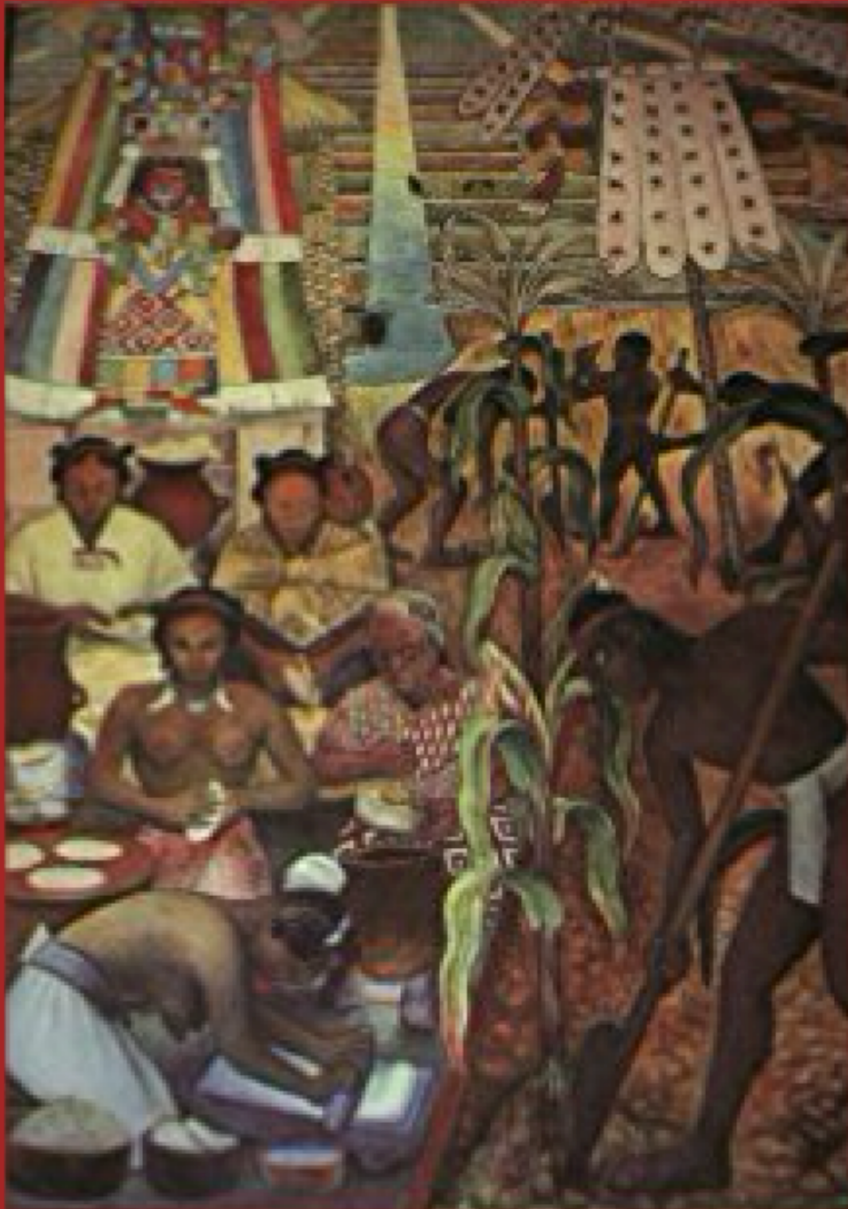


DANGEROUS MEMORIES



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**Foreword by
Marilyn James**

Invasion and Resistance Since 1492

Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America

Perhaps with the words you will be pierced, broken to understand...

Aztec Poem in *Poems of the Aztec People*,
translated by Edward Kissam and Michael Schmidt

why some people be mad at me sometimes

*they ask me to remember
but they want me to remember
their memories
and I keep on remembering
mine.*

~ Lucille Clifton, *next: new poems*

Dangerous Memories
Invasion and Resistance Since 1492

Guide to the book

How to Use Dangerous Memories

This book is written in a way different from the usual history text. The authors have attempted to provide some of the vision and voices of this history which's re not usually seen or heard in mainstream educational curricula.

Chapters One and Two

The first two chapters of Dangerous Memories present overviews of the European invasion and the subsequent five hundred years of resistance. They support, dramatize, explicate, and extend the historical context, leading the d reader to possibilities for further research.

Material in italics is directly quoted from the source listed at the end of each passage. The author's name, the title (occasionally in a shortened form), and the page number are given for easy reference. Citations within the historical context follow the standard form: author's last name and page number. Full bibliographic information appears at the end of each chapter.

Chapter Three

The last chapter addresses, in the form of two essays, the war against culture and resistance to that sustained attack.

Audience

This book was developed with several audiences in mind, it can be used by an individual or by groups, which might be classes at the high school or college level or adult/community/church study groups in a less formal setting than school.

Reflective questions and activities, including role plays, debates, writing assignments, simulations, timelines and brainstorming, may help readers connect their own lives and experience with new information. The facilitator of these activities might be a teacher or any member of a study group who will help to engage learners in the most critical level of discourse on controversial issues.

Our Goal

Our primary intent is to engage readers, to challenge them to examine their knowledge and assumptions about the history of a certain time and certain place. We will be successful if students and readers become seriously critical of their own knowledge base and begin to confront the ways their lives are affected and influenced by their understanding.

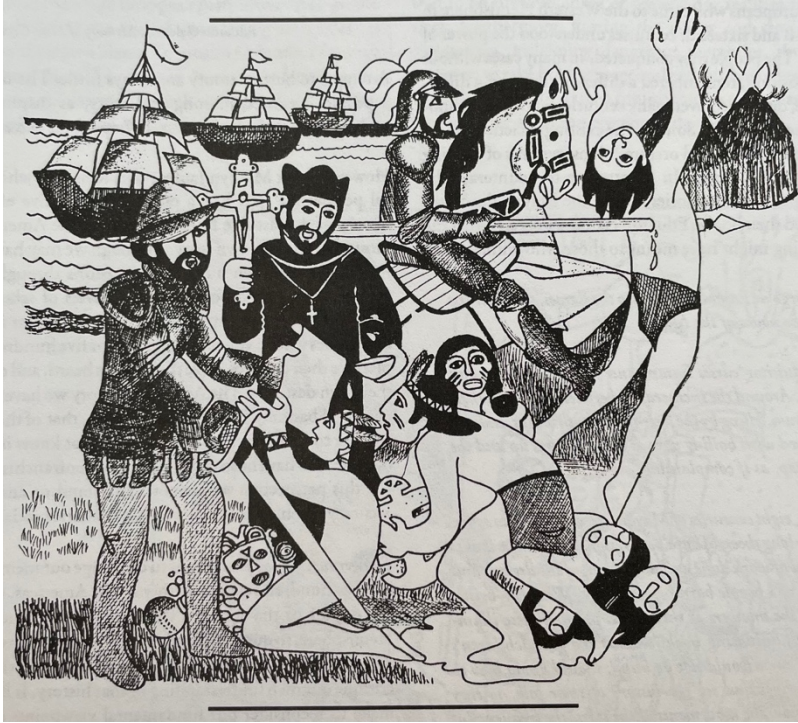
The material presented here is meant to challenge us to understand and appreciate the last five hundred years in American history from vantage points to which many of us have not been privileged.

With Tolstoy, we must ask, "What then must we do?"

Memories frame perspectives. This book is meant to frame new perspectives in places where the old ones have fooled us--and failed us.

This text has been synthesized from the original content in the book.

Chapter 1: Invasion



*A gulf deeper than ocean
yawns between the old world and the new.*

Fray Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca quoted in Haniel Long,
The Power Within Us

The Europeans who came to the Western Hemisphere in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries understood the power of memories. The people they conquered, in many cases without much opposition, remembered a different time and a different culture, developed over many centuries, and their memories gave them strength. Some of the existing societies had, in addition to highly refined oral traditions, systems of writing and written documents. In an attempt to counteract the danger of powerful memories among the Mayas, the Spaniards burned their books. Eduardo Galeano suggests what the book burning might have meant to those who witnessed it:

Fray Diego de Luanda throws into the flames, one after the other, the books of the Mayas.

The inquisitor curses Satan, and the fire crackles and devours. Around the incinerator, heretics howl with their heads down. Hung by the feet, flayed with whips, Indians are doused with boiling wax as the fire flares up and the books snaps, as if complaining.

Tonight, eight centuries of Mayan literature turn to ashes. On these long sheets of bark paper, sings and images spoke: They told of work done and days spent, of the dreams and the wars of a people born before Christ. With hog-bristle brushes, the knowers of things had painted these illuminated, illuminating books so that the grandchildren's grandchildren would not be blind, should know how to see themselves and see the history of their folk, so they should know the movements of the stars, the frequency of eclipses and the prophecies of the gods and so they could call for rains and good corn harvests.

In the center, the inquisitor burns the books. Around the huge bonfire, he chastises the readers. Meanwhile the authors, artist-priests dead years or centuries ago, drink chocolate in the fresh shade of the first tree of the world. They are at peace, because they died knowing that memory cannot be burned. Will not what they painted be sung and danced through the times of the times?

When its little paper houses are burned, memory finds refuge in mouths that sing the glories of men and of gods, songs that stay on from people to people and in bodies that dance to the sound of hollow trunks, tortoise shells, and reed flutes.

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis 137*

Attempts to burn memory are always futile. The memory of a people is carried in song and story, as inspiration and understanding of a better past, as hope for a better future.

However, what Marilyn James refers to as the "white historical perspective" has had a powerfully negative effect. The history of the last five hundred years in the Americas is for most of us an unknown story. Although we may have studied American history on numerous occasions through elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels of schooling, we know little of the real story of the first Americans and of the multitudes who have been struggling for five hundred years to preserve their cultures, have their voices heard, and determine their own destinies. The American history we have heard has been told basically from one perspective, that of the invaders and the conquerors. The history we do not know is the story of those who have been colonized and disenfranchised. Without this perspective we cannot understand or analyze with accuracy or objectivity the reality of America today.

Dangerous Memories is meant to challenge our memory of the last five hundred years of history in the Americas, to reassess the origins of the societies that developed in the Western Hemisphere, to question fundamental assumptions about the disenfranchised, to reread history with a more critical eye, to critique our own understanding of that history. It is meant to make us reconsider our fundamental viewpoints and assertions about who we have been and who we are now as nations and peoples.

Writing history is the art of making choices; it requires choosing perspectives and choosing sides. In this book we have tried to present writings that are not well known, to encourage the reader to investigate resources that are certainly available but not widely publicized, with the hope that they will be jolted into an appreciation of the narrowness of commonly held historical perspectives. We have been selective in the voices and events included, choosing to give voice to the marginalized, those who refused to give in or give up in the face of overwhelming firepower. We have chosen to present what was accidentally lost or purposely suppressed.



Moteczuma meets Cortes

Some may call this approach one-sided and therefore not objective. Our purpose is not to be objective; our purpose is to try to be honest. The critical question for historians is not "Is your material objective?" but rather "Is it true? Those who speak from the white European perspective often use the term "objectivity" or the goal of "presenting both sides" as ways to cover their own biases. To present Columbus's voyage to the Western Hemisphere as an "encounter between two cultures" is not objective; it is simply wrong. What most of us have received in terms of history has been one-sided. What we present here is indeed the other side, the side of the persecuted and the rebels. We do so without apology. As they approach

this material, readers should ask the same questions that should be asked of traditional histories: "Is this presentation true to the historical record" Whose interests does this history serve? What is the purpose of its writing?"

Ultimately, the study of the past should enable us to see the present more clearly. The study of the Americas' past should lead to an understanding of present-day realities and injustices. Furthermore, hearing the voices and stories of the courageous, reclaiming dangerous memories, should empower us to take hold courageously of our own responsibility to work together to frame a future which is truly characterized by justice for all the peoples of the Americas.

Europe Before the Conquest Teaching Strategies: Pre-reading Strategies

Recollections of European History

What images and memories come to mind from your previous study of Europe and Spain around the end of the Middle Ages? From recollections of art, literature, history, write down your impressions of everyday life, work, and social conditions at the time?

Who had power?

What were the main kinds of political structures?

How did governments work?

Recalling Images of Columbus

Write a portrait of Columbus from your study of history, from pictures and movies you have seen. Describe him and his compatriots as you recall them. Write what you think were his intentions in sailing west from Europe.

Life in Fifteenth Century Europe

Anonymous engraving

The selling of sweet-meats and herring

Not many children lived even to maturity. About half, and not just the poor, died in their first year. If you lived longer, poor diet, disease, and violence threatened to cut life short.

Food supplies were scanty. The usual meal was bread dipped in a thin vegetable soup. To eat fresh meat more than a dozen times a year was very uncommon. Milk, butter, and cheese were too expensive. The family pig was not eaten at home but sold for much-needed cash. The landowners savagely punished poaching for game or fish. If you didn't starve to death, malnutrition was almost sure to keep you so weak you fell prey to disease.



If disease didn't get you, violence might. The frequent wars of this period organized violence on a large scale. On their way to and from battle, armies ravaged the countryside. Bandits attacked travelers and held whole villages for ransom. Violence was a poison running through the bloodstream at all levels of society. People were killed casually in quarrels, for cheating in gambling, over malicious gossip, in drinking bouts, and in urban riots.

~ Milton Meltzer, *Columbus and the World Around Him*, 31

End of the World

To understand the invasion of the lands known to us as the Americas, it is necessary to know something about Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. In many ways it was a place under siege.

Most Europeans were far from rich, and their lives were marked by violence, disease, and famine. The belief that the world would end soon was taken quite seriously. In fact, preoccupation with morbid subjects was so great that it was given a name, "the culture of death."

Christopher Columbus concluded, from his extensive study of the Bible and theologians of the time, that Armageddon had a date: it would occur in 1650. There were good reasons for such melancholy.

Death

The general devastation was so great that a famous demonic preacher, Savonarola, could say, in 1496:

There will not be enough men left to bury the dead; nor means to dig enough graves. So many will lie dead in the houses that men will go through the streets crying, "Send forth your dead." And the dead will be heaped in carts and on horses; they will be piled up and burnt. Men will pass through the streets crying aloud, "Are there any dead? Are there any dead?"

~ Quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 34

...And Despair

Always and everywhere in the literature of the age, we find a confessed pessimism. As soon as the soul of these men has passed from childlike mirth and unreasoning enjoyment to reflection, deep dejection about all earthly misery takes their place and they see only the woe of life.

~ Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 138
Quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 31

Violence

Common folk routinely suffered acts of violence from each other in the form of robberies and murders. Revenge was sweet, especially if it came in the form of a public spectacle. Crowds got perverse enjoyment from watching criminals being tortured and then executed on scaffolds in public squares.

The many different units of society contending for domination also constantly fought with each other: earldoms, republics, duchies, noble families, and all kinds of factions engaged in “kidnapping, torture, mutilation, fratricide, patricide, assassination, and fomented rebellion” (Sale, 33).

In addition to these battles among themselves, those who had any power at all didn’t hesitate to use it against their disobedient subjects or fellow citizens who had the misfortune of being out of favor. Wars on a large scale were common-place as newly organized nation-states vied for power.

Preparation for Overseas Conquest

The Europeans were not the first to undertake sea voyages. In fact they learned valuable techniques from the Arab world and others.

Inuit (Eskimo) plied the entire Arctic circle in their rapid kayaks for centuries and made contacts with many peoples, as did Indian and Polynesian fishermen of the Pacific rim. Egyptians and Greeks and Norsemen knew the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

What was different was the mindset of European merchants and heads of state. Their own society was set up in a hierarchy in which domination of one class over another was an accepted way of life.

In a sense, the first people colonized under the profit motivation by the use of labour, before overseas exploitation was made possible, were the European and English peasantry. Indeed, whole nations, such as Ireland, Bohemia and Catalonia, were colonized. The Moorish nation, as well as the Judaic Sephardic nation, were physically deported by the Crown of Castile from the Iberian peninsula, an act that was accomplished, significantly, in 1492. All the institutions of colonialism, all the methods for relocation, deportation and expropriation, were already practiced if not perfected.

~ Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas*, 9

Disease and Famine

For centuries the Black Death had ravaged the countryside of Europe. By 1450 the population was just beginning to grow back to its pre-plague levels. Other epidemic diseases also scourged humanity as a direct result of unsanitary and crowded living conditions, general uncleanness and ignorance, and the constant waging of wars.

Hundreds of thousands also died every year of hunger during recurrent famines when the main crops of wheat and barley failed. The landscape was riddled with pestilence, war, and death. No wonder people whose daily experience was chaotic and dangerous had a preoccupation with death.

The colonization is a story of military conquest carried out by a people possessing vastly superior arms against sometimes practically unarmed populations, of subduing and sometimes exterminating those populations, of appropriating their land and their labor to the ends of the conquerors.

~ John Mohawk, "Discovering Columbus: The Way Here," *View from the Shore*, 45

Constant Warfare, Holy and Otherwise

Latin Christendom had waged war against Islam for eight hundred years, and portions of Europe, including parts of Spain was still under Islamic control. The Moors, or Moslems, invaded the Iberian Peninsula in 711 from North Africa and conquered it in only seven years. The next seven centuries saw almost constant fighting in what came to be known as the "reconquest." The goal of Christians was to expel from their territory not only the Moors but also others who challenged the prevailing version of Catholicism.

The Crusades, the series of campaigns fought from 1096 to 1291 to recover the Holy Land from the Moslems, were unsuccessful in their main goal but nevertheless had a powerful impact in that they opened the way to a larger world. The many nobles, knights, servants, and churchmen who participated returned from their quest with fantastic tales of great cities and lavish stores of consumer goods.

The Transformation of Society

The reconquest prepared Spain for its task of conquering a native population. Necessitating almost continuous fighting, the reconquest advanced not by townships but by great regions, emphasizing their importance as the basic unit of Spanish national life and contributing to the rise of nationalism.

Though capable leaders' unity, self-reliance, and resettlement all helped to achieve the Reconquest, the most important factor was probably the willingness of Christian Spaniards to transform their society for this purpose. This transformation was extremely thorough. Late medieval Castile became essentially a society organized for war, a dynamic military machine which would function well so long as it had more lands to conquer. It might be disconcerted by military defeats, but it could survive them...

Only Spain was able to conquer, administer, Christianize and Europeanize the populous areas of the New World precisely because during the previous seven centuries her society had been constructed for the purpose of conquering, administering, Christianizing and Europeanizing the inhabitants of al-Andalus.

Thus, if the Reconquest is important in Old World history because it is the primary example of the reversal of an Islamic conquest and because it fostered the transfer of Greek and Asian culture to Western Europe, in the general sweep of world history it is vital because it prepared the rapid conquest and europeanization of Latin America.

~ D.W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain, 173-178, passim* in 1492:
Discovery/Invasion/Encounter, 8

Military Advancements

The constant waging of local conflicts, advancements in existing technologies, and general agreement throughout diverse communities that experimentation was not only acceptable but also inevitable led the nation-states of Europe in the direction of developing new technologies of warfare.

The introduction of new weapons set into motion an arms race which has continued to the present. As new military technologies were introduced the players were forced to buy the new weapons and adopt the new techniques or face annihilation on the battlefield. Each new offensive weapon was countered with a defensive weapon or formation. Huge cannon balls capable of smashing projectiles, through thick masonry walls were countered with earthworks which proved impervious to cannonballs. As states grew in size and wealth, the ambitious among them acquired the weapons and armies which helped to spur their growth during periods when offensive weapons overwhelmed defensive ones.

~ John Mohawk, "Discovering Columbus: The Way Here." *View from the Shore*, 39-40



Medieval Market

Trade

As a result of contact with the East, Europe began a brisk trade, centered on the Mediterranean Sea. Venice and Genoa were in the best geographic position to monopolize business arrangements with the powerful Moslem rulers. By the time of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, wealthy Europeans had become enamored of such luxuries as teas, spices, silk, gold, and

jewels, and Portugal and Spain wanted to open up their own routes to the riches so they wouldn't have to pay middlemen.

Ferdinand and Isabella



Changes in Spain

Spain itself went through tremendous upheaval during the reconquest. The bulk of the population had converted to Islam, but from tiny remnants of the old regimes grew the mighty kingdoms of Leon, Castille, Aragon, and Portugal, determined to reconquer the whole territory. At the same time, all the various rulers waged wars among themselves, vying for power and internal domination. In retrospect it seems that Spain was preparing itself for the conquest of a new continent, although any notion that such a place existed would have been labeled dreaming in the fifteenth century.

Nationalism

The rise of nation-states and, eventually, nationalism also helped set the stage for conquest.

The disintegration of the Roman Empire in Europe had led to a decentralization of government that in turn led to a fragmentation of power. As the weak sought protection from the strong, the strong forced the weak to do their bidding. The feudal system arose as the method of organizing society after centuries of struggle when Europe was invaded over and over. Peasants suffering from constant encroachment by marauders entered into arrangements with more powerful lords, giving them their land and their service (including military service) in return for protection.

However, the concept of feudalism can't be limited to the single institution of vassalage and lordship. Nor does the term "feudal system" imply that the arrangement was systematic. Patterns varied greatly.

The modern nation-state of Spain was unified by the political marriage between Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Aragon, and Isabella, heiress to the throne of Castile, in 1469 (they met four days before the wedding). From 1479 on, they ruled as "the Catholic monarchs."

The only part of the country not under their control was Granada, the last remnant of the Moorish Empire, established in the ninth century. They used that problem to their advantage,

organizing war-hungry barons and nobles to conquer Granada. But when Granada fell in 1492, the war machine ran out of land to conquer inside Spain, and the only avenue open was for the barons to go back to fighting each other.

Patterns of Feudalism

Feudalism in Europe consisted of a wide variety of social organization with two common elements:

1. The individual received protection in return for his personal service to a stronger, rich man.
2. Ownership of land, or some other valuable commodity, passed from the original, weak owner to the lord.

The destruction caused by whole groups of people marching over the countryside and waging war was a prologue to the feudal era. After each Conflict new fragments of territory were taken over by someone. Eventually “Europe” became merely a name for a bewildering variety of communities, some autonomous, some interconnected, identified by different terms: the manor, the city, the church, business, the military.

Feudal process was the incessant wrestling within and between these communities to establish relations of dominance and dependency. In such a world the ordering restraints of religion and law often became mere instruments for conquest, petty or grand.

~ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, 4

Patterns of Conquest



Burning of Victims during the Inquisition

When the Spaniards entered a village in the “new world,” they followed a routine first developed in the Canary Islands called the *requerimiento*.

The invaders read out loud, in Spanish or in an appropriate translation if they knew the native language, a formal document that announced their arrival and their intentions and then offered the natives a choice:

accept Christianity and Spanish rule or suffer enslavement and/or death.

The experiences of the reconquista had led to the formulation of an elaborate code of rules about the “just war,” and the rights of the victors over the vanquished population, including the right to enslave it. These rules were extended as a matter of course to the Canary Islands. The conquerors of the Canaries used, for instance, the strange technique of the requerimiento, which was later employed in America, whereby the bewildered natives were presented before the opening of hostilities with a formal document giving them the option of accepting Christianity and Spanish rule.

It could, however, be argued that there was a difference in kind between the Canary Islanders and the Moors of South Spain, since the islanders were totally ignorant of Christianity until the arrival of the Spaniards, whereas the Moors had heard of Christianity but rejected it. Slavery would surely seem an excessively harsh punishment for mere ignorance.

~ J.M Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 46-7, 58 in 1492: *Discovery/Invasion/Encounter*, 9

Much later, in America, the long speech would be read in the middle of the night, without an interpreter, some distance away from the village that would be attacked in the morning, so that the sleeping natives never knew their “options” before the surprise massacre.

Overseas Expansion



Columbus bids farewell to Queen Isabella

Ferdinand and Isabella came to power because they were able to consolidate the various factions during the long war against the Moors, but they had very little economic power. They looked with longing at the riches the Mediterranean nation-states gained from commerce. In addition to the need to refocus the war machine and the desire for riches, the traditional hostility between Spain and Portugal provided another incentive to acquire possessions overseas. Portugal had already settled the Azores and Madeira, far out in the Atlantic.

Following the lead of Portugal, the Spanish monarchs launched a successful attack against one of the Canary Islands and thereby began their experience with colonization. They then used the Canaries as a sort of laboratory for practicing the techniques later used in the “new world.”

In its later stages, much of the reconquest was conducted under control of the crown with financial support from both public and private institutions. This pattern was further developed in the occupation of the Canaries in a contract between the state and a company of merchants from Seville. The combination of money from merchants and legal authority from the royal family provided a useful precedent for the later voyages of discovery. The Canaries would also be critically important as a staging point for the voyages themselves.

All of Columbus's expeditions were launched from the Canary archipelago.

Eventually, Portugal would concentrate its efforts on finding a way to Asia eastward around Africa; Spain, in the person of Christopher Columbus, would sail west.

Expulsion of Heretics

The Inquisition had monetary as well as a religious drive. Successful businessmen who also happened to be Jews were envied and distrusted. Many Jews converted to Christianity, to no avail, as the excesses of religious zeal were put to double use. Jews were denounced as heretics, they were arrested and expelled from the country, and their money was confiscated into the coffers of the state.

The Moors were conquered at Granada, but the victory had emptied the treasuries of the Spanish kingdoms. The power of the Church, never so great as when it stood with cross and sword over the fallen Moslem, had at that moment insisted upon the expulsion from the realms of every person professing their Jewish faith, and thus the country was deprived of people not only possessing commercial riches but constant producers of national property, a people sober, dexterous, and thrifty.

~ John Boyd Thacher, *Christopher Columbus: His Life, His Work, His Remains*, 172

The country may have been deprived of productive citizens, as Thacher points out, but the treasuries benefited. Indeed, some of the confiscated wealth was used in funding later voyages of exploration.

The Church



The Inquisition by Goya

During the first three centuries after the birth of Jesus, Christianity had no concern for the punishment of those who disagreed with the precepts. But gradually throughout Europe a notion took hold that the divinity of Jesus Christ was a doctrine that all human beings must believe in. Unlike many other cultures of the world which accept the reality of different belief systems, Christianity developed at its base a compulsive universality, the idea that “Christian truths were absolute and permitted no deviations among believers, non-believers, or peoples who had not yet encountered the faith” (Mohawk, 43).

From 1057 on, popes tried to unify all of Europe under their authority. In addition to the reconquest and the Crusades, the major military attempts to expel heretics from European-claimed territory, another device was instituted: the Inquisition, which all the European countries used in various forms to rid their lands of heresy.

The Spanish, after an initial hostility towards its excesses, gradually adopted and greatly refined the methods of the Inquisition. At first the primary targets were Moors and Jews, even those who had converted to Christianity (converses), who were held in general suspicion because of their wealth and power.

When heretics were convicted, by a separate court of the Inquisition, for statements, writings, or actions that didn't follow stringent church laws, they lost their property, their citizenship, and quite often their lives. The accused were presumed guilty; they were not told who had denounced them, and they were strongly persuaded to confess and denounce other “heretics.”

Torture, although originally unpopular in Spain, gradually became the main method of extracting confessions and was applied widely until the eighteenth century.

The Inquisition spread throughout the Spanish colonial empire hand in hand with the Catholic faith. Later, in Spain as in the rest of Europe, it was directed against Protestants.

Church Promotion of Violence



Inquisition

However, the message of the Inquisition was not just for Jews, or for Moors, but for everyone:

The church-sponsored violence known as the Inquisition...went, methodically and heartlessly, after any variety of heretic or dissenter, reformer or mystic, attempting to do by the sword—or by the torturer's rack and the auto-da-fe (public burning—what it could not do by word or prayer, under whose jurisdiction countless millions were imprisoned, by whose decree countless hundreds of thousands were killed.

The Inquisition in Spain was the most brutal of all in the fifteenth century, in part because it was, uniquely, under the control of the crowns of Castile and Aragon. It was in fact the only truly

national institution within their territory and as such their single most potent (and indeed most popular) instrument for creating the nation-state that was to be Spain.

The Inquisition, under royal direction from 1483, was the one whose strictures Cristobal Colon would have been careful to heed, and whose ministrations, evidenced in clouds of smoke billowing from town squares throughout the land, he would have witnessed daily.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 33

The Economies of Wool



The year 1492 marked a watershed for Spain. The conquest of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews had far-reaching consequences. Centuries of conflict came to an end; so did centuries of religious tolerance. Spain became a nation-state characterized by centralized autocratic government, a homogeneous population, and a theology that allowed for no deviation. It was also a nation-state badly in need of gold.

The only way of getting that universally acceptable means of payment was through the export of wool, a crop produced in a context of extreme economic disparity and hardship.

