**Think Piece Assignment #1: TEXTBOOKS**

Below you will find excerpts from leading textbooks that were written from deliberately opposing perspectives: *A Patriot’s History of the United States* supports a more traditional, conservative (or rightist) perspective, while *A People’s History of the United States* presents a more radical, progressive (or leftist) perspective.

In your Think Piece, please compare and contrast the different perspectives on the early interaction between American Indians and Europeans. How are the intentions of the Europeans described? How are the effects on the American Indians considered? Why is the number of Indians in the Americas important? How is the understanding of disease handled?

**Document #1: A Patriot’s History of the United States, Larry Schweikart and Michael Patrick Allen, 2004**

A 500 year anniversary of Columbus’s discovery was marked by unusual and strident controversy. Rising up to challenge the Intrepid voyager’s courage and vision-- as well as the establishment of European civilization in the New World-- was a crescendo of damnation, which posited that the Genoese navigator was a mass murderer akin to Adolf Hitler. Even the establishment of European outposts was, according to the revisionist critique, a regrettable development. Although this division of interpretations no doubt confused and dampened many a Colombian festival in 1992, it also elicited a most intriguing historical debate: did the esteemed Admiral of the Ocean Sea kill almost all the Indians? . . . It is important to note that first, that the term “genocide” implies a deliberate effort to destroy natives. Neither the Spanish nor the Indians had a thorough understanding of how their diseases were transmitted. Second, no one dismisses even the accidental transmission a deadly diseases that act actually affected the North and Central American Indians. . . Pre-Columbian native population numbers are much smaller than critics maintain. For example, one author claims “approximately 56 million people died as result of European exploration and the New World.” . . .Comparing pre-Columbian Indians to other Stone Age populations, is highly unlikely that, even without any diseases, North and Central American Indian populations could have exceeded 20 million. Once diseases were accounted for, those numbers could easily have fallen by half or two thirds. . . Tuberculosis existed in central North America long before the Spanish arrived, as did herpes, polio, tick bone fevers, giardiasis, and amoebic dysentery. As one authority summed up the research, the old world was to contribute to its diseases, the New World certainly was not the Garden of Eden some have depicted. As one might expect, others challenged Dobyns and the ”early epidemic” school, but the point remains that experts are divided. Many now discount the notion that huge epidemic swept through central North America; smallpox, in particular, not seem to spread as a pandemic. . .

Later, when whites could document oral histories during the Indian wars on the western frontier, they found the different tribes exaggerated their accounts of battles in totally different ways, depending on tribal custom. Some, prefer to emphasize bravery over brains, inflated casualty numbers. Others, viewing large body counts as a sign of weakness, deemphasize their losses. What is certain is that the vast numbers of natives were killed by other natives, and the only technological backwardness – – the absence of guns, for example – – prevented the numbers of natives killed but other natives growing even higher. . .

European scholars have long appreciated the dynamic of small state diplomacy, such as was involved in the Italian or German small states the 19th century. Was been missing from a discussion about native populations has been a recognition that in many ways the tribes resembled the small states and Europe: they concern themselves more with traditional enemies (other tribes) than with new ones (whites).

**Document #2: A People’s History of the United States, Howard Zinn, 1999**

To emphasize the heroism of Columbus and his successors as navigators and discovers, and to deemphasize their genocide, is not a technical necessity but an ideological choice. It serves --unwittingly -- to justify what was done.

My point is *not that we must, and telling history, accuse, judge, condemned Columbus in absentia*. It is too late for that; it would be a useless scholarly exercise in routing. But the easy acceptance of the trustees as a deplorable but necessary price to pay for progress-- that is still with us. One reason these atrocities are still with us is that we have learned to bury them in a mass of other facts, as radioactive wastes are buried in containers in the earth. We have learned to give them exactly the same proportion of attention the teachers and writers often give them in the most respectable of classrooms and textbooks. This learned sense of moral proportion, coming from the apparent objectivity the scholar, is accepted more easily than when it comes from politicians of press conferences. It is therefore more deadly.

The treatment of heroes (Columbus) and the victims (the Arawaks)-- the quiet acceptance of conquest and murder in the name of progress-- is only one aspect of a certain approach to history, which surpasses told the point of view of governments, conquerors, diplomats, leaders. . . . Him and [p. 10] the history of any country, presents as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflict of interest between conquerors and Concord, masters and slaves, capitalist and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex. In such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, is the job of thinking people, as Albert Camus suggested, not to be on the side of the executioners. Thus, an inevitable taking of sides which comes from selection and emphasis in history, I prefer to try to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, avenger Jackson is seen by the Cherokees, with the Civil War is seen by the New York Irish, of the Mexican war seen by the deserting soldiers of Scots army, of the rise of industrialism as seen by the young women in the Lowell textile mills, the Spanish-American war as seen by the Cubans, conquest the Philippines is seen by black soldiers on Luzon, the Gilded Age as seen by southern farmers, the first world war seen by socialists, the second world war seen by pacifists, the new deal is seen by blacks in Harlem, the postwar American Empire seen by peons in Latin America. And so on, to limited extent that any one person, however he or she strains, can “see history from the standpoint of others.”

But what Columbus did to the Arawaks of the Bahamas, Cortez did to the Aztecs of Mexico, Pizarro to the Incas of Peru, and English settlers of Virginia and Massachusetts to the Powhatans and the Pequots.