

European Perspective

Document A:

Bartolomé de las Casas

(Spanish) 1550

Some Spaniards protested the brutality of conquest. None was more influential than Bartolomé de las Casas, a friar in the Dominican Order who lived in Mexico. His writings show that not all Spaniards and Europeans viewed the Native Americans as uncivilized savages “worthy of conquest and destruction.”

“What will these people think of Christ, the true God of the Christians, when they see Christians venting their rage against them with so many massacres, so much bloodshed without any just cause...”

“Furthermore, how will that nation love us, how will they become our friends (which is necessary if they are to accept our religion), when children see themselves deprived of parents, wives of husbands, and fathers of children and friends?”

“They are not ignorant or inhuman. 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 [philosophers] of Athens...”

*Reprinted from In Defense of the Indians by Bartolomé de Las Casas
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European Perspective

Document B:

John Smith

(British) 1608

Soon after a supply boat arrived at Jamestown, the fort burned, causing major damage, and plunging the English colonists into death and disease. Each week, the Emperor Powhatan sent deer, bread, and raccoon skins, along with the request to meet with Captain Newport. John Smith was sent to meet with the Emperor.

Arriving at Weramocomoca, being jealous of the intent of this politick [savage]; to discover his intent the better, I with 20. Shot armed in Jacks went a shore... Two in a ranke we marched to the Emperors house. Before his house stood fortie or fiftie great Platters of fine bread. Being entred the house, with loude tunes they all made signes of great joy. This proud [savage], having his finest women, and the principall of his chiefe men assembled, sate in rankes as before is expressed: himself as upon a Throne at the upper end of the house, with such a Majestie as I cannot expresse, nor yet have often seene, either in Pagan or Christian. With a kinde countenance hee bad[e] mee welcome, and caused a place to bee made by himselfe to sit. I presented him a sute of red cloath, a white Greyhound, and a Hatte: as Jewels he esteemed them, and with a great Oration made by three of his Nobles, if there be any amongst [Savages], kindly accepted them, with a publike confirmation of a perpetuall league and friendship.

... With a merrie countenance he asked me for certain peeces which I promised him... I gave him them, being sure that none could carrie them. But where are these men you promised to come with you. I told him, without. Who thereupon gave order to have them brought in, two after two, ever maintaining the guard without. And as they presented themselves, ever with thanks he would salute me: and caused each of them to have foure of five pound of bread given them. This done, I asked him for the corne and ground he promised me. He told me I should have it: but he expected to have all these men lay their armes at his feet, as did his subjects. I tolde him that was a ceremonie our enemies desired, but never our Friends, as we presented ourselves unto him; yet that he should not doubt of our friendship. The next day my father would give him a child of his, in full assurance of our loves, and not only that, but when he should thinke it convenient, wee would deliver under his subjection the Country of Manacam and Pocoughtaonack his enemies.

This so contented him, as immediatly with attentive silence, with a lowd oration he proclaimed me Awerowances of Powhatan, and that all his subjects should so esteem us, and no man account us strangers...and that the Corne, weomen and Country, should be to us as to his owne people. This proffered kindness for many reasons we contemned not, but with the best Languages and signes of thanks I could expresse, I tooke my leave.

A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate As Hath Happened in Virginia, 1608
Edited by Hanover College, History Department

Vocabulary

20. Shot armed in Jacks: twenty armed men clothed in jacks – coats made of thick leather

Countenance: facial expression

Greyhound: a large dog used for tracking, war, and hunting

Peeces: guns

Without: outside

Awerowances: a chief

European Perspective

Document C:

A Pilgrim's Journal (British) from Plymouth

Massachusetts 1621

“Having their guns and hearing nobody, they entered the houses and found the people were gone. (We) took some things but didn’t dare stay...We have meant to have left some beads and other things in the houses as a sign of peace and to show we meant to trade with them. But we didn’t do it because we left in such a haste. But as soon as we can meet with the Indians, we will pay them well for what we took.”

“We marched to the place we called Cornhill, where we had found the corn before. At another place we had seen before, we dug and found some more corn, two or three baskets full, and a bag of beans...In all we had about ten bushels, which will be enough for seed. It was with God’s help that we found this corn, for how else could we have done it, without meeting some Indians who might trouble us.”