Ferdinand and Isabella had used the long war against the Moors to strike down the political power of the noblemen, but not their economic power. The nobility, about two percent of the population, owned ninety-five percent of the land. The peasants were not serfs: they had the right to leave their fields. But that freedom has been called “the freedom to die of hunger.” There was nowhere for them to go.

The sheep of Spain, some three million of them, belonged to the Mesta, the sheep raisers’ corporation, which was really a state within the state. Every spring, these vast flocks of sheep were driven from the high plains of Castile to the mountains of Galicia and Leon for summer

grazing. In the fall they were brought back. They had a guaranteed free passage. The sheep walks could not be enclosed by the peasants, who twice a year saw their land despoiled and their woods cut down by the Mesta shepherds.

The wool went to Flanders for gold, and the Mesta paid no one for the damage done to the land. No one but the King, who got tax monies, and the noble owners, who reaped profits, received anything back.

This, then, is a very brief sketch of the economics of Spain at the end of the fifteenth century: half-starving peasants and noblemen holding enormous estates: townships humbly obedient to an aggressive enormous monarchy and Church. The country was criss-crossed by millions of hungry sheep like a permanent plague of locusts. Wool was the national export but the wool trade brought in diminishing returns, and the damage to the land began causing repeated famines at home.

It was no wonder that envious eyes looked at the riches from commerce, and at the easy prosperity that the trade in spices and gold had brought to Venice, and was bringing to Portugal from its trading stations along the African coast.

The “Catholic Monarchs” felt they had a role to play in the world that could neither be financed by their miserable peasants nor by the Mesta alone. The stage was set for Columbus and the conquistadors who came after him.

~ Hans Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise*, 17-18

New Philosophies



Medieval painting of a garden

To the violence and terror of the day, *humanism* provided answers. Humanists turned to the classics of antiquity, translating and disseminating ideas from Greek and Latin authors to help upper-class citizens find a sense of direction in their lives.

According to humanist philosophy, man is the crown of God’s creation, constantly seeking dominion over the world, never satisfied as long as there

are lands to conquer. Morality took the form of a secular pragmatism: what's important is what works in the here and now.

Humanism also fit into the prevailing class system. Although the term "man" was used to mean "human," it also had strong connotations of "male human," especially male human of the upper class, the educated, wealthy, urban man of position.

Along with the glorification of the human went a dismissal and fear of nature. Fairy tales and poetry portrayed mountains, forests, jungles, and deserts as terrifying, populated with both real and mythical beasts. Anything wild was feared; man's duty was to tame the wilderness, to bring nature under his control. The early explorers shared with their culture a lack of appreciation of the beauties of the lands they were seeing for the first time; the notion that humans might live in harmony with nature was not a familiar one.

The idea of the Wild Man, a terrifying mythical being who lived in the hills and mountains, frightened both children and adults. In pictures and stories he was portrayed as naked, covered with hair, usually wielding a club, living like a wild beast and ready to do damage to more "civilized" Europeans. The concept of the Savage Beast later had disastrous consequences for the innocent natives who welcomed Columbus.

Another response to the chaos of the Middle Ages was *rationalism*, the philosophy that forms the basis for present-day scientific methodology. Gradually, over many decades, old worldviews were replaced. Centuries-old beliefs in gods and spirits that inhabited the elements of nature gave way to scientific proof that all combinations of chemical and mechanical properties could be measured and subjected to analysis, prediction, and manipulation.

Scholars could point to new technological advances such as the printing press to bolster their claims for the validity and significance of rationalism. Printing extended knowledge to a wider audience than ever before. With the development of movable type in the 1440s and the availability of good, cheap paper, came a well-established printing industry by the 1470s. In a fifty-year period, from 1454 to 1504, twenty million books were printed in at least forty thousand separate editions. One of the most successful early books was the log of Columbus's first voyage, translated into four languages and printed in nineteen editions.

A natural adjunct of humanism and rationalism was *materialism*, the celebration of objects of the "real" world. Possession of material wealth became a primary goal of life and began to replace other values long honored because of ethical and religious considerations. Coveting goods was gradually accepted as tolerable human behavior, not criticized as sinful or immoral, and slowly a new form of economic interaction developed: capitalism. The church accompanied the shift in attitude. The Bible enjoins believers to promote the general welfare and common good of God's "corporate" world. Those words were simply applied to the new definition of God's world as the civil society in which individuals resided.

Under capitalism, morality shifted. The purposes, needs, and limits of human beings no longer had a restraining influence upon industry; rather, the accumulation of money and power became the ultimate end for which human beings worked.

Nature as the Enemy

The attitude toward nature of Europeans was very unusual.

This separation from the natural world, this estrangement from the realm of the wild, I think, exists in no other complex culture on earth. In its attitude to the wilderness, a heightening of its deep-seated antipathy to nature in general, European culture created a frightening distance between the human and the natural, between the deep silent rhythms of the body, between the elemental eternal workings of the cosmos and the physical and psychological means of perception, by which we can come to understand it and our place within it.

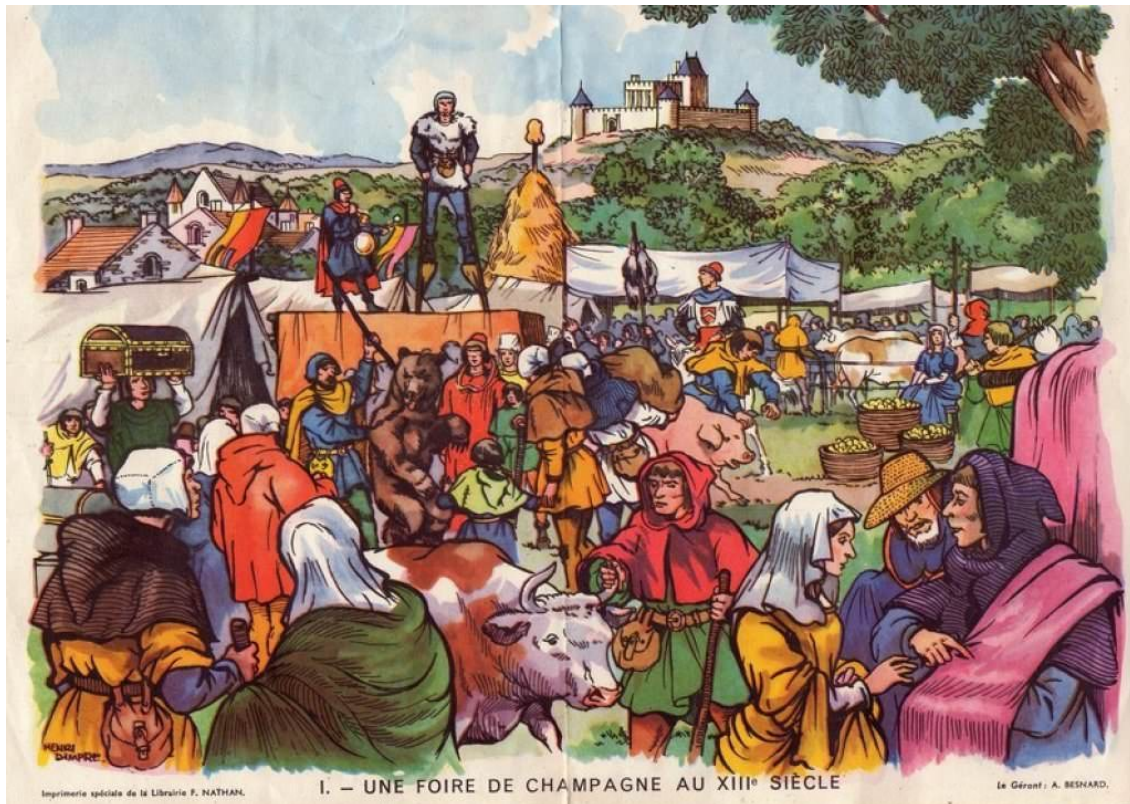
To have regarded the wild as sacred, as do many other cultures around the world, would have been almost inconceivable in medieval Europe—and, if conceived, as some of those called witches found out, certainly heretical and punishable by the Inquisition.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 78-79

The rise of mercantilism is the story of a struggle to retain and adapt an original Christian morality during the dynamic secularization of a religious outlook as an agrarian society was transformed into a life of commerce and industry.

~ William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History*, 33

Beginnings of Capitalism



Medieval craftsmen

What began as a new way to organize economic interaction, referred to as capitalism or mercantilism, had a profound impact on the next several centuries.

Having brought impoverishment to the domestic peasantry, especially in England, the land-owners and budding manufacturers were stimulated to promote overseas conquest and colonization. With their control of the state they could carry on such commercial activities under the guise of legality, international law and the law of states and conquest.

First the Spanish and Portuguese, and then the British, turned towards America, and the British annihilated whole societies in North America, in both cases rearranging the survivors under their control. The Dutch and French also penetrated North America and the Caribbean with the same motives, goals and results.

The advent of capitalist production brought fundamental changes in the structure of European society, and through colonialism, affected the entire world. Two new classes appeared wherever capitalism intervened: owners of the means of production, and dispossessed persons who were forced to sell their labor cheaply to those owners.

For the first time in human history, the majority of the people depended for their livelihood on a small minority, a phenomenon which became associated with colonialism worldwide.

~ Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas*, 10



An artist's interpretation of the mystery of traveling through uncharted waters

Dangerous Voyages

Highly motivated men dared to undertake dangerous voyages to strange lands, willing to risk their lives on the high seas on perilous journeys, traveling farther than anyone had ever ventured before. A combination of

circumstances in fifteenth-century Spain provided the incentives and the context: the violence, poverty, and disease common in the lives of the people; the rise of nationalism out of the hierarchical feudal system with its acceptance of the domination of one class over another; an impoverished nobility yearning for wealth; a recognition of the importance of material wealth and an awareness that other nations were getting it through commerce; and an insistence on the universality of the Christian culture, with a tradition of waging battles against heretics and a missionary spirit to "save the world."



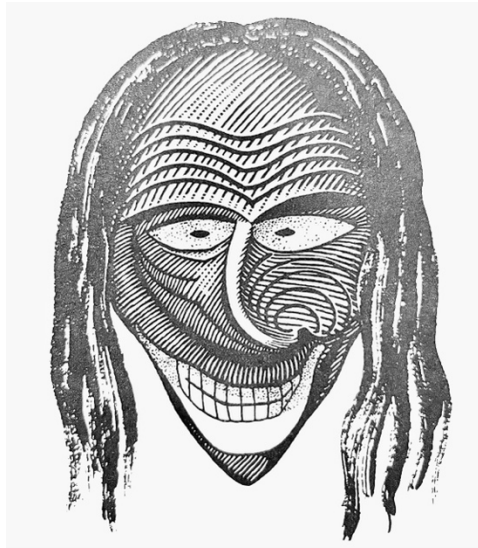
The Peoples of the Western Hemisphere

1. Iroquois Confederacy
2. Eastern Woodland Indians
3. Peoples of the Plains and Prairies
4. Fishing Peoples of the Pacific Northwest
5. Peoples of the Mountain Ranges
6. Peoples of the Southwest
7. Nations of the Southeast
8. Toltec Nation
9. Aztec Nation
10. The Maya
11. Peoples of the Caribbean Basin
12. The Peoples of the Amazon Basin
13. The Mapuche Peoples
14. The Guarani Peoples
15. The Inca State

The Western Hemisphere Before the Conquest

Indians are traditionally viewed as natural features of the land, rather like mountains or rivers or buffalo or troublesome, if colorful, wild varmints, affecting American history only by at times impeding the civilizing progress of advancing settlers.

~ William Brandon, *The Last Americans*, 1



Iroquois wooden mask

It is difficult to get an accurate picture of the inhabitants of the lands visited by Columbus for two reasons: overall, they were very quickly destroyed, and most of the words we have on the subject were written by the Europeans who were responsible for that destruction. The current state of knowledge about pre-Columbian civilization in the Western Hemisphere reflects scholars' fairly recent attempts to describe the cultures found by Europeans in a fair and nonjudgmental way.

Length of Habitation

For a long time learned writers wanted to justify the conquest by pretending that the hunting and gathering tribes existing in what became the Americas had only recently migrated from Asia over the Bering Strait and therefore had little claim to the vast resources of the "new world." If the explorers and colonizers found only a seemingly endless, relatively unpopulated wilderness, they were clearly entitled, indeed mandated by the presumptions of their own culture, to tame it. And furthermore, if the groups of human beings they encountered were unorganized, unskilled, unchurched, unschooled—in short, "primitive"—then the colonizers had every right to share their superior civilization. According to this line of reasoning, massacres and murders were necessitated by the resistance of the subjects of their generosity.

Now it is generally agreed that human beings have lived on the American continent for at least twenty thousand years and possibly as much as twice that long. They may indeed be the oldest known people on earth (Brandon, 26)

Scholars disagree about where they originated. It is possible that they crossed what is now Alaska from what is now Siberia, using a land bridge exposed by the lowering of the ocean

during the last Ice Age. Moving southward and populating the whole continent took thousands of generations, until much, much later, by the late fifteenth century, many diverse cultures and civilizations with very long histories occupied the land mass of which Europe knew nothing.

A Multiplicity of People

Civilization in America emerged from certain centers, just as it did in the three other major continental land masses of the world. These centers tended to incorporate groups and territory on their peripheries, sometimes in growth spurts that led to periods of integration, sometimes very gradually through periods of decline and disintegration. The shifting of boundaries and control in the Western Hemisphere resembled that in Europe and Asia, especially in that it occurred over thousands and thousands of years.

Naming every tribe and nation and giving their characteristics would require a huge amount of space. The following list is not intended to be exhaustive, but it gives an idea of the number and variety of groups in the Western Hemisphere at the time of the conquest. Several centers can be identified:

The Iroquois Confederacy

- At first five, eventually six nations formed from thousands of agricultural villages from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic to the Carolinas.
- Population around two million.

[The Iroquois Confederacy] was a highly structured state system which allowed the multi-ethnic state to incorporate many diverse peoples and nations. Undoubtedly, it would have continued to incorporate and annex other peoples in North America. The remarkable aspect of the Iroquois state was its ability to avoid centralization by means of a clan-village system of democracy, based on collective ownership of the land; its products, stored in granaries, were distributed equitably to the people by elected authorities. "Clan mothers" played the key role of supervising all activities, having the final veto on any decision.

