

European Perceptions 1550–1620: Quotations

“...if they [the Africans] are treated humanely it is better for them to be slaves among Christians than free in their own lands, for it is the greatest good fortune to become a Christian.”

Francisco de Vitoria, Spanish theologian

“These people [the inhabitants of the Antilles] live like beasts on either side of the equator; and beneath the poles there are wild men as Ptolemy says in his Tetrabiblos. And this has now been demonstrated by experience, wherefore the first person to conquer them, justly rules over them because they are by nature slaves.”

John Mair, Scottish theologian

“... participants in reason so as to sense it, but not to possess or follow it. In this they are no different from the animals (although animals do not even sense reason) for they are ruled by their passions. This may be clearly seen because for them there is no tomorrow and they are content that they have enough to eat and drink for a week ...”

Juan de Matienzo, Spanish jurist describing indigenous peoples in Peru

“... that the incapacity we attribute to the Indians contradicts the bounty of the Creator, for it is certain that when a cause produces its effects so that it is unable to achieve its end, then there is some fault in the cause; and thus there must be some fault with God for having made men without sufficient capacity to receive the faith and save themselves.”

Bartolome de Las Casas, Dominican monk explaining why it is illogical to assume

Aboriginal peoples lack in mental capacity

“This [the quiet resolution, patience and calm of the Huron] gave me much to reflect upon, and made me wonder at their firmness and the control they have of their feelings, and how well they can bear with one another and support and help one another if need be. And I can truly say that I found more good in them than I had imagined, and that the example of their patience often led me to force myself more resolutely to endure with cheerfulness and courage everything vexatious that happened to me, for the love of God and the edification of my neighbour.”

Father Gabriel Sagard, a French priest who travelled among the Huron

Quotations taken from Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982) and from George M. Wrong, *The Long Journey to the Country of the Huron* by Father Gabriel Sagard (Toronto, 1939).