“The next morning, we found...a grave. We decided to dig it up. We found first a mat, and under that a fine bow...We also found bowls, trays, dishes, and things like that. We took several of the prettiest things to carry away with us, and covered the body up again.”

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong © 1995, 2007 by James W. Loewen. Reprinted by permission of The New Press. www.thenewpress.com

European Perspective

Document D:

A Jesuit missionary

(French) 1642

During the 1600s and 1700s Jesuit missionaries traveled to America in an effort to convert Native Americans to Christianity.

To make a Christian out of a Barbarian is not the work of a day... A great step is gained when one has learned to know those with whom he has to deal; has penetrated their thoughts; has adapted himself to their language, their customs, and their manner of living; and when necessary, has been a Barbarian with them, in order to win them over to Jesus Christ.

Smithsonian Source, 2007

European Perspective

Document E:

Adriaen Van Der Donck

(Dutch) 1655

Their Bodily Shape, and Why They are Called Wilden

“Having briefly spoken of the attributes of the land as far as needful, it will also be worthwhile to treat in the following the nature of its original natives, so that when the Christians shall have multiplied there, and the Indians melted away, we may not suffer the regret that their manners and customs have likewise passed from memory.

The original natives of that country [New Netherland] ... were called wilden by our people as a general appellation, though they are divided into many different tribes. That name, as far as can be ascertained, was given them from the first and is quite appropriate for a number of reasons. First, on account of religion, because they have none or so little as to be virtually in a state of nature. Second, as regards marriage and in recognition of landed property, they deviate so far from the general laws that they may be called wilden, because they act in those matters almost at will. Third, as the Christians, to set themselves apart, give foreign nations the names of Turks or Mamelukes or barbarians, since the term heathen is too general and little used abroad, they did not wish to include the American natives in that term either. Similarly, the terms black and white are customary among those who have business overseas, to distinguish the Negroes from our and similar nations, but neither of those names quite fitted the Americans, who tend toward the olive colored. Therefore our people, on the spur of the moment rather than with forethought, it may be supposed, called them wilden, as the first name that occurred to them. And since the first opinion of women and the uneducated is best, it seems appropriate that they be called wilden, because they are quite wild and are strangers to the Christian religion.”

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European Perspective

Document F:

Adriaen Van Der Donck

(Dutch) 1655

Of the Different Nations and Languages

The variety of nations, tribes, and languages in that part of the world is as great as in Europe... All appear to have sprung from one original stock, however... Their languages are very diverse and differ as much from one another as Dutch, French, Greek, and Latin... To render their speech in one or other European language is impossible, and they have no taste or inclination for it. Until one makes the effort to learn their language he understands as little of it as if he heard a dog bark. Some omit to sound the letter R in their language, but others voice it so often that they hardly utter a syllable without it. Apart from that the pronunciation varies little, and thy can mostly understand one another.

The Indian languages are very seldom learned fully and perfectly by our people, though some, by conversing in those tongues over an extended period, have reached a point where they can understand and say everything. Not being learned men, however, they are unable to teach others or set out the principles of the language.

Of the Indians Government and Public Policy

Public policy in the proper sense does not exist, but there is a glimmer of government and something that in broad terms suggests policy. Government is of the popular kind, so much so that it is in many respects defective and lame. It consists of the chiefs, the nobles, and the tribal and family elders. Only when military matters are being considered are war chiefs consulted as well. Those together constitute all there is of council, governance, and rule.

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European Perspective

Document G:

Adriaen Van Der Donck

(Dutch) 1655

Of the Universal Law of Nations

Of all the rights, laws, and maxims observed anywhere in the world, none in particular is in force among these people other than the law of nature or of nations. Accordingly, wind, stream, bush, field, sea, beach, and riverside are open and free to everyone of every nation with which the Indians are not embroiled in open conflict. All those are free to enjoy and move about such places as though they were born there.

Of Gifts and Offerings

All their treaties, accords, peace negotiations, atonements, proposals, requests, contracts, and pledges are sealed and sanctioned with gifts and offerings. Without these, their acts and promises are not worth much, but when followed or preceded by a presentation, they are regarded as duly executed and attested. That is why an offering is commonly made with each point requested or agreed...While each subject, article, or point is being stipulated, determined, and recapitulated, the person making the request or speech has the offering either before him or in his hand. At the close of the parley he places it before the one for whom it is intended. Matters thus concluded with and among them they will exactly remember and perform to the utmost by all possible means. The offerings they make usually consist of **sewant**, pelts, duffel cloth, and munitions of war, very seldom of grains.