~ All material in italics is from Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas*, 2-8

Number and Variety



Eastern Woodland Indian by John White

Population estimates range widely, but a rough academic consensus now maintains that between ninety and one hundred twenty million people lived in the Americas before Columbus' voyage, compared to sixty to seventy million people in Europe at the same time (excluding Russia.)

The extraordinarily rich variety of cultures had adapted not only to their wide range of physical environments but also to each other. Some were gentle and peaceful, some were fierce and quarrelsome, some were reserved in their demeanor, and some were emotional. Some remained hunters and gatherers, others developed kingdoms and empires.

Eastern Woodland Indians

- Many diverse groups who lived along the eastern coast, from Nova Scotia to Florida, and west to the Great Lakes.
- Three large language stocks: Algonquian, Iroquoian, and Siouan; included the Delaware, Ojibway/Chippewa, Sauk, Fox, Menominee, Kickapoo, Illinois, Winnebago, Shawnee, Seminole, Creek, as well as thirty or forty more nations.
- Population hard to estimate since thousands were obliterated before awareness of them was developed; certainly in the hundreds of thousands, possibly half a million or more.

Political organization of these semi-nomadic town dwellers took the form of large confederacies such as the Three Fires, composed of the Ojibways, Potawatomis, and Ottawas on the eastern end of Lake Superior. Wide trade networks were well established. The people were skilled in hunting; they also cultivated wild rice, squash, corn, and other crops. They developed snowshoes, used birch bark to build canoes and houses, and produced maple syrup. They introduced wampum, seashells strung on strings or braided into belts, used for trading and also as a way of remembering for a non-literate society; for example, belts might embody the terms of treaties in the symbolic placement of the shells. Some tribes were matri-lineal; some created clans claiming descent from the spirit of an animal, or special societies formed for a specific purpose such as war or healing. Occasional wars of battles gave the erroneous impression to early settlers that all these people were warlike; the French and English used ancient enmities to turn tribes against each other.

Languages

Groups in the Western Hemisphere spoke some two thousand distinct languages at the time of the conquest, some as different from one another as Chinese and English. In the entire "old world" about three thousand languages are known to have existed at the end of the fifteenth century. The languages of the "new world" can't be classified as primitive, in vocabulary or in any other respect.

"Whereas Shakespeare used about 24, 000 words, and the King James Bible about 7,000, the Nahuatl of Mexico used 27,000 words, while the Yahgans of Tierra del Fuego, considered to be one the world's most retarded peopled, possessed a vocabulary of at least 30,000 words."
(Stravianos, 213-214)

Peoples of the Plains and Prairies

- Several centers of state development, from West Texas to the sub-Artic.
- Cree in prairies of Canada, Lakota and Dakota (Sioux) in present-day North and South Dakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho to the west and south.
- Human population approximately one million; bison population around eighty million.

Many other bison-hunting peoples occupied various parts of the territories, and territorial disputes occurred. Some peoples, such as the Potowatomie, turned almost entirely to commerce. These groups tended to be peacemakers and negotiators in disputes, speaking many languages, perhaps originating the sign language which became universal in the Western Hemisphere in pre-colonial times.

Characteristics

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

~ Haudenosaunee prayer

Although generalization is risky because of the variety of lifestyles and systems represented in the many pre-Columbian cultures, it's safe to say that at least some of the cultures of the "new world" exhibited admirable characteristics. People in those ancient societies tried to live according to the moral principles agreed on by their forebears. Among many groups' freedom and equality prevailed, with no division between rich and poor, no form of servitude, no money, no meddling governmental bureaucracy, no private property. In many cases governments were established to promote the general good, not to create a state apparatus for repression.

Fishing Peoples of the Pacific Northwest

*The great sea has set me in motion.
Set me adrift,
And I move as a week in the river.*

*The arch of sky
And mightiness of storms
Encompasses me,
And I am left,
Trembling with joy.*

~ Eskimo Song

- Included the Tlingit, Hoopa, Poma, Karok, and Yurok peoples
- Total population of four million.

A state system as such is not apparent, although their ceremonial and trade linkages could have supported some sort of state structure. These were wealthy people living in a paradise of natural resources... These people are also the inventors of the potlatch, the ceremonial destruction of accumulated goods, and of the gigantic totems and masks.



Nez Perce Man, 1899

Villages between the Two Great Mountain Ranges

- Nez Perce, Blackfeet, Shoshones, Utes, Paiutes and others.
- Inhabited difficult terrain, developed clan-based democratic communities which shifted habitations according to animal migrations and seasons.
- Around two hundred thousand people.

Zuni Woman with a pot

Peoples of the Southwest

The mountains, I become part of it..
the herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it.
The morning mists, the clouds,
the gathering waters, I become part of it.
The wilderness, the few drops,
the pollen...I become part of it.

~ Navajo Chant



- Desert and alpine arid and semi-arid region, fragile land base suffering from drought.

- One to two hundred city-states maintained by Pueblo and Hopi Indians, living according to the “right way”: moderations, industry, peaceful interactions.
- Developed vast irrigation systems, including extensive leak-proof canals.
- Also home for the Athabascans (Navajos and Apaches), who hunted and traded, interacted and intermarried with the Pueblo peoples and became involved in the inter-village fights and wars engendered by disputes over water usage and territory.
- Numbered around two hundred thousand.



Creek Warrior Osceola

Major Nations of the Southeast

- One of the most fertile agricultural belts in the world, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico along the southeast portion of what is now the United States.
- Muskogee-speaking Choctaw, Creek, and Chickasaw in the south center; Algonquin-speaking Cherokee in the east; Natchez in the west.
- Five major nations, a thriving civilization in 1492.
- Total population of at least two to three million.

These states functioned in a confederacy similar to that of the Iroquois, with decision making based on popular consensus. Among these groups were mound builders who created massive communal graves and temples; it is possible that they had contact with Mayans or other groups in Central America.



Toltec Warriors at Tula Ruins

The Toltec Nation

- Appeared around two thousand years ago in central Mexico, creating great cities.
- After flourishing for two centuries, wiped out by invaders who waged war among themselves.

Huge buildings, sculptures and markets made up the cities, which housed vast universities and libraries. Their written language was (a forerunner to the later) Mayan form, as was the calendar used in scientific research and study.

Attitudes toward Property

One very basic difference between the two worlds, the one known to Europeans and the one unknown, was the attitude toward property.

With some notable exceptions, the European way of life had developed into a focus on individual competition for the acquisition of property. What motivated the early colonizers was desire for gold and other minerals, for land as a means of production, for labor to extract or create wealth and commodities, and for all the other promised riches of the newly discovered territory. From humble settlers looking for small land-holdings to powerful forces of land and mineral speculation, all white frontier expansionists understood the advantages of owning property.

The basic attitude of the inhabitants of the unknown world (also with some notable exceptions) seems to have focused more on cooperation, using property in common rather than competing to acquire private property. In many of the native groups, all members seemed to live as equals, with no hierarchies or class structure. Societies emphasized the nonmaterial satisfaction of being in harmony with nature; individuals didn't appear to work very hard. The profit motive was far from primary.

"It might be said, in sum, that the Indian world was devoted to living while the European world was devoted to getting. This may be the essence of the Indian world and image" (Brandon, 8)

For instance, the people referred to as the Incas, one of the most highly developed civilizations according to European criteria, valued harmony with the universe as their chief goal of life. Their intricate political organization relied on two principles: reciprocity and redistribution.

Reciprocity, the mutual exchange of gifts, was important to the *allyus*, groups united by kinship ties that formed the basis of society. Gradually, these small groups organized into much larger units and fed into a central government which had a high respect for local institutions. Farmers paid a tribute from their surpluses to a coordinating center, responsible for storing the collected produce and redistributing it to local chieftains in time of need (Wachtel, 61).

The Aztec Nation

Our house on earth
we do not inhabit

only borrow it
briefly

~ Aztec poem

- Expanded through wars of conquest to an area from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific and northwards.
- Population of some thirty million.

The economy was based on hydraulic agriculture, with corn (maize) as the central crop and many others such as beans, pumpkins, tomatoes, cocoa, tobacco, and cotton, which provided the fiber for all cloth and clothing. The Aztecs created works of art and useful commodities of cloth and metal, built huge stone dams and canals as well as fortress-like castles, had huge markets in each city and a far-flung trade network, using turquoise for exchange. They developed a sophisticated political organization: the land was owned in common and worked by commune members, who lived in clans and elected leaders, including the principal commander of the military who was also the main political and religious leader.

By the late fifteenth century Aztec dominance was in a process of decay. Constant warfare had many negative effects: the equitable distribution of wealth was skewed by rewards of property and land given to distinguished warriors; slavery was becoming an essential institution, with prisoners of war used as slaves; formerly elected offices were being transformed into hereditary ones by the emergence of a clan nobility. The clan structure itself gradually disintegrated, with a corresponding emergence of a class society, similar to the state development taking place in Europe at the same time. Most slaves taken in conquest were used for human sacrifice; eventually the dominant religious cult required the daily human sacrifice of thousands of people to the Sun God.

At the time of the conquest, peasant uprisings were increasing and intensifying all over Mexico; Montezuma II, who came to power in 1503, was making an attempt to reform the regime.

Meaning of the Land

The land that Europeans coveted and eventually took away from the Indians had totally different meanings to the two cultures. To the Indians land was sacred, obviously precious and life-giving and worthy of special reverence, with holy spots that evidenced the oneness of all creation. The souls of the ancestors were mixed with the soil.

“In a way that few Europeans could understand, the land *was* Indian culture: it provided Native Americans with their sense of a fixed place in the order of the world, with their religious observances, and with their lasting faith in the importance of the struggling but united community as opposed to the ambitious acquisitive individual” (Segal and Stineback,28)

Identification with the land in no way implied ownership. The concept of owning the land was as foreign to the Indians as the idea of owning the air would be to us. The early inhabitants had an intimate and abiding relationship with nature that colored their view of humans as only one

of many species participating in an intricate web of life. The rituals, myths, and ceremonies passed down through the ages that helped individuals understand their obligations and responsibilities played a primary role, at the very center of existence.

Living on the land required conscious caretaking, a finely-tuned sense of balance, and respect in such everyday activities as hunting, farming and foraging.

Mayan Civilization

- Prospered for five centuries in the northwest of what is now Central America.
- Population around ten million.

Mayan culture, often compared to that of Greece in the golden age of Athens, amazes everyone who studies it. The cultivation of corn was its basis, so essential that a religion was constructed around this vital food. However, methods of agriculture never became more technically sophisticated than slash and burn: hacking down and burning trees and brush, planting a cornfield in the rough clearing, and then repeating the process in another place in a few years.

The Mayans used a variety of materials, including gold and silver, in their highly-developed art, architecture, sculpture, and painting. But it is in the realms of mathematics and astronomy that their achievements are the most impressive. The calendar system developed by the Mayans was one-thousandth of a day per year more accurate than the one we use now, and they were familiar with the concepts of positional numbers and zero, unknown in Europe for another thousand years. They also had a written language with hieroglyphic ideographs, conventionalized symbols standing for certain words, as in Chinese writing, and possibly some symbols representing sounds like modern alphabets.

There was a distinct commercial class, and the cities were authentic urban centers, not simply bureaucratic or religious ones; but ordinary Mayans retained the fundamental features of a clan structure in their communities. They were required to work in the nobles' fields and to pay them rent for use of the land, and also to contribute to the building of roads, temples, noblemen's houses, and other structures. It is not clear whether these relations of production were exploitative or democratically and co-operatively developed. It is clear that certain groups, such as war prisoners, criminals, debtors and orphans were used as slaves, and although easily freed and not hereditary, features of slave-dependence for labor were apparent.



Potlatch ritual

Importance of Giving Gifts

The generosity of the Indians was extolled by Columbus and other early explorers. It was a natural product of the understanding among natives that life depended on the largesse of nature. Grateful recipients of good harvests and successful hunting expeditions routinely shared their bounty with others in the ritual

known as “potlatch” among Northwest Coast Indians.

The formal distribution of food and other goods to the community was deeply engrained in the society and went beyond mere customs of hospitality; the colonizers benefited greatly from its practice.

The Caribbean Basin

- Important as the place Columbus first landed.
- Total population of at least several million.

This region, like the resource-rich and temperate Pacific Northwest, was a virtual paradise where hunger and want were unknown. Tied by cultural, clan, and trade bonds, there may have been state developments or federations that have not been detected; the pre-colonial cultures in the Caribbean have been very little studied, since most were annihilated or merged with African populations during slavery.



Machu Pichu one of the sites of the Inca Empire

Four Major Nation-State Formations in the Southern Continent

- The peoples of the Amazon basin.
- The Mapuche (Araucan) of the Pacific regions.
- The Guarani of Paraguay and Argentina.

- The peoples of the Inca state, present-day Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia.
- Total population fifty million.

The Incas were agriculturalists and stock-breeders, metal-workers and weavers, and notable architects; their science, mathematics, and medicine were much more highly developed than in Europe at that time. The Quechua language had a hieroglyphic script and books were published in it.

Road-building and trade were extraordinarily far-flung and developed in these highlands, where villages are at elevations of several miles. The main social unit in land tenure was the ayllu, or the commune, the members of which worked together to till the land which was distributed equitably to families. The Sapa Inca (leader of the state) was considered the owner of the land, and a portion of the harvest and animal produce went to the state to support its functions, both secular and religious.

The irrigation canals of the sierra and the coast and the agricultural terraces of the Andes, which survive to this day, are evidence of the degree of economic organization reach by the Inca state. As regards religion, the cult of Mama Pacha is considered to be on a par with the worship of the Sun. Like the Sun, Mother Earth represents no one in particular, with a correlation between communal ownership of land and the universal religion of the Sun.

~ All material in italics is from Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas*, 2-8
See also William Brandon, *The Last Americans*

The Natives Who Welcomed Columbus



Tainos going to meet Spanish ship

The natives who rowed out to investigate the strange intruders in their gigantic ships, greatly overdressed for the climate and so eager to display the power of their weapons, were Tainos, related to a larger group known as Arawaks. Evidently they were peaceful and agricultural, living in houses built of perishable materials such as reed and palm trees.

Some of their household implements have been recovered: small stones chipped and carved in the shape of chisels, gouges, spearheads, hoes, and knives; mortars and pestles, the latter with carved heads, possibly idols; beads of stone and oyster shell and fragments of pottery.

