

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# Two Worlds Collide

## Europe's Encounter with the Americas

*Europeans made sense of their encounter with  
the Americas in contrasting ways.*



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## *Debating* the DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# Two Worlds Collide

## Europe's Encounter with the Americas

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The 2017 World History Course and Exam Description of the College Board Advanced Placement Program\* lists five themes that it urges teachers to use in organizing their teaching. Each World History *Debating the Documents* booklet focuses on one or two of these five themes.

### *The Five Themes*

- 1. Interaction between humans and the environment.** (demography and disease; migration; patterns of settlement; technology)
- 2. Development and interaction of cultures.** (religions; belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies; science and technology; the arts and architecture)
- 3. State-building, expansion, and conflict.** (political structures and forms of governance; empires; nations and nationalism; revolts and revolutions; regional, transregional, and global structures and organizations)
- 4. Creation, expansion, and interaction of economic systems.** (agricultural and pastoral production; trade and commerce; labor systems; industrialization; capitalism and socialism)
- 5. Development and transformation of social structures.** (gender roles and relations; family and kinship; racial and ethnic constructions; social and economic classes)

### *This Booklet's Main Themes:*

- 1** Interaction between humans and the environment.
- 2** Development and interaction of cultures.

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# Teacher Introduction

## ★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,  
conflicting  
perspectives are  
among the truths  
of history.  
No single  
objective or  
universal account  
could ever put an  
end to this endless  
creative dialogue  
within and  
between the past  
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

#### **Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes**

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

### ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

#### **1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.**

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

#### **2. Have students do the worksheets.**

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

NOTE: If you are using these materials with an AP world history class, an honors class, or some other group of advanced and/or more knowledgeable students, you may want to make more written sources available to them on this topic. Do a basic Internet search for sources that provide additional perspectives and then add to the sources provided here.

### 3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

### 4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

#### **The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):**

“When Europeans arrived in the Americas, they only saw what they wanted to see, and they misunderstood the native peoples here entirely.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

#### **Excellent Essay**

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

#### **Good Essay**

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Fair Essay**

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Poor Essay**

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

# Suggestions to the Student

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### 1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



### 2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

### 3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

### 4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

### 5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.



## *Two Worlds Collide*

Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Bahamas on October 12, 1492. After leaving Spain in August, he first stopped at the Canary Islands. Only on September 6 did he finally head into unknown waters. His voyage across the Atlantic did not actually take that long. Yet about five weeks later, on October 12, Columbus believed he had reached an island off East Asia. His quick crossing did not surprise him because he mistakenly thought the world was much smaller around than it actually is. His error was a part of his success. Had he realized how far Asia really was from Europe, he might not have tried to reach it by sailing west in the first place.

Such misunderstandings were to be a constant part of the age of exploration. Europe was only just emerging from its isolation at the western tip of the great Eurasian landmass. The Renaissance was helping Europeans recover much of the lost literary heritage of ancient Rome and Greece. Contact with other cultures was awakening European curiosity about the larger world and a desire to understand it better. Yet in many ways, Columbus and other explorers were products of medieval Christendom. They were largely ignorant of many faraway regions, and they felt hemmed in by powerful Muslim enemies on all sides.

To break out of this bind, Portugal had been sending ships slowly down the coast of Africa. Ultimately, the Portuguese reached the Indian Ocean that way, bypassing Muslim-controlled trading networks and gaining direct access to the fabulous spices and silks of East Asia. Columbus, of course, hoped to achieve the same goal for Spain by sailing west. In each case, a combination of greed, curiosity, and a crusading Christian spirit motivated them.

Their encounters with others along the way were of less importance to them. Moreover, their encounters with the peoples of the Americas were a complete surprise. Yet these encounters were to change them in ways they could hardly begin to imagine.

As Europeans explored, conquered, and colonized in the centuries after Columbus, they tried to make sense of the many cultures they found. They expected their deeply held Christian beliefs to guide them in this, and they expected the Christian story and message to be as attractive to other societies as it was to them. They soon discovered these other societies had their own systems of belief, arts and technologies, achievements and limitations. In seeing this, many of them reacted with contempt or indifference, while some were fascinated and even sympathetic. All of them had to struggle to fit these new experiences into their old ideas. In the process, Europeans would be changed by those they encountered even as those they encountered changed them.

