The Western Hemisphere is often referred to as the New World, but for the Native Americans who lived there, it was an ancient and diverse land. Although Spanish, Portuguese, and later English, French, and Dutch colonists often perceived native peoples in simplistic ways—as savages to be suppressed or as pagans to be converted—the lives of North and South Americans before European contact were varied and complex. North American Indians lived both nomadic and agricultural lives in forests and deserts. They lived in towns in the Southwest, as nomads in the Great Plains, and in villages in the vast forests in the East. In Central and South America, Native Americans lived in enormous cities and tiny villages, in mountains, in jungles, and on the plains. Native America was a place of vast cultures, societies, religions, and histories. It was a very old world before it was the New World. It is also a world for which few written sources remain, and so historians must rely on material culture—artifacts and other visual sources—in analyzing the history of the continents.

Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the Western Hemisphere in 1492 began a time of dislocation and destruction for Native Americans, but this era also inaugurated an era of exchange for both peoples. Europeans brought goods (like onions, olives, wheat, barley, and oats) and livestock (like cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses) to the Western Hemisphere from Europe, and sugar, vanilla, beans, cacao, pineapples, tobacco, maize, potatoes, cassava, and turkeys entered the European economy from the New World. The exchange was not wholly positive, however, because Europeans introduced diseases (like smallpox, influenza, and measles) that decimated Native American populations and brought syphilis back from the Western Hemisphere to Europe. Because this exchange of plants, animals, and microbes began with Columbus’s arrival in 1492, historians call it the Columbian exchange.

In Central and South America, where Spanish and Portuguese colonies ruled after Hernán Cortés’s destruction of the Aztec empire between 1519 and 1521, native populations were reduced to a subservient class and converted to Christianity. Although Europeans believed in their own superiority to native populations and often used this belief to justify their conquests, some Europeans protested against the oppression of Southern American Indians. Largely grounded in theological arguments, these debates revolved around whether native peoples were capable of religious conversion and salvation and, if so, whether they deserved European benevolence and perhaps, on conversion, equality with fellow Christians.

Native Americans often proved ambivalent or hostile to attempts to change their beliefs, cultural mores, and economic and social practices. To capture the spirit of this vast and often unrecorded resistance, this chapter offers a document from the revolt of a single native town in what is now modern New Mexico. This revolt was one of many forms of resistance to European conquest that took place across the continent and throughout this era.

Europeans also supplemented a need for labor in the Western Hemisphere by opening a transatlantic trade economy in slaves from West Africa. Many enslaved Africans resisted the horrors of slavery by maintaining belief systems and languages that they brought from West Africa to the Western Hemisphere. These traditions often mixed easily with those of Europeans and Native Americans, beginning a heritage of cultural blending and exchange throughout the region.
Italian explorer Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) sought a westerly route to Asia but landed in the Western Hemisphere in October 1492. The sovereigns of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, funded Columbus’s voyages in hopes of expanding Spanish trade routes to Asia. This excerpt from his journal is the first recorded contact between Europeans and native peoples.

They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances. Their hair is short and coarse, almost like hairs of a horse’s tail. They wear the hairs brought down to the eyebrows, except a few locks behind, which they wear long and never cut. They paint themselves black, and they are the colour of the Canarians, neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and others of what colour they find. Some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only on the nose. They neither carry nor know anything of arms, for I showed them swords, and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their darts being wands without iron, some of them having a fish’s tooth at the end, and others being pointed in various ways. They are all of fair stature and size, with good faces, and well made. I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to ask what it was, and they gave me to understand that people from other adjacent islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they defended themselves. I believed, and still believe, that they come here from the mainland to take them prisoners. They should be good servants and intelligent, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion. . . .when your Highness so command, they can all be carried to Castile or held captive... since with fifty men they would all be kept in subjection and forced to do whatever may be wished...

The Tlaxcalan people of central Mexico assisted Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) in the conquest of the Aztec empire after the death of Moctezuma in 1520. The two images below portray Spanish and Tlaxcalan armies under the command of Cristóbal de Olid, a lieutenant of Cortés, as they battle against the Aztecs. These images appear in the El Lienzo de Tlaxcala, an illustrated manuscript, but were copies of murals painted for Tlaxcalan nobles to commemorate the part that they played in the conquest of the Aztec empire.

Practicing Historical Thinking

Identify: According to these images, who were the victors? How is their victory portrayed?

Analyze: How might the fact that the Tlaxcalans were enemies of the Aztecs have influenced the way they portrayed themselves in this battle?

Evaluate: Observe the weaponry shown in these two panels. Assess the influence of Spanish technology on these Native Americans.
**APPLYING AP® Historical Thinking Skills**

**Historical Thinking Skill - Continuity and Change over Time**

When historians draw conclusions about time periods, they look for patterns of continuity and change over time. That means they are looking at the ways that some things changed and other things stayed the same during the same period.

Sample Prompt that asks about Continuity and Change over Time:

> To what extent did competition and cooperation among different societies in North America change with the coming of Europeans in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries?