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Vocabulary:

The Law of Nature Or of Nations: cultural attributes that separate groups of people from one another

Parley: negotiation between opposing sides

Sewant: wampum

Indigenous Perspective

Document A:

Acuera

(Timucua) c. 1540

“With such a people I want no peace”

In 1539, about twenty-five years after Juan Ponce de Leon had “discovered” Florida and enslaved Floridian tribes, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and an army arrived in Florida. When de Soto sent a few Native Americans he had captured to ask Acuera to meet him, the Timucua chief had this to say:

Others of your accursed race have, in years past, poisoned our peaceful shores. They have taught me what you are. What is your employment? To wander about like vagabonds from land to land, to rob the poor, to betray the confiding, to murder in cold blood the defenseless. No! with such people I want no peace – no friendship. War, never-ending war, exterminating war, is all the boon I ask.

You boast yourselves valiant, and so you may be; but my faithful warriors are not less brave, and this too you shall one day prove; for I have sworn to maintain an unsparing conflict while one white man remains in my borders – not only in battle, though even thus we fear not to meet you, but by stratagem, ambush, and midnight surprisal.

I am king in my own land, and will never become a vassal of a mortal like myself. Vile and pusillanimous is he who will submit to the yoke of another when he may be free. As for me and my people, we choose death – yes! A hundred deaths – before the loss of our liberty and the subjugation of our country.

Keep on, robbers and traitors: in Acuera and Apalachee we will treat you as you deserve. Every captive will we quarter and hang up to the highest tree along the road.

Great Speeches by Native Americans
Edited by Bob Blaisdell

Indigenous Perspective

Document B:

Powhatan, Wahunsonacock

(Powhatan) c. 1609

“Why should you destroy us, who have provided you with food?”

I know the difference of peace and war better than any in my country. But now I am old and before long must die... What good will it do you to take by force that which you may have by love, or to destroy those that provide you with food? What can you get by war, when we can hide our provisions, and fly to the woods, so that you must famish by wronging us, your friends?

Do you think I am so simple, not to know it is far better to eat good meat, lie well, and sleep quietly with my women and children, to laugh and be merry with you, have copper, hatchets, or what I want, being your friend, than be forced to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots, and such trash; and so be hunted by you, that I can neither rest, eat, nor sleep; but my tired men must watch, and if a twig but break, everyone cries, “Here comes Captain Smith!” so I must fly I know not where, and thus in miserable fear end my miserable life? Come in a friendly manner to see us, and not thus with your guns and swords.

In a Sacred Manner I Live: Native American Wisdom
Edited by Neil Philip

Indigenous Perspective

Document C:

Chickataubut

(Massachuset) c. 1620

**“Thy mother doth complain, implores thy aid against this
thievish people new come hither”**

The first Plymouth settlers of 1620 thoughtlessly desecrated the grave of Chickataubut's mother, stealing the bear skins that covered her body. When Chickataubut found out about this, he gathered his people and called for vengeance. Chickataubut died in 1633, one of many New England Native Americans who succumbed to a smallpox epidemic.

When last the glorious light of all the sky was underneath this globe, and birds grew silent, I began to settle, as my custom is, to take repose. Before mine eyes were fast closed, me tho't I saw a vision, at which my spirit was much troubled, and trembling at that doeful sight a spirit cried aloud, “Behold! My son, whom I have cherished; see the paps that gave thee suck, the hands that clasped thee warm, and fed thee oft; canst thou forget to take revenge of those wild people, that hath my monument defaced in a despiteful manner; disdaining our ancient antiquities, and honorable customs. See now the sachem's grave lies like unto the common people, of ignoble race defaced. Thy mother doth complain, implores thy aid against this thievish people new come hither; if this be suffered, I shall not rest in quiet within my everlasting habitation.”

Great Speeches by Native Americans

Edited by Bob Blaisdell

Indigenous Perspective

Document D:

An Indian Reply

(Huron) 1635

During the 1600s and 1700s Jesuit missionaries traveled to America in an effort to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Although some were successful, others, as this document demonstrates, were not able to supersede Native American religious practices.