And what of those others whom the Europeans encountered? It is much harder to say what they thought and felt at first. Few American native cultures had written records. And the Spanish conquerors often destroyed those records that did exist. Yet some voices have been partially preserved. For this lesson, you will study a variety of European responses to the peoples of the Americas. You will also study one fascinating record of an Aztec's first encounter with the Spaniards.

All the sources deal with the earliest Spanish contact with the Americas. However, they can offer insight into the general process that would repeat itself many times in the Americas and elsewhere in the centuries after 1492.

Historians writing about Europe's encounter with the Americas have often written about the exchange of plants, diseases, domestic animals, tools, and products. The impact of the encounter on ideas and attitudes is much harder to grasp. The sources here may give you some help as you do try to grasp this.

# Two Worlds Collide Time Line

1492

• • • Christopher Columbus lands in the Bahamas and returns to Spain with news of the lands he has discovered and his impressions of the natives he encounters.

1510

• • • At a church in Santo Domingo, Dominican friar Anton Montecino preaches his sermon critical of Spanish treatment of the natives. Many Spanish colonial leaders are in attendance.

1513

• • • After several years as a colonist with his own *encomienda*, or estate, Bartolome de Las Casas becomes a priest. The next year, 1514, he begins to speak out against Spanish oppression of the Indians. He is famous and widely admired, though some are critical and view his accounts as exaggerated.

1519–1521

• • • Hernan Cortes and 600 soldiers arrive in Mexico. A native woman, Malinche, becomes his guide and interpreter. He is allowed to enter the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where some Aztecs see him as Quetzalcoatl, a mythic light-skinned god-king whose return from the east was expected. Cortes forces the Aztec ruler Moctezuma to swear allegiance to King Charles of Spain. Later, fighting breaks out, and Cortes and his men are forced to flee Tenochtitlan. Cortes returns with native enemies of the Aztecs as allies. As plague strikes the Aztecs, Cortes takes control of Tenochtitlan and destroys the Aztec empire.

1528–1536

• • • Alvar Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors of an original group of 300 explore what will become the U.S. Southwest. For a time, they are enslaved and live among tribes of this region. De Vaca gains fame as a healer before he and the others finally make their way back to Spanish-held Mexico.

1547–1585

• • • Franciscan missionary Bernardino de Sahagun compiles the *Codex Florentino*. He supervises a group of native Indians who record other native eyewitness accounts of the Spanish conquest in Nahuatl, the language the Aztecs used. Later, Sahagun further revises the *Codex* and translates it into Spanish.

1531–1533

• • • After several earlier tries, conquistador Francisco Pizarro and 180 soldiers find Peru and conquer the Inca Empire, after ambushing and then later executing its last emperor.

1607

• • • English settlers found Jamestown in Virginia. Starvation and disease kill more than half the original colonists. Wahunsenacawh, or Chief Powhatan of the Powhatan Confederacy, captures Captain John Smith. The chief's daughter Pocahontas may have saved Smith from execution. Pocahontas later marries colonist John Rolfe, is baptized, assumes the name Rebecca Rolfe, visits England with her husband and other members of the Powhatan Confederacy, and dies just as she is about to leave in 1617.

1608–1609

• • • Samuel de Champlain founds Quebec in Canada for France. The next year he battles the Iroquois and uses guns against them for the first time.

1621

• • • Pilgrims at Plymouth in New England sign a peace treaty with the Wampanoag Indians. They celebrate a day of thanksgiving and invite some of the Indians who helped them get through their first winter.

1622

• • • Chief Powhatan's successor, Opechancanough, gives up diplomacy and attacks the Virginia colonists, seeking to drive them out. About 350 settlers are killed. The colonists retaliate, killing hundreds of the natives. Relations between natives and settlers never really recover after that.

## DOCUMENTS 1 &amp; 2

## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 &amp; 2

Document 1



The Granger Collection, New York

Document 2



The Granger Collection, New York

## Information on Documents 1 &amp; 2

**Document 1.** Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) at the time of the Spanish Conquest. This colored woodcut is from the Latin edition of the second letter Hernan Cortes sent to Spain's King Charles V shortly after Cortes and his forces conquered the Aztecs (1519–1521). The illustration shows Tenochtitlan as an island in the middle of a lake. Four main stone causeways connect it to the mainland. Since the lake water was too salty, stone aqueducts carry water to the city.

**Document 2.** This Spanish color line engraving from 1737 is of Father Antonio Margil de Jesus (1657–1726). He was the Spanish founder of missions in what would become Texas. Father Margil is shown here preaching to Native Americans.