One definition of “order,” according to the American Heritage Dictionary, is “a condition of logical or comprehensible arrangement among the separate elements of a group.” “Disorder” would obviously be an illogical or incomprehensible arrangement, then. Using these definitions, I think that while mainstream Europeans, Africans responsible for selling their brethren, and Native Americans willing to “Westernize” their ways of life saw more order in the time span of 1500-1700, dissenting Europeans, Africans sold into slavery, and Native Americans who wanted to keep their old ways of life saw more disorder in the same time span. This combination of insights allowed mainstream Europeans, with the support of the small number of Africans and Native Americans who accepted European conquest and tried to profit off of it, to continue their colonization practices against the wishes of the three dissenting parties (the Europeans against slavery and strict Christianity, the African slaves, and the Native Americans being driven from their lands) even though the dissenters outnumbered those putting forth the policies.

Mainstream Europeans (that is, those who wanted colonization of the New World at the expense of the Native Americans’ land and Africans’ freedom) definitely saw more order from 1500-1700, since they were the ones doing the ordering. There are many examples of European ordering during this time period: the multiple laws regulating relations between Europeans (later whites), slaves (later blacks), and the Native Americans created solely for the purpose of segregating these communities as much as possible (Virginia Laws, 1643-1691), laws regulating rules of conduct based upon religion (Mather, 1684 on promiscuous dancing and Bradford, 1682 on wickedness in general but bestiality in specific), and even full-blown codes of law written by the leaders of European countries like France, Spain, and Portugal. France’s *Code Noir*, written in 1685, was the first slave code specifically for the Americas and put forth very specific rules
for what was seen as how to properly and fairly handle slaves. Spain put forth an even more
generous code centuries prior to the French in 1265 that laid the groundwork for Spanish
treatment of slaves in the New World through Las Siete Partidas. The Portuguese created in
1603 the Ordenacoes Filipinas, a set of books regarding the commercial aspect of owning
African slaves as opposed to those captured in war. In all three of these cases as well as the
others mentioned briefly above, strictly defining an arrangement of the many new subtypes of
people that were encountered was a priority for the mainstream Europeans, and in most aspects it
was a full-blown success.

However, for the Europeans unhappy with the treatment of the slaves, such as Bartolome
de las Casas (who objected in 1552 to the eradication of the majority of the populations of Native
Americans through disease and slavery), there was an increase of disorder from 1500 to 1700.
This also held true for Europeans who came to the New World and decided to experiment by
forging new relationships, ignoring things outlawed by religion, and generally attempting to
enjoy themselves. They danced with members of the opposite sex, had sex with other people
outside of marriage, flirted with their slaves, drank alcohol, and smoked tobacco. All of these
actions were not illegal in the Americas when the Europeans came over, but once the mainstream
Europeans saw these things going on they passed laws attempting to eliminate those who would
blur the boundaries of European and non-European.

Native Americans who came out in favor of the European takeover were few and far in-
between. Those who were, though, saw more order in their rapidly expanding worlds. A good
example of one such person is a Native American who adopted the European name of John
Sassamon (Lecture notes, September 2008). He like other Native Americans saw the destruction
of their society but chose to be assimilated into it instead of resist it. He did this in order to fight
against the Europeans on their level. However, he soon saw the order of the world and how one person would be unable to change it. Unable to fit into either the European (still just a savage even if he was in European clothes and spoke English) or Native American (sold out to the foreign devils) group, he was eventually murdered by the Indians. He saw more order in the world, though he definitely was not happy about it.

Most Native Americans saw much disorder in the world from their “discovery” to 1700. A very powerful example can be seen in the 1677 translation of “A Micmac Responds to the French.” In this long speech a Native American in Eastern Canada questions the conventional French wisdom that their lives were so much better than the Native Americans’. He asks if their homes are so much better, why did they leave them to come to the Native Americans’ land. The French have no answers to these questions. Native Americans could not understand many of the Europeans attempts to order their world into strict categories. Land ownership, possession of slaves, theft of goods, alcohol, waste of natural resources, gluttony, lust, greed, and especially Christianity: none of these things fit into the world of the Native Americans. The rapid introduction of these elements into their society brought about not only drunkenness, loss of identity, rampant disease, and widespread death, but also a pervasive feeling of disorder.

Africans who perceived more order were also a rare breed during this time period. Those who did, coincidentally, were the ones who profited massively from the slave trade. A very few African elites of the ruling class actually facilitated the selling of the strongest and best African males to the Europeans for riches, depleting the entirety of the source of African wealth in the 1400s but enriching the unscrupulous few (Bender, pg. 37). Though they had some doubts, they behaved in the same way the few Native Americans did: They saw the impending order of the
world to come and gave in, hoping to salvage some personal gain from the approaching carnage. Again, though they saw more order in the world they were not pleased.

The Africans who saw more disorder were all of the slaves who were ripped from their homes in Africa and sent to work in America for Europeans who believed them to be no more than property. They tried many tactics to escape their newfound homes, whether literally or figuratively. They ran away, attacked their masters, sabotaged their work, and feigned sickness. On the other hand, they sang songs in the field, formed fervent religious beliefs and groups, created strong family groups despite being constantly torn apart, and cared for each other through the oppression. They were sold, resold, beaten, raped, and killed while being slowly worked to death otherwise. The order that the Europeans created further limited them by taking away their churches, their families, and all of their rights.

In the end, while order was experienced and realized by three separate groups, it only was enjoyed by the mainstream Europeans who created the order. Every other group’s experience was a response to these manufactured rules. So although three groups saw primarily order while three saw primarily disorder, there were many more people who saw disorder as opposed to order, especially if you take into account the thousands of Africans and Native Americans killed in the process. Even with the huge disparity between populations, the Europeans were able to implement this order with the help of those small groups of Native Americans and Africans who grudgingly acquiesced to unfavorable conditions in the hope of either great personal wealth or a premature stop to the violence. Neither of these things happened, and the repercussions of that were felt for years to come.