Frederick Ober, commissioned in 1890 as a special representative of the World's Columbian

Exposition to follow the path taken by Columbus, reported on his findings, “There yet remain other articles to mention, which show that these barbarians did have among them, or were in communication with, skillful artisans who carved wonderful things in wood and stone, the like of which have not been found elsewhere...

“When the Indies were discovered, all the common people sat on the ground in the presence of strangers, but... their chiefs made use of low seats, of stone or wood, carved in the shape of a beast or reptile, with very short legs, its head and tail erect, and with golden eyes” (Ober, 84)

The Lands of the Western Hemisphere



Detail of an Inca tunic

Varied societies, in differing degrees of “civilization,” ordering the lives of their members according to deeply held principles and beliefs, lived in the land mass unknown to Europeans, about to be “discovered” and forever changed. Pre-Columbian North America was fairly densely populated, as such cultures go, and certainly was not the empty wasteland and untouched wilderness that Europeans took it to be...

...We must Imagine a sizable population, such as the European Invaders did not achieve until the 1840’s, in some areas quite densely settled, that would have been trapping and shooting small game and game birds day after day for centuries, fishing

any available stream and clamming any available coast, gathering fruits and nuts and roots of several hundred species over thousands of acres a year, hunting big game over hundreds of square miles with many thousands of pounds of meat every year (more than fifteen thousand for a village of four hundred in southern New England alone, one estimate suggests), ringing and burning trees and planting crops on a scale of perhaps an acre a person, clearing underbrush and driving animals by fires any one of which might be as much as twenty miles around, and, let us assume, occasionally blundering with a fire out of control or a hillside denuded for firewood or a well dried up from overuse—all that, and still occupying an environment that in important ways was ebullient and wild, abundant in both kinds and numbers of flora and fauna, functioning to all intents and purposes in its original primal state.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 316-317

Variety and Harmony

It is safe to say, then, that in the immediate world Columbus and his crew “discovered,” human beings lived in harmony with nature and shared nature’s bounty and that the larger world later visited by other Europeans was characterized by a very large populations and a wide variety of cultural patterns.

Cahokian Indian Mound

The Natives’ View of the Land

The Indians say: The land has an owner? How’s that? How is it to be sold? How is it to be bought? If it does not belong to us, well, what? We are of it. We are its children. So it is always, always. The land is alive. As it nurtures the worms, so it nurtures us. It has bones and blood. It has mild and gives us suck. It has hair, grass, straw, trees. It knows how to give birth to potatoes. It brings to birth houses. It brings to birth people. It looks after us and we look after it. It drinks chichi, accepts our invitation. We are its children. How is it to be sold? How bought?



~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 225



Tainos

Men of the Good

The following excerpts from an article by Jose Barreiros describe in some detail the culture that had enjoyed a long existence in the area where Columbus landed. Although the cultural patterns of the “new world” vary tremendously, this one, as the first to feel the effects of the conquest, is a key example of the values,

lifestyles, and community organization practiced by many groups throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The word Taino meant “men of the good,” and from most indications the Tainos were good. Coupled to the lush and hospitable islands over a millennium and a half, the indigenous people of “La Taina” developed a culture where the human personality was gentle. Among the Taino at the time of contact, by all accounts, generosity and kindness were dominant values. Among the Taino peoples, as with most indigenous lifeways, the physical culture was geared toward a sustainable interaction with the natural surroundings. The Taino’s culture has been designated as “primitive” by Western scholarship, yet it prescribed a lifeway that strove to feed all the people, and a spirituality that respected, in ceremony, most of their main animal and food sources, as well as the natural forces like climate, season, and weather. The Taino lived respectfully in a bountiful place and so their nature was bountiful.

The naked people Columbus first sighted lived in an island world of rainforests and tropical weather, and adventure and fishing legends at sea. Theirs was a land of generous abundance by global terms. They could build a dwelling from a single tree (the Royal Palm) and from several others (gommier, ceiba), a canoe that could carry more than one hundred people.

...The Tainos lived in the shadows of a diverse forest so biologically remarkable as to be almost unimaginable to us, and, indeed, the biological transformation of their world was so complete in the intervening centuries that we may never again know how the land or the life of the land appeared in detail. What we do know is that their world would appear to us, as it did to the Spanish of the fifteenth century, as a tropical paradise. It was not heaven on earth, but it was one of those places that was reasonably close.

The Taino world, for the most part, had some of the appearance that modern imaginations ascribe to the South Pacific islands. The people lived in small, clean villages of neatly appointed thatch dwellings along rivers inland and on the coasts. They were a handsome people who had no need of clothing for warmth. They liked to bathe often, which prompted a Spanish royal law forbidding the practice, “for we are informed it does them much harm,” wrote Queen Isabella.

The Taino were a sea-going people, and took pride in their courage on the high ocean as well as their skill in finding their way around their world. They visited one another constantly. Columbus was often astonished at finding lone Indian fishermen sailing in the open ocean as he made his way among the islands. Once, a canoe of Taino men followed him from island to island, until one of their relatives, held captive on Columbus’s flagship, jumped over the side to be spirited away.

Among Tainos, the women and some of the men harvested corn, nuts, cassava, and other roots. They appear to have practiced a rotation method in their agriculture. As in the practice of many other American indigenous eco-systemic peoples, the first shoots of important crops, such as the yucca, beans and corn, were appreciated in ceremony, and there are stories about their origins. Boys hunted fowl from flocks that “darkened the sun,” according to Columbus, and

the men forded rivers and braved ocean to hunt and fish for the abundant, tree-going jutia, the succulent manatee, giant sea turtles and countless species of other fish, turtles and shellfish. Around every bohio [hut], Columbus wrote, there were flocks of tame ducks (yaguasa), which the people roasted and ate.

...The Taino world of 1492 was a thriving place. The Taino islands supported large populations that had existed in an environment of Carib-Taino conflict for, according to archeological evidence, one and a half millennia, although the earliest human fossil in the region is dated at fifteen thousand years. Tainos and Caribs may have visited violence upon one another, and there is little doubt they did not like each other, but there is little evidence to support any thesis that genocidal warfare existed in this world. A Carib war party arrived and attacked, was successful or repulsed, and the Tainos, from all accounts, returned to what they were doing before the attack. These attacks were not followed up by a sustained campaign of attrition...

Early descriptions of Taino life at contact tell of large concentrations, strings of a hundred or more villages of five hundred to one thousand people. These concentrations of people in coastal areas and river deltas were apparently well-fed by a nature-harvesting and agricultural production system whose primary value was that all of the people had the right to eat. Everyone in the society had a food or other goods producing task, even the highly esteemed caciques and hiques (medicine people), who were often seen to plant, hunt, and fish along with their people. In the Taino culture, as with most natural world cultures of the Americas, the concept was still fresh in the human memory that the primary bounties of the earth, particularly those that humans eat, are to be produced in cooperation and shared.

...Like all American indigenous peoples, the Taino had an involved economic life. They could trade throughout the Caribbean and had systems of governance and beliefs that maintained harmony between human and natural environments. The Tainos enjoyed a peaceful way of life that modern anthropologists now call "ecosystemic." In the wake of recent scientific revelations about the cost of high impact technologies upon the natural world, a culture such as the Taino, that could feed several million people without permanently wearing down its surroundings, might command higher respect.

...There was little or no quarrelling observed among the Tainos by the Spaniards. The old caciques and their councils of elders were said to be well-behaved, had a deliberate way of speaking and great authority.... The peoples were organized to the gardens (conucos) or to the sea and the hunt. They had ball games played in bateyes, or courtyards, in front of the cacique's house. They held both ceremonial and social dances, called areitos, during which their creation stories and other cosmologies were recited. Among the few Taino-Arawak customs that have survived the longest, the predominant ideas are that ancestors should be properly greeted by the living humans at prescribed times and that natural forces and the spirits behind each group of food and medicinal plants and useful animals should be appreciated in ceremony.

As can be seen throughout the Americas, American indigenous peoples and their systems of life have been denigrated and misperceived. Most persistent of European ethnocentrism toward

Indians is the concept of “the primitive,” always buttressed with the rule of “least advanced” to “most advanced” imposed by the prism of Western Civilization—the more “primitive” a people, the lower the place they are assigned in the scale of “civilization.” The anti-nature attitude...[inherent in this idea] came over with the Iberians of the time, some of whom even died rather than perform manual labor, particularly tiling of the soil. The production and harvesting of food from sea, land, and forests were esteemed human activities among Tainos. As with other indigenous cultures, the sophistication and sustainability of agricultural and natural harvesting systems was an important value and possibly the most grievous loss caused by the conquest of the Americas.

~ Jose Barreiro, “A Note on Tainos: Whither Progress?” *View from the Shore: American Indian Perspectives on the Quincentenary*, *Northeast Indian Quarterly*, 7:3 (Fall, 1990), 66-71

The Conquest and its Consequences



Columbus's Reckoning

The First Voyage

[Columbus was] a figure in transition from the dying Middle Ages to the rising world of capitalism and science, blindly credulous and boldly questioning, a medieval mystic incongruously eager for gold and worldly honors.

~ Benjamin Keen, *The life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, vi

Columbus's Reckoning

The more Columbus studied and dreamed the more certain he became that he was right about the possibility of sailing west to Asia.

Logic had small place in his thinking. Without going into technical details, it may be enough to say that he convinced himself the ocean was narrower than it is, and that Asia was wider than it is. He sifted through the literature, the maps, the charts produced by scholars and seafarers

from ancient times to his time, and wherever figures differed from his concept, he “corrected” them.

~ Milton Meltzer, *Columbus and the World Around Him*, 57

Cristoforo Colombo (Cristobal Colon) son of a weaver from Genoa, went to sea as a young man, probably as a trader or clerk, and turned up in Lisbon, Portugal, the center of European navigation and exploration, around 1476. The long (and growing) list of authors who have written about him disagree about many aspects of his, but most would say he was driven by an obsession to explore the world.

The Conquest and Its Consequences: Teaching Strategies

The expressions listed below are terms which you have probably encountered often in reading about the history of Columbus. Reading history with a critical eye and ear entails questioning terms very carefully. Review the following terms. Discuss how they have been used in textbooks in talking about this period. For each term write or discuss ways in which the term might not be altogether true.

Discovery When is a discovery not a discovery?

New World In what way was this “new world” really and “old world”?

Explorer How could Columbus, Cortes, Lewis and Clark, et.al., be called explorers of lands, rivers, mountains, valleys, and territories occupied for centuries by nations of people?

Wilderness What concepts were conveyed to the Europeans when the “virgin land” voyages perceived this land as a wild, uninhabited place?

The West To whom was the West not west? To whom was this land north? South? East?

Pagans/Infidels/Cannibals/Hostile In what way were these terms absolutely false about indigenous people? Which terms were used by the Europeans and why? Which terms have you seen in textbooks describing the people Columbus encountered?

Primitive vs. Civilized

How does terminology become important in conveying an historical, geographic, and political perspective in a text book?

What perspectives were/are fostered by those who use these terms to define Columbus’s and the colonialists’ activity in the Americas? Whose perspectives are left out?

What other terms would be more accurate in describing what Columbus and the colonialists did?

To Name = To Own = To Subjugate



The Conquistadors

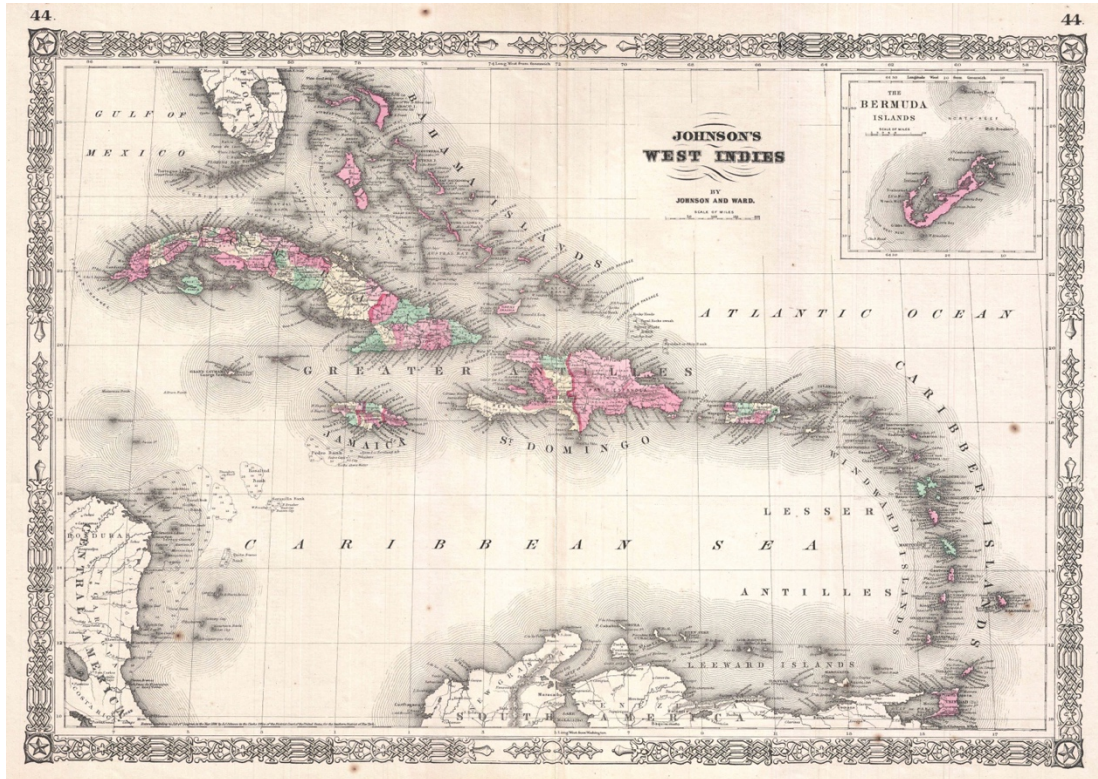
Language can be powerful. To give a new name to people or places is symbolically to exercise power and authority over them.

Brainstorm a list of the names Columbus and the Europeans “gave” to the people they met. If you can, try to write the names the indigenous used for those same people and places. Discuss the way in which Columbus’s act of naming the indigenous people (Indians) and the land he encountered (West Indies, capes, mountains, ports, islands) was a powerful act on the part of the Europeans. How did it influence beliefs of ownership over these groups of people and this land for centuries?

Research how indigenous people of the Americas today feel about being called “Indians.” What did they call themselves before Columbus arrived? How do they refer to themselves today? How might it alter our thinking if people could be called by names which they have chosen for themselves rather than names which are superimposed on them (e.g., the slaves being given names of their masters)?

