Our country was never in that want that now it is, and more of money than corn, for there are many thousands in these parts who have sold all they have even to their bed straw and cannot get work to earn any money. Dog's flesh is a dainty dish and found upon search in many houses, also such horse flesh as hath lain long in a deke for hounds. And the other day one stole a sheep who for mere hunger tore a leg out, and did eat it raw. All that is most certain true and yet the great time of scarcity not yet come. I shall rejoice to have a better subject to write of, and expect it with patience. In the mean time and ever

I will remain

Your honour's most loving brother to serve you

*William Pelham*

#### 4. *Hakluyt Sees England's Salvation in America (1584)*

*In one of his most widely read works, Discourse Concerning the Western Planting, published in 1584, Richard Hakluyt further developed the argument that colonizing America might provide a remedy for England's festering economic and social problems. What did he identify as the most pressing problems to be solved? In what ways did he see America providing solutions to those problems? How prophetic was he about the role the American colonies were to play in England's commerce?*

It is well worth the observation to see and consider what the like voyages of discovery and planting in the East and West Indies have wrought in the kingdoms of Portugal and Spain; both which realms, being of themselves poor and barren and hardly able to sustain their inhabitants, by their discoveries have found such occasion of employment, that these many years we have not heard scarcely of any pirate of those two nations; whereas we and the French are most infamous for our outrageous, common, and daily piracies. . . . [W]e, for all the statutes that hitherto can be devised, and the sharp execution of the same in punishing idle and lazy persons, for want of sufficient occasion of honest employment, cannot deliver our commonwealth from multitudes of loiterers and idle vagabonds.

Truth it is that through our long peace and seldom sickness . . . we are grown more populous than ever heretofore; so that now there are of every art and science so many, that they can hardly live by one another, nay, rather, they are ready to eat up one another; yes, many thousands of idle persons are within this realm, which, having no way to be set on work, be either mutinous and seek alteration in the state, or at least very burdensome to the commonwealth, and often fall to pilfering and thieving and other lewdness, whereby all the prisons of the land are daily

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Hakluyt, *Discourse Concerning the Western Planting* (1584), in Charles Deane, ed., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Cambridge: Press of John Wilson and Son, 1877), vol. 2, pp. 36–39.

pestered and stuffed full of them, where either they pitifully pine away, or else at length are miserably hanged. . . .

Whereas if this voyage were put in execution, these petty thieves might be condemned for certain years to the western parts, especially in Newfoundland, in sawing and felling of timber for masts of ships; . . . in burning of the firs and pine trees to make pitch, tar, rosin, and soap ashes; in beating and working of hemp for cordage; and, in the more southern parts, in setting them to work in mines of gold, silver, copper, lead, and iron; in dragging for pearls and coral; in planting of sugar cane, as the Portuguese have done in Madera; in maintenance and increasing of silk worms for silk, and in dressing the same; in gathering of cotton whereof there is plenty; in tilling of the soil for grain; in dressing of vines whereof there is great abundance for wine; olives, whereof the soil is capable, for oil; trees for oranges, lemons, almonds, figs, and other fruits, all which are found to grow there already; . . . in fishing, salting, and drying of ling, cod, salmon, herring; in making and gathering of honey, wax, turpentine. . . .

Besides this, such as by any kind of infirmity cannot pass the seas thither, and now are chargeable to the realm at home, by this voyage shall be made profitable members, by employing them in England in making of a thousand trifling things, which will be very good merchandise for those countries where we shall have most ample vente [sales] thereof.

And seeing the savages . . . are greatly delighted with any cap or garment made of coarse woollen cloth, their country being cold and sharp in winter, it is manifest we shall find great [demand for] our clothes . . . whereby all occupations belonging to clothing and knitting shall freshly be set on work, as cappers, knitters, clothiers, woolmen, carders, spinners, weavers, fullers, shearmen, dyers, drapers, hatters, and such like, whereby many decayed towns may be repaired.

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### *Thought Provokers*

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1. How might we explain the attitudes of Renaissance-era Europeans toward the newly discovered Indians? Was the concern for Christianizing the Native Americans sincere?
2. What motivated the Spanish to colonize the Americas in the sixteenth century? On balance, was the Spanish arrival good or bad for the New World? What advantages and disadvantages did the Spanish have as colonizers?
3. Why did Europeans look to Africa for labor with which to develop the riches of the New World? To what extent did Africans themselves help to promote the slave trade?
4. What were the most valid arguments used to promote English colonization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What relevance to the English did the example of Spain's colonizing venture in the New World have?