

## DOCUMENT 1.7

BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS, *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

1542

Dominican priest Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), one of the first settlers in New Spain, protested the treatment of Indians by the Spanish in this address to Prince Philip, the future king of Spain. In this passage, Las Casas advocates for the rights of native peoples and rejects the encomienda system.

They are by nature the most humble, patient, and peaceable, holding no grudges, free from embroilments, neither excitable nor quarrelsome. . . . They are also poor people, for they not only possess little but have no desire to possess worldly goods. For this reason they are not arrogant, embittered, or greedy. . . . They are very clean in their persons, with alert, intelligent minds, docile and open to doctrine, very apt to receive our holy Catholic faith, to be endowed with virtuous customs, and to behave in a godly fashion. And once they begin to hear the tidings of the Faith, they are so insistent on knowing more and on taking the sacraments of the Church and on observing the divine cult that, truly, the missionaries who are here need to be endowed by God with great patience in order to cope with such eagerness. . . .

Yet into this sheepfold, into this land of meek outcasts there came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravening wild beasts, wolves, tigers, or lions that had been starved for many days. . . .

Bartolomé de las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, ed. Bill M. Donovan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 28.

## PRACTICING Historical Thinking

**Identify:** A historian's **summary** can provide a short but accurate account of the original text. Summaries include key details and feature general statements of fact, attitude, or purpose. Summarize Las Casas's presentation of native peoples and the actions of the Spaniards.

## DOCUMENT 1.8

JUAN GINÉS DE SEPÚLVEDA, *Concerning the Just Causes of the War against the Indians*

1547

Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1489–1573), a Spanish theologian and philosopher, was tasked by Charles V, grandson of Ferdinand and Isabella, to respond to Bartolomé de las Casas's assertions that the Spaniards were unjustly treating Native Americans. Below is an excerpt from his book, *Concerning the Just Causes of the War against the Indians*.

. . . [T]he 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. . . .

Compare, then, these gifts of prudence, talent, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and religion with those possessed by these half-men . . . , 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. . . .

Columbia University, "Democrates Alter; Or, On the Just Causes for War against the Indians," in *Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 526–527.