

## **DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES**

### Historical Context

Historians estimate that when Columbus first landed in the large Caribbean island of Hispaniola (today's Haiti and Dominican Republic) there were over one million natives living on that one island alone. Thirty years after the Spanish had arrived, the native population numbered fewer than 20,000. Only two percent of the original number of natives still remained. This experience was repeated again and again as European settlers and their descendents spread throughout North and South America. Native peoples were pushed aside, and their lands were confiscated. Their cultures were crushed. And most native people perished.

From our vantage point in the present, historical events sometimes seem almost inevitable. Because we know "how the story ends," we assume that the course of history was somehow determined, almost fated. But this is not true. Events and human decisions in the past shaped history just as the events and decisions of our time will affect our future.

Was the destruction of America's native cultures inevitable and unavoidable? Could the violence have been avoided? If other more broadminded people had been in charge, and different decisions had been made, could some type of mutual accommodation have been possible? Or, considering the time and situation, were tolerance, respect, and understanding simply out of the question?

■ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–8) in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and the author's point of view. Be sure to

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions that follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

**Question: Was it inevitable and unavoidable that violence and dispossession were outcomes of the centuries-long confrontation of Native Americans with European settlers and their American descendents?**

## **DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED***

### **PART A**

The following documents will help you understand the nature and extent of the cultural conflicts between Native Americans and the European colonists. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

#### **Document 1**

In 1493, upon returning from his first voyage to America, Christopher Columbus wrote a report to the Spanish government. This excerpt comes from that report.

This is a land to be desired . . . never to be relinquished. Here in a place most suitable and best for its proximity to the gold mines and for [transportation to Europe] . . . I took possession of a large town [from the natives]. I have made fortifications there, and I have left in it men, with arms and artillery and provisions for more than a year.

Why did Columbus seize this town? \_\_\_\_\_

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How do you suppose the natives felt about the actions of Columbus and his men?

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#### **Document 2**

During the century after Columbus' voyage, the Spanish government sent a number of military expeditions to America to explore the New World and conquer the natives. One of these was led by the conquistador Francisco Coronado, who in the 1540s led an army through the region that centuries later became the southwestern United States. What follows is a short excerpt from the orders he and other conquistadores were given.

You must explain to the natives . . . that there is only one God in heaven, and the emperor on earth to rule and govern it, whose subjects they must all become and whom they must serve.

With orders like this one, how do you suppose Coronado and his men treated the natives?

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**Who may have issued these orders to Coronado? Why?**

*(continued)*

**DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED***

**Document 3**

A century after the Spanish first colonized sections of the New World, the English and their descendents began to settle along the eastern seaboard of North America. As their settlements spread westward, conflicts with native peoples continued. Benjamin Franklin, who was a thoughtful observer of eighteenth-century American life, made this 1784 observation about the differences between the cultures of the Native Americans and colonial settlers.

Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think [are perfect, and] they think the same of theirs . . . . Our laborious manner of life, compared with theirs, they [think] slavish and [inferior]; and the learning, on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous and useless.

What cultural differences between eighteenth-century Americans and native peoples did Franklin note in this statement?

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**Document 4**

Tecumseh was a Shawnee leader during the early 1800s. He tried to stop the expansion of American settlement into the Great Lakes region by allying his followers with the British against the United States in the War of 1812. This is an excerpt from one of his speeches.

Where today are the Pequot? Where are the Narragansett, the Mohican, the Pokanoket and many other once powerful tribes of our people? They have vanished before the avarice [greed] and oppression of the white man, as snow before a summer sun.

What, according to Tecumseh, was to blame for the destruction of Native American cultures?

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*(continued)*

**DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED***

**Document 5**

Here is another excerpt from Tecumseh’s speech.

... The land ... belongs to all. No tribe has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers . . . . Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?

What traditional Native American belief about land and its ownership was Tecumseh explaining here?

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How did this belief differ from the viewpoints of the European settlers and their American descendents?

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**Document 6**

Red Jacket was a Seneca leader of the late 1700s and early 1800s. This excerpt comes from a speech he made to a group of missionaries in Buffalo, New York, in 1805.

... our [lands] were once large, and yours were very small; you have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets; you have got our country, but are not satisfied; [now] you want to force your religion upon us.

What actions of the American settlers was Red Jacket protesting in this speech?

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Were these complaints justified? \_\_\_\_\_

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*(continued)*

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## **DBQ 1: CLASH OF CULTURES, *CONTINUED***

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### **Document 7**

In 1820, U.S. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun issued this directive about dealing with Native Americans.

[They] must be brought gradually under our authority and laws . . . . It is impossible, with their customs, that they should exist as independent communities in the midst of civilized society. They are not, in fact, an independent people, . . . nor ought they to be so considered. They should be taken under our guardianship; and our opinions, and not theirs, ought to prevail, in measures intended for their civilization and happiness.

How does this government directive describe relations between the American government and native peoples?

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### **Document 8**

U.S. Secretary of Interior Caleb Smith wrote this in a report in 1862.

The rapid progress of civilization upon this continent will not permit the lands which are required for cultivation to be surrendered to savage tribes for hunting . . . . Government has always demanded the removal of the Indians when their lands were required for agricultural purposes . . .

What, according to this statement by a U.S. government official, justifies the “removal of the Indians” from their lands?

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**PART  
B**

Was it inevitable and unavoidable that violence and dispossession were outcomes of the centuries-long confrontation of Native Americans with European settlers and their American descendents?