

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On the United States as an Independent Nation

To many people, Europeans and Americans alike, the long-term survival of the United States as a nation was questionable. The young country's most noteworthy characteristics—its vast size, its democratic government, the diversity of its population—were viewed by some observers as fatal weaknesses, while others considered these very traits to be the nation's greatest strengths.

Read the passages below written by Europeans who traveled to America and wrote their opinions about its future upon their return home. Then answer the questions that follow.

PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF AMERICA

Andrew Burnaby, British clergyman, in Burnaby's Travels Through North America, 1775

America is formed for happiness, but not for empire. In a route of 1,200 miles I did not see a single person who asked for charity. But I saw insurmountable causes for weakness that will prevent America from being a powerful state.

The Southern Colonies (Maryland, the smallest, being the only exception) will never be thickly populated. These colonies have no set boundaries and extend westward indefinitely. People, therefore, rather than take up too laborious occupations, will gradually move westward and settle upon fresh lands which are said to be more fertile. There, with the service of a slave or two, they may enjoy all the satisfaction of an easy and lazy independence. Hence, the lands along the coast will remain thin of inhabitants. . . .

The Northern Colonies have other difficulties and disadvantages to struggle with. Their boundaries being already defined, they will undoubtedly become very populous. Though people will readily move back toward the frontier of their own colony, they will not be so easily induced to settle beyond that colony, where different laws and policies prevail.

The Northern Colonies have still other disadvantages to contend with. They are composed of people of different nations, different manners, different religions, and different languages. They have a mutual jealousy of each other that is bred by considerations of self-interest and power.

Religious zeal, too, is secretly burning in the hearts of the different sects that inhabit these colonies; if it was not restrained by laws, it would soon burst out into a flame of universal persecution.

In short, such is the difference of character, manners, religion, and interest of the different colonies that if they were left to themselves, there would soon be a civil war from one end of the continent to another.

OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF AMERICA

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer, 1793

What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European, or the descendant of a European, hence that strange mixture of blood that you will find in no other country. I could point out a family whose grandfather was English, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons now have four wives of different nations.

He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.

Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigor, and industry which began long ago in the East. They will finish the great circle. The