Talk about how this phenomenon works in your own life or experience. How are powerful images of you created by others, by history, or by society?

Invasion Timekeepers



As you read this chapter create a timeline which charts events related to the invasion of the continent which came to be known as America. Though you may want to concentrate on the beginning years of the invasion, be sure to show in some way the history of the millions of people who were here prior to Columbus's landing (as a reminder that American history did not begin in 1492).

One kind of specific timeline to construct as you read this chapter is a detailed summary of the events which occurred surrounding the four voyages of Columbus. As you develop this timeline, create a map of the Caribbean to track Columbus's travels and the territories invaded by the Europeans.

There are many ways of doing timelines. You can construct one in a linear fashion, write a timeline as a kind of diary (with a page per day or week or month), or make a kind of storyboard which can later be illustrated. A group could divide this project into smaller tasks.

Late 1400s: Shipboard Life



It is well to remember, as an antidote to romantic sea tales written in warm libraries, that ships were then floating slums and floating sweat ships. The common fate of crew and officers gave a certain solidarity that would not have been found on land among such disparate men, but they were still masters and servants, and no nonsense. The captain was lord over life and death, and any man who evoked his displeasure could be lashed, locked in irons, keelhauled, or hanged. The food for the crew was vile—though on a normal voyage probably no worse than what they were used to on land. As for their quarters, there weren't any. The men simply had to bunk down for the night wherever they could find a dry spot, which is not easy on a sailing boat; and those who had one change of dry clothes with them were the fortunate ones.

Those were the men who did the work, though. It has been said that the great explorers of Africa were simply the first white men carried around that continent by blacks; likewise, those famous captains were the first men sailed across the oceans by their crews.

~ Hans Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise*, 44

Strong Determination



Columbus with Ferdinand and Isabella

The schoolbook story that Columbus knew the earth was round although everyone else thought it was flat is simply not true. Five hundred years earlier, the Greeks knew that the earth is a sphere, and educated Europeans of the fifteenth century shared that knowledge.

What stopped seamen from sailing west across the sea was primarily fear of the unknown. Ships hugged the coastlines, the captains not trusting navigational aids enough to venture forth into uncharted seas. Also, everyone assumed the distance to land was too great to traverse. And, at least in theory, they were right.

Columbus's reckonings of the distance between Europe and Asia, if one traveled across the sea to the west, was dead wrong. He believed, and finally able to convince others, that Japan was about twenty-four hundred sea miles from the Canary Islands, about the quarter of the actual distance. If he had to distort facts and figures to fit in with his notion of the size of the ocean, he didn't hesitate to do so. He was so sure he could do what he dreamed of that finally his dream became more real to him than reality.

In 1484 Columbus began a long period of arguing, cajoling, pressuring, and begging private investors and heads of governments to finance his proposed endeavor to sail west to

Asia. Failing to find backers in Portugal, he went to Spain in 1485, where he soon realized he needed the support of the powerful monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella.

Somehow, he managed to get an audience at court in May, 1486. It is known that he spent time in a monastery near the castle; possibly he had the attention of church leaders who persuaded the king and queen to listen to his plans. "Even in that religious and bigoted age, Columbus stood out as a very fierce Catholic. When he discussed his westward voyage, he always dwelt on its religious aspects: to convert the Asian 'heathens' to Catholicism, and/or to use their gold for the reconquest of the Holy Land from the Moslems" (Koning, 35).

October 11, 1492: Somewhere in the Western Part of the Ocean Sea

Clear skies, the moon a few days past full. Three ships from the port of Palos, in Spain, sailed before a brisk wind of about ten knots. The ships, the largest about the size of a tennis court, had been at sea for thirty-two days. In spite of fear and tension built up during the long journey, the crew felt a growing anticipation, for increasingly in the last few days had seen signs of land.

Around ten o'clock in the evening the captain general of the little fleet thought he saw a light on the western horizon. However, he wrote in his log that he was too uncertain to confirm it as land. He called the royal steward, who said he too saw the light, and the royal inspector, who said he couldn't see anything.

The captain general kept looking, still thinking he could see something out there, "like a little wax candle that was lifting and rising." Since no one on either of the two other ships called out, the captain general went to bed, after telling his crew to keep a good watch and "to look well for the land." He promised a doublet of silk to the first man to see land. This promise was in addition to the other reward the King and Queen had offered: ten thousand *maravedis* as a yearly stipend, a little less than a seaman's annual wages.

Sometime around two o'clock in the morning the lookout on the Pinta, Juan Rodriguez Bermejo, gave out the cry of "Tierra!" A cannon was fired as a signal to the other ships. And there, "at a distance of two leagues," they saw their long-anticipated goal. They lowered sails and lay-to until daylight.

Shortly after dawn the crew of the flagship prepared a display of ceremonial grandeur, including banners, pennants, and the royal standard. Their theatrical efforts were soon appreciated, fortunately, by an audience of naked people on the sands. The captain general boarded the flagship's longboat, taking with him the two royal observers to take notes, the official interpreter, and probably a few armed soldiers, and they were all rowed ashore.

Eduardo Galeano imagines how the scene might have played itself out:

He falls on his knees, weeps, and kisses the earth. He steps forward, staggering because for more than a month he has hardly slept, and beheads some shrubs with his sword.

Then he raises the flag. ON one knee, eyes lifted to heaven, he pronounces three times the names of Isabella and Ferdinand. Beside him the scribe Rodrigo de Escobedo, a man slow of pen, draws up the document.

From today, everything belongs to those remote monarchs; the coral sea, the beaches, the rocks all green with moss, the woods, the parrots, and these laurel-skinned people who don't yet know about clothes, sin, or money and gaze dazedly at the scene.

Luis de Torres translates Christopher Columbus's questions into Hebrew: "Do you know the kingdom of the Great Khan? Where does the gold you have in your noses and ears come from?"

*The naked men stare at him with open mouths, and the interpreter tries out his small stock of Chaldean: "Gold? Temples? Palaces? King of kings? God?"
Then he tries his Arabic, the little he knows of it "Japan? China? Gold?"*

The interpreter apologizes to Columbus in the language of Castile. Columbus curses in Genovese and throws to the ground his credentials, written in Latin and addressed to the Great Khan. The naked men watch the anger of the intruder with red hair and coarse skin, who wears a velvet cape and very shiny clothes.

Soon the word will run through the islands:

"Come and see the men who arrived from the sky! Bring them food and drink!"

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 45-46

The lookout who first called out the sighting, Juan Rodriguez Bermejo, didn't collect the doublet of silk or the ten thousand *maravedi* annuity. Columbus kept the reward to himself, although it was a small amount compared to the fortune he would later amass. His rationale was that he must have seen the lights of the landfall earlier in the evening. After all, the royal steward said he saw the lights, too.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, "What Columbus Discovered," *The Nation*, 444, 446

Success

The monarchs took the plan under advisement. While waiting for their answer, Columbus and his brother Bartolome petitioned the kings of Portugal, France, and England—in vain. After a long time with no response, the report from the royal advisors finally came: it cautioned that the westward-to-Asia plan appeared impossible to any learned person because the ocean was much wider than Columbus supposed. Isabella, however, held out a little hope to the discouraged dreamer. If Spain was victorious in the war with the Moors for Granada, Columbus could apply again.

After the Moors surrendered in January, 1492, Luis de Santangel, the royal treasurer, scraped up enough money from Italian bankers to finance the expedition. Isabella also agreed to Columbus's rather outlandish demands: ten percent of all the wealth that would pour into Spain from his new route to Asia; not only the riches he would personally bring in, but all that everyone else might gather, and for all time, for both himself and his heirs; the title of viceroy and Admiral of the Ocean Sea, together with other honors. With the title of admiral he would become the commander of the Western Atlantic, and would receive a share in all the naval booty to be drawn from that vast region.

The First Voyage

On August 3 the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, sailed from the small port of Palos, Spain, on their way to their first stop on the Canary Islands. They couldn't use Spain's principal port, Cadiz, because eight thousand people were penned up there in the holds of all kinds of ships awaiting deportation. They were Jews, expelled by the Holy Inquisition in a move toward religious unity.

The crew of ninety men, mostly professional sailors, included an interpreter who knew Hebrew and some Arabic and who, it was hoped, would be able to converse with whatever people they met in Asia; a marshal, or disciplinary officer, on each ship; a secretary to keep the official journal; a comptroller to record the expected riches; a "surgeon," probably with limited qualifications; and various petty officers.

Land!

With amazingly good fortune, given his lack of experience and faulty reckoning, and the increasing tension felt by the crew, farther from land for a longer period than anyone had ever been before, Columbus charted a course that led to a landing within thirty days of leaving

Goмера, the westernmost part of the Canary Islands, the only Spanish colony, and thus a good staging place for the voyage.

First Reports from Columbus



Arrival of Columbus in the "New World"

...with this act two vastly different cultures, which had evolved on continents that had been drifting apart steadily for millions of years, were suddenly joined. Everything of importance in the succeeding five hundred years stems from that momentous event: the rise of Europe, the triumph of capitalism, the creation of the nation-state, the dominance of science, the establishment of a global monoculture, the genocide of the indigenes, the slavery of people of color, the colonization of the world, the destruction of primal environments, the eradication and abuse of species, and the impending catastrophe of ecocide for the planet Earth.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, "What Columbus Discovered," *The Nation*, 446

Friday, October 12, 1492

No sooner had we concluded the formalities taking possession of the island than people began to come to the beach, all as naked as their mothers bore them....

The people here called this island Guanahani in their language, and their speech is very fluent, although I do not understand any of it. They are friendly and well-dispositioned people who bare no arms except for small spears, and they have no iron. I showed one my sword, and through

ignorance he grabbed it by the blade and cut himself. Their spears are made of wood, to which they attach a fish tooth at one end, or some other sharp thing.

I want the natives to develop a friendly attitude toward us because I know that they are a people who can be made free and converted to our Holy Faith more by love than by force. I therefore gave red caps to some and glass beads to others. They hung the beads around their necks, along with some other things of slight value that I gave them. And they took great pleasure in this and became so friendly that it was a marvel. They traded and gave everything they had with good will, but it seems to me that they have very little and are poor in everything. I warned my men to take nothing from the people without giving something in exchange.

This afternoon the people of San Salvador came swimming to our ships and in boats made from one log. They bought us parrots, balls of cotton thread, spears, and many other things, including a kind of dry leaf [probably tobacco] that they hold in great esteem. For these items we swamped them little glass beads and hawks' bells.

Many of the men I have seen have scars on their bodies, and when I made signs to them to find out how this happened, they indicated that people from other nearby islands come to San Salvador to capture them; they defend themselves the best they can. I believe that people from the mainland come here to take them as slaves. They ought to make good and skilled servants. For they repeat very quickly whatever we say to them. I think they can easily be made Christians, for they seem to have no religion. If it pleases Our Lord, I will take six of them to your Highnesses when I depart, in order that they may learn our language.

~ Robert H. Fuson, trans., *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, 75-77

Columbus' Log



Coat of Arms of Columbus

During the ninety-six days he spent exploring the lands he encountered, Columbus kept a daily log which he gave to Isabella on his return. In spite of many misadventures the record survived and was translated by Fray Bartholome de Las Casas, an early admirer of Columbus who later migrated to the "new world" and became the most outraged reporter of the atrocities committed by the Spaniards against the natives.

In his log, Columbus raves about the generosity and simplicity and good-nature of the islanders and refers to the beauty of the scenery, but he is quick to possess the land and think what good slaves the people would make.

Given prevailing European attitudes toward nature, it is not surprising that Columbus's descriptions of the landscape lag behind his descriptions of the people. The handsome, naked, trusting islanders understandably grabbed his immediate attention; they were as strange and fascinating to him as the Spaniards were to them. But in the early days he slights what must have been spectacular scenery around them.

"Here he was, in the middle of an old-growth tropical forest the likes of which he could not have imagined before, its trees reaching sixty or seventy feet into the sky, more varieties than he knew how to count much less name, exhibiting a lushness that stood in sharp contrast to the sparse and denuded lands he had known in the Mediterranean, hearing a melodious multiplicity of bird songs and parrot calls—why was it not an occasion of wonder, excitement, and the sheer joy at nature in its full, arrogant abundance?" (Sale, 101).

For the first two weeks of the beginning of his voyage through the Bahamas to Cuba, only a third of the lines of description recorded in the log have anything to do with the natural phenomena around him. And some sights he seems not to have noticed at all. He mentions the nighttime sky in terms of navigation but never describes the sharp, glorious configurations of stars that must have been visible practically every night of his journey.

Wednesday, 17 October 1492, on "Long Island"

The houses look like Moorish tents, very tall, with good chimneys, but I have not seen a village yet with more than 12 or 15 houses. I also learned that the cotton coverings were worn by married women or women over 18 years of age. Young girls go naked. And I saw dogs, mastiffs and pointers. One man was found who had a piece of gold in his nose, about half the size of a castellano, and on which my men say they saw letters.

Log, 86

Tuesday, 6 November 1492, on Cuba

The Spaniards said that the Indians received them with great solemnity, according to Indian custom, and all the men and women came to see them and lodged them in the best houses. The Indians touched them and kissed their hands and feet in wonderment, believing that we Spaniards came from Heaven, and so my men led them to understand. The Indians gave them to eat what they had.

Log, 103

Monday, 3 December 1492, on Cuba

I saw and entered a beautiful house, not very large and with two doors, such as they are all built. I saw a wonderful arrangement of chambers, built in a way that I do not know how to describe. The chambers were formed by mats and shells hanging from the ceiling. I thought it was a temple, and I called them and asked by signs if they prayed in it and they said no. One of them went overhead to a loft and gave me all they had there, and I took some of it.

Log, 123-124

Taking Possession

Although he didn't rhapsodize about the physical splendor at first, Columbus had no hesitation about taking possession of all he came across, no question about the possibility that someone else might already have a proprietary relationship with the landscape. Significantly, he assigned names to sixty-two physical features on the islands—capes, ports, mountains—as he possessed them for his king and queen, instead of asking whether or not they had names.

Later he succumbed to the natural beauty around him. In Cuba, toward the end of his journey, he came upon a large harbor which he named Puerto Santo. "As I went along the river," he writes on November 27, "it was marvelous to see the forests and greenery, the very clear water, the birds, and the fine situation, and I almost did not want to leave this place. I told the men with me that, in order to make a report to the Sovereigns of the things they saw, a thousand tongues would not be sufficient to tell it, nor my hand to write it, for it looks like an enchanted land" (Fusion, 119).

