Primary Source Readings
CHAPTER 1: NEW WORLD BEGINNINGS

SOURCE A: Juan Gines de Sepulveda Belittles the Indians (1547)

Juan Gines Sepulveda 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 Sepulveda as one of the most learned men in his realm. As a student of Aristotle, Sepulveda 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 Sepulveda book The Second Democrats, published in 1547, in which he set forth his basic arguments.

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? 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? Although some of them show a certain ingenuity for various works of artisanship, this is no proof of human cleverness, for we can observe animals, birds, and spiders making certain structures which no human accomplishment can competently imitate. 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. ...

Questions:
1. What differences does Sepulveda emphasize between Europeans (especially Spaniards) and the Indians?
2. What grounds does he assert the superiority of European culture?

SOURCE B: Bartolome de Las Casas Defends the Indians (1552)

The Dominican friar Bartolome de Las Casas was Sepulveda'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 legend not without substance, and eagerly exploited by the rival English.

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 barbarans) 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 Sepulveda 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 other's, 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....

Next, I call the Spaniards who plunder that unhappy people torturers.... 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.
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.

Questions:
1. How are his views of the Indians different from those of Sepulveda?
2. What ideas did the two debaters share?

SOURCE C: 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.

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 ourselves) 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 forslown [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 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 matter's 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.... 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....

Questions:
1. What were Hakluyt's various arguments for settling the Atlantic Coast north of Florida?
2. Which ones probably appealed most strongly to Sidney's patriotism and religious faith?