You tell us fine stories, and there is nothing in what you say that may not be true; but that is good for you who come across the seas. Do you not see that, as we inhabit a world so different from yours, there must be another heaven for us, and another road to reach it?

A Huron Indian to Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf, 1635

Smithsonian Source, 2007

Indigenous Perspective

Document E:

John Quinney

(Mahican) 1854

Beginning around 1645, councils were convened by the Mahicans to convey “from the old to the young men a knowledge of the past.” On Independence Day, 1854, following years of betrayal, land grabs, and forced removal by colonists and then Americans, Quinney expressed the history of his people.

Their religion communicated by priest and prophet, was simple and true. The manner of worship is imperfectly transmitted; but their reverence for a Great Spirit, the observance of feasts each year, the offering of beasts in thanksgiving and atonement is clearly expressed.

They believed the soul to be immortal—in the existence of a happy land beyond the view, inhabited by those whose lives had been blameless. While for the wicked had been reserved a region of misery covered with thorns and thistles, where comfort and pleasure were unknown. Time was divided into years and seasons; twelve moons for a year, a number of years by so many winters.

The tribe to which your speaker belongs and of which there were many bands, occupied and possessed the country from the seashore at Manhattan to Lake Champlain. Having found the ebb and flow of the tide, they said: “This is Muh-he-con-new,” “Like our waters which are never still.” From this expression and by this name they were afterwards known, until the removal to Stockbridge in the year 1630.

Housatonic River Indians, Mohegans, Mannhattans, were all names of bands in different localities, but bound together as one family by blood and descent.

Fourth of July Address at Reidsville, New York

Indigenous Perspective

Document F:

John Quinney

(Mahican) 1854

Beginning around 1645, councils were convened by the Mahicans to convey “from the old to the young men a knowledge of the past.” On Independence Day, 1854, following years of betrayal, land grabs and forced removal by colonists and then Americans, Quinney expressed the history of his people.

A great people from the northwest crossed over the salt water, and after long and weary pilgrimage, planting many colonies on their track, took possession of and built their fires upon the Atlantic coast, extending from the Delaware on the south to the Penobscott on the north. They became in process of time different tribes and interests; all, however, speaking one common dialect.

This great Confederacy, Pequots, Penobscot, and many others (Delawares, Mohegans, Mances, Narragansetts) held its council fires once a year to deliberate on the general welfare.

Patriarchal delegates from each tribe attended, assisted by the priests and the wise men, who communicated the will and invoked the blessing of the Great and Good Spirit. The policies and decisions of this council were everywhere respected, and inviolably observed. Thus contentment smiled upon their existence and they were happy.

Fourth of July Address at Reidsville, New York

Vocabulary:

Confederacy: independent nations that unite and cooperate in times of need

Patriarchal delegates: male representatives

Indigenous Perspective

Document G:

John Quinney

(Mahican) 1854

Beginning around 1645, councils were convened by the Mahicans to convey “from the old to the young men a knowledge of the past.” On Independence Day, 1854, following years of betrayal, land grabs and forced removal by colonists and then Americans, Quinney expressed the history of his people.

Two hundred and fifty winters ago, (a) prophecy was verified and the Muh-he-con-new (Mahican) for the first time beheld the paleface. Their number was small, but their canoes were big.

In the select and exclusive circles of your rich men of the present day I should encounter the gaze of curiosity, but not such as overwhelmed the senses of the Aborigines, my ancestors. Our visitors were white and must be sick. They asked for rest and kindness; we gave them both. They were strangers, and we took them in; naked and we clothed them.

The first impression of astonishment and pity was succeeded by awe and admiration of superior intelligence and address.

A passion for information and improvement possessed the Indians. A residence was given—territory offered—and covenants of friendship exchanged.

Your written accounts of events at this period are familiar to you, my friends. Your children read them every day in their school books; but they do not read—no mind at this time can conceive, and no pen record, the terrible story of recompense for kindness, which for two hundred years has been paid the simple, guileless Muh-he-con-new (Mahican)...

Promises and professions were freely given and ruthlessly and intentionally broken. To kindle your fires was sought as a privilege; and yet at that moment you were transmitting to your kings intelligence of our possessions, “by right of discovery,” and demanding assistance to assert your hold.

Fourth of July Address at Reidsville, New York