25 December 1492: A Chief's Kindness

On Christmas Day, 1492, an incident occurred that led to the establishment of the first settlement in the "new world." Columbus had been sent a present from a leader, or *cacique*, named Guacanagari, a belt and mask with features of hammered gold, and a promise of "all that he had" if the Admiral would visit him.

On Christmas Eve, the Niña and the Santa Maria made their way along the coast. The entire crew, including the Admiral went to sleep, and the Santa Maria hit a coral reef a few miles from shore, was quickly stuck firmly, and broke up and sank as the sun arose. Columbus sent a messenger to Guacanagari to ask for help. The *cacique* wept when he heard of the shipwreck.

The Cacique was unwearied in his attentions; his grief at the disaster was so manifest, and his attempts to divert [the sailors] from their trouble so delicately proffered, that finally hope returned to cheer them, and they thought upon their blessings.

The little Niña lay anchored off the village of Guarico, and at sunrise of the day after Christmas, the Cacique paid a visit of state to the Admiral, when Columbus was so pleased with his frank and manly bearing that he repeated his encomiums, declaring him preeminent in virtue.

While the king was on board, his Indian subjects swarmed in canoes around the caravel, holding out pieces of gold, and crying out, "Chug, chug!" intimating that they wished to barter the nuggets for hawks-bells, over which they went wild with joy. Seeing that such trifles brought in exchange great pieces of gold, Columbus was delighted, and at the sight of the pleasure expressed in his countenance, Guacanagari, quick to note the change, assured him that if gold was the object of his desires, he would direct him to a region where the very stones were golden, and where it was in such abundance that the people dwelling there held it in light esteem. This region he called Cibao, which Columbus construed to mean Cipango [Japan], so long the goal before him in his voyages.

Of course, the chief's promise, made out of a desire to please, was never fulfilled.

~ Frederick Ober, *In the Wake of Columbus*, 2224-225

First Colony

Columbus didn't find what he was looking for: gold. The natives answered his constant questions the only way they could. They were puzzled by these strangers, but they tried to please them by giving them information about possible stores of the shiny metal they admired so much.

He also didn't find Asia. To make up for those failures he began to consider building a colonial outpost, a military fortress:

"I wanted to see if I could find a place to build a fort. I saw a piece of land that looked like an island, even though it is not, with six houses on it. I believe that it could be cut through and made into an island in two days. I do not think this is necessary, however, for these people are very unskilled in arms. Your Highnesses will see this for yourselves when I bring you the seven that I have taken. After they learn of our language I shall return them, unless Your Highnesses order that the entire population be taken to Castile, or held captive here. With fifty men you could subject everyone and make them do what you wished" (Fuson, 79-80). Colonization and slaves began to have as much appeal as gold and a passage to Asia.

The shipwreck of the Santa Maria gave the explorers an excuse to build a colony, named “La Navidad” in honor of the Day of Nativity (Christmas) on which its inadvertent founding occurred. Using salvaged timber, with the help of the willing Tainos, the Spaniards in a few days constructed some buildings, and thirty-eight or forty of the men agreed to stay in the fortress. The rest of the crew, plus Indian captives, set sail in the two remaining ships on the homeward journey.

Sunday, 13 January 1493: A Show of Strength



Columbus claiming Hispaniola

After three months on the islands, the Spaniards for the first time discovered some natives with bows and arrows “as if ready for war.” Since the Admiral (Columbus quickly began referring to himself by his new title) had given standing orders that his men should buy or barter away any weapons the Indians might have, the sailors dickered with a few of these men of ferocious aspect and persuaded them to come on board to talk with the Admiral, who sent them ashore

to induce the other to bring gold.

Following are two versions of the story, the first written by Columbus’s son, the second a commentary on the significance of the episode:

How the First Skirmish Between the Indians and Christians Took Place in Samana Bay on the Island of Española

The Indian who had visited the ship persuaded the others to lay down their bows and arrows and the large cudgels which they use as swords, for they have no iron. The Christians began to buy swords and arrows as the Admiral had instructed them to do, but after the Indians had sold two of their bows they disdainfully refused to sell any more; instead they ran toward the place where they had deposited their weapons, with the design of picking them up and also of getting cords with which to tie our men’s hands. But the Christians were prepared for their attack, and

though only seven in number, fell upon the Indians with so much spirit that they gave one Indian a slash on the buttocks with a sword and wounded another in the breast with an arrow. Terrified by the valor of our men and the wounds inflicted by our arms, the Indians turned and fled, leaving behind most of their bows and arrows. Many would certainly have been killed had not the pilot of the caravel, who was in charge of the landing party, restrained our men.

The Admiral was not displeased by this incident; for he was convinced these were the Caribs whom the other Indians feared so greatly, or if not Caribs, at least their neighbors. Their appearance, arms and actions showed them to be a daring and courageous people. The Admiral hoped that when the islanders learned what seven Spaniards had done against 55 ferocious Indians, they would feel more respect for the men left behind the town of Navidad and would not dare annoy them.

~ *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by His Son, 88-90*

After just two bows were sold, the Indians turned and ran back to the cover of the trees where they kept their remaining weapons and, so the sailors assumed, “prepared...to attack the Christians and capture them.” When they came toward the Spaniards again brandishing ropes—almost certainly meaning to trade these rather than give up their precious bows—the sailors panicked and, “being prepared as always the Admiral advised them to be,” attacked the Indians with swords and halberds, gave one “a great slash on the buttocks,” and shot another in the breast with a crossbow. The Tainos grabbed their fallen comrades and fled in fright, and the sailors would have chased them and “killed many of them” but for the pilot in charge of the party, who somehow “prevented it.”

It may fairly be called the first pitched battle between Europeans and Indians in the “new world”—the first display of the armed power, and the will to use it, of the white invaders.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 120-121

Captives

Columbus had kidnapped citizens of the island villages he visited, realizing what good servants these gentle, agreeable people could become.

In one harbor, “five young Indian men came aboard for a last visit, and in return for their trust, Columbus held them captive. He wanted to train them as interpreters, he said. Then he sent a boat ashore to kidnap seven women and three boys. Seeing this, the husbands and fathers of some of the victims begged to be taken along with them, rather than suffer the pain of

separation. Columbus kindly agreed. A little later two of the young men escaped. The others? All would die before the fleet reached Spain” (Meltzer, 99).

Although he captured a total of thirty-one islanders, the number he actually took with him isn't known. Six survived the difficult voyage, especially difficult for inhabitants of a tropical climate who had never experienced cold weather, and were centerpieces of Columbus's triumphant entry first into Portugal and then into Spain.

1493: Reaction

Historians hardly knew what to make of the stories Columbus brought back from his first voyage. In an early interpretation, Peter Martyr focused on the riches of the land and the strangeness of the people:

A certain Christopher Columbus...followed the western sun from the Gades, with three ships furnished him by my sovereigns and proceeded to the Antipodes, about five thousand miles.

He ascertained that the land [he visited] produced naturally gold, cotton, spices in form like cinnamon and smooth like pepper, trees of scarlet dyes, the juices of which make a bluish-grey color, and many other things most precious to us, small samples of which things he bought away.

The island has many kings, but naked, as indeed all are of both sexes. This people, wholly content by nature, naked as they are, feed only on such nourishment as comes from trees, with a kind of bread made of roots. Notwithstanding, they are fond of government, and owing to this desire they wage wars against each other, with bows and with pikes burned into very sharp points. The King who is conquered is considered to be subject to the conqueror.

And the principles of Meum and Tuum [mine and thine] has a part in their lives as it has among us; and so the things belonging to luxury and the accumulation of money are sought by them, a thing you would hardly think necessary for naked people.

~ Peter Martyr of Anghara in John Boyd Thacker, *Christopher Columbus: His Life, His Work, His Remains*, 58

Later, however, Martyr's views changed somewhat, and he described Cuba as a veritable Utopia:

It is certain, that among them, the land is as common as the sun and water: and the Mine and Thine (the seeds of all mischief) have no place with them. They are content with so little, that in

so large a country, they have rather superfluity than scarceness. So that...they seem to live in the golden world, without toil, living in open gardens, not entrenched with dikes, divided with hedges, or defended with walls. They deal truly one with another, without laws, without books, and without Judges. They take him for an evil and mischievous man who takes pleasure in doing hurt to others.

~ Peter Martyr, quoted in Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 199

Responses in Europe

After hearing about the first voyage, other writers followed the lead of Columbus in describing the “new world.” In the words of Peter Martyr, an early historian, writing after a later journey, “This people are astonished at the sound of our trumpets and drums, stupefied by the thunder of our cannon, speechless at the prancing, running, and trappings of our horses; perplexed at the sight of everything belonging to us. They stand in open-mouthed astonishment. They think our people have come from heaven” (29 December 1494, letter in Thacher, 70).

The Later Voyages

The Treaty of Tordesillas

Where is it written that the world is already divided up?

~ King of France, 1494, Quoted in Hans Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise*, 67

Pope Alexander VI expressed himself (using the royal “we”) in no uncertain terms:

We have indeed learned that you, who for a long time had intended to seek out and discover certain islands and main lands remote and unknown and not hitherto discovered by others, to the end that you might bring to the worship of our Redeemer and the profession of the Catholic faith their residents and inhabitants...chose our beloved son, Christopher Columbus,...whom you furnished with ships and men equipped for like designs, not without the greatest hardships, dangers, and expenses, to make diligent quest for these remote and unknown main lands and islands through the sea, where hitherto no one had sailed;...and they at length,...discovered certain very remote islands and even main lands that hitherto had not been discovered by others.

Wherefore, as becomes Catholic kings and princes, after earnest consideration of all matters, especially of the rise and spread of the Catholic faith, as was the fashion of your ancestors, kings of renowned memory, you have purposed with the favor of divine clemency to bring under your sway the said main lands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith...

And, in order that you may enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with the benefit of our apostolic favor, we...by the authority of Almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter and of the vicar ship of Jesus Christ.... do by tenor of these presents...give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever,...all islands and main lands found and to be found, discovered and be discovered towards the west and south, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic pole...to the Antarctic pole... to be distant one hundred leagues towards the west and south from any of the islands... commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde.

You should appoint to the aforesaid main lands and islands worthy, God-fearing, learned, skilled, and experienced men, in order to instruct the aforesaid inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals. Furthermore, under penalty of excommunication... we strictly forbid all persons of whatsoever rank... to dare, without your special permit... to go for the purpose of trade or any other reason to [these] islands or mainlands.

~ Francis Gardner Davenport, ed., *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies to 1648*, 76-78

The Church



1502 map depicting the meridian designated by the Treaty of Tordesillas

Columbus stopped first in Portugal, where he heard from John II, the king who had refused to sponsor the expedition, that, based on the terms of a treaty signed between Portugal and Castile in 1479, all the lands visited during the journey would henceforth be Portuguese territory. However, according to the medieval church under the traditions of feudalism, any newly discovered land belonged to the pope and could be given away only by him and only the heads of state who promised to lead the inhabitants to the “true faith.”

Although at this time it was unclear what place Columbus had visited, since he and many others assumed he had reached the outskirts of Asia, evidently no one worried about what the

Emperor of Japan or the ruler of China might think of Pope Alexander VI dividing up the world between Spain and Portugal. For that's what he did. He granted Ferdinand and Isabella, the "Catholic Sovereigns," all they had already conquered and everything they might discover on the westward journey to the Orient.

King John wasn't happy with this decision, naturally. In 1494 he persuaded the Catholic monarchs to meet with him in the town of Tordesillas where they signed the treaty of that name. An imaginary line now cut vertically through the ocean fourteen hundred miles west of the Cape Verde Islands. Everything west of that line belonged to Spain, everything east to Portugal. Based on the Treaty of Tordesillas, Portugal later claimed Brazil, and for years any foreign sailors apprehended in Spanish waters were punished by garroting (strangling to death with a rope and stick).

The Second Voyage



Columbus's ships

The positive reception of the travelers led to a second voyage, this time grandly outfitted with seventeen ships and between twelve and fifteen hundred colonists, including five religious specifically charged with converting the natives, a large band of soldiers, and many adventurers, financed at least partly with funds confiscated from Spanish Jews. Underlying the voyage was the

general assumption that surely this time Columbus would reach the Asian islands Marco Polo had described.

On the second voyage, "the pretense was ended, the idyll over. The Indians, who had been praised for their generosity and innocence, were now called savages. The talk was of slavery and gold, rather than brotherhood and conversion. The new relationship between the races was established" (Koning, 69-70).

As the fleet traveled through the islands, the Spanish took captives whenever they could. This time the villages were largely deserted. The Spanish colonizers in La Navidad had set the tone for centuries to come by roaming the islands in gangs, demanding gold and terrorizing the natives, until the gentle, timid Tainos rose against them and killed them in pitched battle, in spite of attempts by the *cacique* Guacanagari to prevent his revenge.

Late April, 1494: Isabella



The tone for the second voyage was set early on. At first Columbus continued his practice of bartering for the largesse his men received from the natives:

As he sail'd close along the Shoar, great Numbers of People came aboard in their Canoes from the Island, thinking the Spaniards to be Men come down from Heaven, bringing them Bread, Water, and Fish, and giving it all freely, without asking for any Return; but the Admiral, to send them away pleas'd, commanded they should be paid, giving them Beads, Bells, and such kind of Baubles.

But soon the voyagers took a more bellicose stand:

The next Day he ran along the Coast to seek out Harbours, and the Boats going to find the Mouths of them, there came out so many Canoes with arm'd Men, to defend the Country, that they were forc'd to return to their Ships, not so much for Fear, as to avoid giving an Occasion of Enmity to those People. But afterwards considering, that if they shew'd the least Signs of Fear, the Indians would grow insolent upon it, they return'd together to the Port, which the Admiral call'd Puerte Bueno, or the Good Harbour. And because the Indians came to drive them off, those in the boats saluted them with such a flight of Arrows from their Cross-bows, that six or seven of them being wounded they were glad to retire.

~ *The American Traveller*, 194-195

Colonization

Another colony, Isabella, was founded in central Hispaniola (today the Dominican Republic and Haiti). The colonists suffered from the tropical heat, the changed diet, the hard work of building a town, and the contrast between the harsh reality they faced and the idyllic descriptions that had lured them. They wanted to return to Spain in spite of Columbus's assurances that gold was plentiful in the interior, where he spent six months searching for it. Columbus himself contracted a devastating illness, quite possibly a mental collapse, with a high fever and crippling arthritis that plagued him the rest of his life.