Even though this question uses only the word “change,” you must consider the extent of that change, which allows you to consider both the extent to which things changed and the extent to which they stayed the same.

In this case, you need to consider the ways in which Native Americans competed and cooperated with each other before and after the arrival of the Spanish. How did their competition and cooperation with each other change after the Spanish arrived? How did they remain the same? Answering these questions means focusing on specific aspects (competition and cooperation) of a larger theme (politics and power).

Note: You are creating what is called an historical argument. When we use the word argument, we refer to an original claim (or position) that is supported by clear evidence and explanations. Historians use arguments not to express conflicts and debates but to explain the past. A historical argument is an original statement in which you put forth a plausible interpretation of some aspect of past events and support and defend that argument with primary-source evidence.

**Step 1** – To answer the above question, one may prewrite by organizing brilliant thoughts on to the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Continuity</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competition</strong></td>
<td>Before and after conquest, native peoples often competed with each other for resources and power.</td>
<td>The Spanish invasion changed the dynamic of these conflicts and often tipped the balance in favor of one native group over another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Aztecs and Tlaxcalan were in competition before and after the Spanish arrived.</td>
<td>The Spanish allied with the Tlaxcalan; the Tlaxcalan used Spanish weapons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Before conquest, natives traded exclusively with other native peoples. After conquest, agricultural and craft production shifted to reflect the interests of Spanish consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Natives produced new agricultural products like cattle and Spanish-influenced crafts, like Catholic icons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice that the findings here claim that competition between natives both changed and remained the same in particular ways. According to the chart, however, cooperation between natives in agriculture and crafts changed after the conquest to reflect Spanish exploitation of native economies. This is why the continuity spaces in the chart remain blank under the category of cooperation.

**Step 2** Let’s read two sample historical claims that would respond to the prompt. Remember, each claim will need support, or evidence. By the word evidence, we mean examples of events, people, or ideas from the documents above and from your outside readings. For example:

**Claim (competition):** The Spanish invasion of the Aztec empire transformed conflicts [change] that already existed [continuity] among native peoples in this part of the world.

**Support:** For example, the Aztecs and Tlaxcalan had long been enemies, and the Tlaxcalan had been under the control of the Aztecs before the Spanish conquest [evidence of continuity]. Conversely, during the conquest, the Tlaxcalan allied with the Spanish and took advantage of superior Spanish weapons and mounted cavalry [evidence of change]. This contributed to the Aztec defeat.

Let’s look at another image:

**Gold Frog Ornaments**

A member of the Mixtec people, who lived within the Aztec empire, made this necklace for an Aztec aristocrat. Mixtec and Aztec peoples associated frogs with rain and fertility, which were important factors for survival in civilizations with large cities and complex societies that depended on stable crop yields of maize and other products.

**Claim (cooperation):** Cooperation in trade between native peoples existed before the conquest, but after the conquest, natives produced overwhelmingly for Spanish consumption [change].

**Support (cooperation):** For example, trade networks that required a degree of cooperation between different peoples within the Aztec empire produced the Mixtec gold necklace above. After the Spanish conquest, however, Native Americans increasingly produced goods for the European market. The production of cattle and Catholic icons by native farmers and artisans mark this change [evidence for change].

What additional documents can you think of that would provide appropriate support for the claim and complete the paragraph?
A papal bull is a statement or decree by the Roman Catholic Pope and is meant to represent the Catholic Church’s position on a particular issue. Pope Paul III (1468–1549) issued the following papal bull in 1537 to forbid the enslavement of native peoples. Under the encomienda system, the Spanish Crown granted conquistadors and colonists a right to control a number of natives, ostensibly to protect, educate, and convert them to Christianity but in effect to use them as forced labor for mining and agriculture.

The sublime God so loved the human race that He created man in such wise that he might participate, not only in the good that other creatures enjoy, but endowed him with capacity to attain to the inaccessible and invisible Supreme Good and behold it face to face; and since man, according to the testimony of the sacred scriptures, has been created to enjoy eternal life and happiness, which none may obtain save through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, it is necessary that he should possess the nature and faculties enabling him to receive that faith; and that whoever is thus endowed should be capable of receiving that same faith. Nor is it credible that any one should possess so little understanding as to desire the faith and yet be destitute of the most necessary faculty to enable him to receive it. Hence Christ, who is the Truth itself, that has never failed and can never fail, said to the preachers of the faith whom He chose for that office “Go ye and teach all nations.” He said all, without exception, for all are capable of receiving the doctrines of the faith. . . .

We, who, though unworthy, exercise on earth the power of our Lord and seek with all our might to bring those sheep of His flock who are outside, into the fold committed to our charge, consider, however, that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the catholic faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it. Desiring to provide ample remedy for these evils, we define and declare by these our letters ... the said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they be outside the faith of Jesus Christ; and that they may and should, freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possession of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved; should the contrary happen, it shall be null and of no effect.


Practicing Historical Thinking

Identify: On what grounds did Pope Paul III forbid the enslavement of native peoples?

Analyze: Does the Pope make his arguments in terms of native equality with Europeans or in terms of European superiority?

Evaluate: What interest might the Pope have had in protecting Native Americans from European subjugation?
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. . . .


**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.

**Analyze:** What portrayals of native peoples here might make a historian skeptical of their accuracy?

**Evaluate:** What European beliefs and values might have led Las Casas to portray native peoples in this way?
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. ...  


Practicing Historical Thinking

Identify: What elements of Native American society and culture does Sepúlveda highlight to support his argument?

Analyze: Another analytical tool for historians is comparison—looking for similarities or differences among different types of evidence to gain a better understanding of them. Compare Sepúlveda’s assessment of the Native Americans with that of Bartolomé de las Casas. In what way does Sepúlveda use arguments that are similar to those of Las Casas?

Evaluate: Using your analysis of Sepúlveda’s and Las Casas’s arguments from the Analyze question above, what can you infer about the ways that the Spanish perceived themselves in relation to the Native Americans?
Document 6 - Transcript of the Spanish Trial in the Aftermath of a Pueblo Revolt 1598

In 1598, Spanish authorities sent a force of four hundred soldiers into modern New Mexico in search of gold and met resistance at the pueblo of Acoma. The following document is the testimony of a Spanish survivor of the violence, which was often widespread in northern Mexico.

By this time the Indians had given them some flour and maize, although not so much as was needed. For this reason, and because the Indians themselves suggested it, the maese de campo [commanding general of the royal troops in New Mexico] sent Captain Diego Núñez de Chaves with six men to get the rest of the provisions at the places indicated by the Indians. He went, and a short time later the maese de campo asked this witness to find out what the captain was doing. This witness went to Captain Diego Núñez, who told him that the Indians would not give anything, and told him to return to the maese de campo for more men to finish the task quickly as it was getting very late. This witness did so, and the maese de campo gave him six more men to gather flour in other places and to finish quickly. When he went to ask for some at a house not far from there, he heard shouting at that moment from the direction of Captain Diego Núñez. What had happened was that the Indians, as soon as they saw that the forces were divided, began to attack and kill. So this witness fell back immediately with his soldiers to rejoin the maese de campo, followed by the Indians who had hitherto accompanied this witness. They pursued the Spaniards in large groups, and began to hurl countless stones, arrows, and clubs, not only from the ground but from the terraces, both men and women participating in the attack. This witness is certain that this was done treacherously and with premeditation, as they waited until the Spaniards were divided, as he has stated. This witness saw Captain Diego Núñez and his soldiers fall back toward the maese de campo, who at that very moment received an arrow wound in the leg, and other soldiers were killed and wounded. The Indians were so numerous, threw so many stones, and shot so many arrows that they forced the Spaniards to a high cliff where they killed the maese de campo, Captains Felipe de Escalante and Diego Núñez, other soldiers and two Indian servants. . . .


Practicing Historical Thinking

Identify: What details does this speaker highlight as important? What evidence does the author give for charging that the incident at Acoma was a premeditated attack?

Analyze: How might the speaker’s audience have influenced the details that he chose to highlight?

Evaluate: What details of the violence at Acoma might this speaker have left out, either intentionally or otherwise?
Historical Thinking Skill - Periodization

We use the skill of periodization all the time. When we talk about the 1960s as being an era of rebellion or the 1980s as an era of conformity, we organize a set of dates into a block of time (a period) when certain common themes or trends existed. When you ask someone about her experiences in the 1980s, you are asking her to periodize this era of her life. You want her to tell you what the 1980s were like.

For historians, a time period is a technical term for the arrangement of past events and processes into discrete—or specifically defined—blocks of time that are often characterized thematically. Time periods begin and end with turning points—key moments that mark a change in the course of events. Some turning points are visible (such as a discovery, a death, a speech, or an event), and some turning points are conceptual (such as the announcement of a new theory, the beginning or end of a movement, or the pronouncement of a policy).

For example, historians characterize Cortés’s conquest of the Aztec empire between 1519 and 1521 as a turning point between two periods of Native American history. Below is an example of what that claim might look like as it relates to Native American society:

Claim: “The first eighty years of Native American history after Hernán Cortés’s conquest [turning point] were a time period of great social upheaval [periodization], especially in Central America.”

A historian could support this claim with evidence statements that are drawn from historical documents. This evidence may reflect your understanding of a historical thinking skill that has already been looked at, such as recognizing patterns of continuity and change over time.

Here is an example of an evidence statement that is related to the claim above:

Evidence statement: “For example, during Cortés’s conquest, peoples within the Aztec empire fought with Spanish troops and weapons to overthrow their Aztec overlords (Doc 2) and destabilized the social order that had existed before the conquest. The Spanish also brought diseases that decimated native populations (Doc 4), the encomienda system that forced them to work for the Spanish (Docs 4 and 5), and a new religion that undermined their traditional religious hierarchy (Docs 3 and 5).”

Using the sentences above as a model, write two more evidence statements of your own to support the following claim:

The first eighty years of Native American history after Hernán Cortés’s conquest were a time period of great social upheaval, especially in Central America.