As more forts were established, governing them became more and more of a problem, since the Spanish soldiers "went their own cruel way, robbing the Indians of their gold ornaments, raping

the women, kidnapping boys and girls to serve as slaves, and gobbling up the scarce supplies of food” (Meltzer, 140).

The only way the newcomers could relate to the hospitable tribes Columbus knew from his first voyage was to terrorize them in order to crush the resistance that grew as a result of their own actions—a vicious cycle. The Spanish had horses and dogs, crossbows and arquebuses (portable guns); the Indians carried on a guerilla war, ambushing soldiers, burning their food supplies, raiding their camps at night.

However, after a year the last remnant of resistance was crushed and the total enslavement of the Indians was inevitable.

Murder

It has been said of the Spanish Conquistadors that first they fell on their knees, and then they fell on the aborigines.

~ Eric Williams, from *Columbus to Castro*, 30

As a Spanish longboat returned to the fleet, they observed a Carib canoe paddling around a point on the coastline. It stopped abruptly when those aboard caught sight of the vast Spanish fleet anchored in the harbor.

For a long hour the four men, two women, and a boy aboard the canoe stayed motionless on the water, staring in wonder at the huge ships and the white men gazing at them from the decks. The shore party meanwhile maneuvered their boat as to cut off the Caribs’ escape.

Seeing that flight was impossible, the Indians shot arrows at the Spaniards, wounding one and killing another. But they were soon overpowered and taken to the fleet.

One of the men, whose belly was sliced by a Spaniard’s sword, was tossed overboard. He did not sink, but clutching his guts with one hand, swam with the other toward shore. The Spaniards chased after him, pulled him aboard, tied his hands and feet, and threw him back into the sea. The Indian managed to free himself, and again swam off. Then the gallant whites, frustrated in their repeated attempts at murder, shot the Indian through and through with arrows until he died.

~ Milton Meltzer, *Columbus and the World around Him*, 125-127

...and Rape

No European women traveled to the “new world” until several years later; obviously the men had implicit permission to use the island women as they wished.

While the great courage of the Indians did not win mercy, it deeply impressed the militaristic Spaniards. They soon found the Carib women were just as brave. Cuneo [a nobleman and one of the few reporters of the second voyage] tells how he tried to rape one he had made his slave. She fought back so violently he had to whip her with a rope before he could subdue her. That evening, he joined all the other Spaniards in singing a hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

~ Milton Meltzer, *Columbus and the World around Him*, 127

The Tribute System

Spanish acts of cruelty against Native Americans.

Columbus had another major problem: he still hadn't found a good source of gold. Now governor of Hispaniola, he instituted the tribute system, “a simple and brutal way of fulfilling the Spanish lust for gold while acknowledging the Spanish distaste for labor” (Sale, 155).

Every man and woman, boy and girl of fourteen or older was forced to collect gold for the Spaniards. They had to fill a hawk's bell with gold dust and bring it to the fort every three months. (Hawk's bells were the same trinkets the Indians had received from the explorers with such happiness during the first voyage.) The “chiefs” had to produce about ten times as much. In areas with no gold, the requirement was twenty-five pounds of spun cotton.

When the Indians brought their tribute in they were given a copper token to wear around the neck. The punishment for not paying tribute was the cutting off the hands of the offender. A famous engraving from a 1619 book called *Spanish Cruelties* shows Indians stumbling away from the chopping block, looking with surprise at the stumps of their arms pulsing out blood.

Since no gold fields existed, the Indians' only hope was to work all day in the streams, washing gold dust from the pebbles. Meeting the quotas of both gold and cotton was an impossible task. Indians who tried to flee into the mountains were hunted down with dogs and killed as an example. Desperate, the Tainos began killing themselves with cassava poison. In two years, one half the entire population of Hispaniola were killed or killed themselves.

When it became obvious that no gold was left, the Spaniards instituted another system known as the *encomienda*, based on models familiar to the Europeans from their own experience of feudalism. The governor could give (“commend”) Indians to the colonists (*encomenderos*) to use

as they chose, for tribute or forced labor; the masters would in return provide their servants with instruction on becoming good Christians.

February, 1495: First Massive Slave Raid

Time was short for sending back a good “dividend” on the supply ships getting ready for the return to Spain. Columbus therefore turned to a massive slave raid as a means for filling up these ships. The brothers rounded up fifteen hundred Arawaks—men, women, and children—and imprisoned them in pens in Isabella, guarded by men and dogs.

The ships had rooms for no more than five hundred, and thus only the best specimens were loaded aboard. The Admiral then told the Spaniard they could help themselves from the remainder to as many slaves as they wanted. Those whom no one chose were simply kicked out of the pens. Such had been the terror of these prisoners that (in the description by Michele de Cuneo, one of the colonists) “they rushed in all directions like lunatics, women dropping and abandoning infants in the rush, running for miles without stopping, fleeing across mountains and rivers.”

Of the five hundred slaves, three hundred arrived alive in Spain, where they were put up for sale in Seville by Don Juan de Fonseca, the archdeacon of the tow. “As naked as the day they were born,” the report of this excellent churchman says, “but with no more embarrassment than animals.”

The slave trade immediately turned out to be “unprofitable, for the slaves mostly died.”

~ Hans Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise*, 82

Stories of Cannibals

In the tradition of the Wild Man and Savage Beast tales, legends circulated in Europe about man-eating islanders, and Columbus assumed that the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands, the Caribs, were the fierce, warlike, cannibals of whom he had heard. However, he never met or saw any Caribs on his first voyage; on the second voyage his assumptions led him to convey the notion that the islands he visited were populated by Caribs. Yet on Guadeloupe, the only Carib island his fleet stopped at, the natives “as soon as they saw us, instantly ran to the mountains,” according to Cuneo, one of the reporters.

The idea of fierce and hostile Caribs, in short, was never more than a bogey, born of Colon's own paranoia or stubborn ferocity and spread to his comrades, to the chroniclers of Europe, and to history. Certain sixteenth-century sailors did come to grief when landing on those islands—given the fierce reputation of the white man by then, it is not surprising that the Caribs were less than hospitable—but the historical record for that century actually emphasizes the friendliness of the islanders and the passivity of their behavior.

*And their rapacious cannibalism? That, similarly, from all the real evidence we have, seems to be a myth... That is all there is... Las Casas, who had considerable experience in the islands over several decades, said flatly that the Caribs were not cannibals, and a nineteenth-century scholar, William Sheldon, reviewing all the literature, said that he could find no believable evidence of cannibalism... The anthropologist W. Arens, in his wide-ranging *The Man-Eating Myth*, says that he was "unable to uncover adequate documentation of cannibalism as a custom in any form for any society" and adds that "there is little reason to assume that the very aborigines whose name now means man-eaters actually were so."*



"They burned him to ashes at the stake."

Supposed cannibalism among Native Americans as depicted by deBry in *Great Voyages*
~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 129-133

Colonists' Complaints

Columbus's role in the second voyage came to an ignoble end. Reports to Ferdinand and Isabella pictured him as an inept administrator. The colonists complained bitterly that he had led them astray with his tales of instant riches. They were unhappy and sick, unable to become self-sufficient and constantly clamoring for fresh supplies from Spain.

A new disease had appeared, and although historians differ on its origin, many agree that syphilis was first transmitted to Europe by colonists returning from the Indies, who contacted it through sexual intercourse with native women. Evidently among the Indians of the Caribbean it was a widespread, nonfatal condition with almost no symptoms. It flared up in a new and deadly form in Europe, as "they just price the Spaniards paid for their ravaging of Indian women" (Koning, 88).

Because of their history as warriors, the colonists were arrogant and brutal toward the Indians and each other. As Spanish gentlemen, they were unaccustomed to hard work and indeed felt only contempt for those who worked with their hands. "They would rather rot than do anything for themselves... In a land where it was easy to grow food, easy to catch fish or fowl, they acted as though Hispaniola were some godforsaken desert" (Meltzer, 145).

...and Amazons

Another persistent story was about the Amazons:

He made for the island Guadalupe, where sending his Boats, well-man'd, ashore, before they reach'd Land, abundance of Women came out of the Woods with Bows and Arrows, as if they would defend their island.

[The wife of a Cacique] told the Admiral that this Island was only inhabited by Women, and that those who endeavour'd to hinder his Men from Landing were all Women, except about four Men, who were there accidentally from another Island; for at a certain Time in the Year, they come to hunt, and accompany with them.

The same Customs, she assur'd him, were also observ'd by the Women of another Island, called d'Matrimonio, of whom she gave much the same Account as we read of the ancient Amazons; all which the admiral made no Difficulty to credit, because of the surprizing Strength and Courage of these Women, which he himself had been a Witness to.

It is likewise observable, that these Women seemed to be endu'd with clearer Understandings than those of the other Islands; for in them they only knew to reckon the Day by the Sun, and the Night by the Moon; whereas these Women could reckon by other Stars, it being a common Expression amongst them, when the North Star rises, or such a Star is North, then it is Time to do such or such a Thing.

~ *American Traveler*, 118-220

The Third Voyage

The King and Queen finally had to pay attention to all the complaints against Columbus by the angry men under his command, and they called him back to Spain.

There he lived in the house of a priest and dressed as a friar, evidently to show humility. He continued to petition for another voyage. With financing partly from the sale of enslaved Indians, Columbus made a third trip in May 1498.

His reports back began to show the effects of his long illness on his mind: he claimed in all seriousness to have found the Garden of Eden and concluded that the earth is not round but pear-shaped, with Paradise at its tip.

He stayed in Hispaniola for two years, governing with his brothers and continuing to bring about the destruction of the island's civilization. The Arawaks were dying out, the colonists waged constant war on each other and all the Indians, and finally the monarchs sent a commissioner, Francisco de Bobadilla, to investigate. What he found led him to arrest Columbus and his two brothers and deport them for trial in Spain. During the arrest, Columbus was manacled. Although later the captain of the ship offered to remove the chains, Columbus insisted on wearing them during the entire trip, until he met with his sovereigns to receive their words of criticism.

The Tragedy of the Natives

The growing hostility between the colonizers and the natives led to tragic misunderstandings and horrible consequences for the natives. During the third voyage, trouble with the Indians accelerated into open warfare. Columbus captured thirty of them in an ambush and confined them to a lower deck on one of the ships.

But even as he prepared to sail, the Indians chose suicide rather than captivity. During the night they all hanged themselves from beams in the low hold of the ship, bending their knees while they strangled. Much later, writing of it, the admiral's son Ferdinand disposed of the tragedy by saying, "Their deaths were not great harm to the ships...."

~ Milton Meltzer, *Columbus and the World around Him*, 166

Eduardo Galeano sums up the total lack of communication:

Bartolomé Columbus, Christopher's brother and lieutenant, attends an incineration of human flesh.

Six men play the leads in the grand opening of Haiti's incinerator. The smoke makes everyone cough. The six are burning as a punishment and as a lesson: They have buried the images of Christ and the Virgin that Fray Ramon Pane left with them for protection and consolation. Fray Ramon taught them to pray on their knees, to say the Ave Maria and Paternoster and to invoke the name of Jesus in the face of temptation, injury, and death.

No one has asked them why they buried the images. They were hoping that the new gods would fertilize their fields of corn, cassava, boniato, and beans.

The fire adds warmth to the humid, sticky heat that foreshadows heavy rain.

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 51

Naming of America

By this time other explorers from other countries were filling in more of the details of the newly discovered continent, and recognizing it as such. Amerigo Vespucci sailed with one of Columbus's former lieutenants and wrote brilliant accounts of his voyages. In his honor mapmakers called the new landmass in the Western Hemisphere "America."

The Last Voyage

Ferdinand and Isabella replaced Columbus as governor of the Indies with Nicolas de Ovando. His first action on his arrival in Hispaniola was to massacre the welcoming party of eighty-five chiefs headed by a woman, cacique, Anacoana, and everyone else they could catch. Hispaniola quickly became a center for the expeditions launched by the Spanish to commit similar atrocities against the people of Cuba.

But Columbus was still determined to find a passage to the Indies. Again he convinced the monarchs to fund him, on condition that he stay away from Hispaniola in search for gold and silver, pearls and spices, but not take slaves. By 1502 he was too old and sick to command the small fleet of four caravels, but he went along, with his brother Bartolomé and his young son Ferdinand, who much later wrote an account of this extremely difficult voyage.

A fourth of the crew, the majority twelve-or-thirteen-year-old boys, never returned home. Attempts to colonize again failed. In the end the men mutinied, almost murdering Columbus before they were subdued by Bartolomé.

Columbus returned to Spain a broken old man wracked by illness. Queen Isabella died shortly after his return, and Ferdinand asked the archbishop of Seville to deal with Columbus's appeals for the income and property and titles he had been promised before his first voyage. His demand to be restored as governor of the Indies was refused, in the interests of the state, but he continued to receive the revenues due him. Contrary to the myths that he died penniless, he ended his life a rich but very unhappy man.

The Legend



Columbus on his death bed

For many years no one paid much attention to Columbus. The publication in 1571 of Ferdinand's biography of his father caused some stir, but it wasn't until later, in the 1600s, that the legend of Columbus gained a place in European consciousness. The first centennial commemoration was celebrated in Europe and America three hundred years after the first voyage in 1792.

Later Assessments

The depths of the differences in worldview among the many cultures involved continued to be plumbed in succeeding centuries, as European immigration followed the initial voyages of Columbus. Only very gradually did Columbus become a hero and his voyages something to remember on a special day. On October 23, 1792, on the occasion of one of the first celebrations in America honoring Columbus, Jeremy Belknap delivered an address at the request of the Historical Society in Massachusetts. Three centuries after the event, Belknap raised significant questions about its meaning for human kind. His speech began with recognition that European travels to the Western Hemisphere had many positive consequences:

The discovery of America has opened an important page in the history of man. We find our brethren of the human race, scattered over all parts of this continent, and the adjacent islands. We see mankind in their several varieties of color, form and habit, and we learn to consider ourselves as one great family, sent into the world to make various experiments for happiness.

Belknap recognized that the oppressed of Europe have always found safety and relief in North America, and the idea of individual freedom from tyranny has been expanded into a clear vindication of the rights **which are the gift of god to man.**

However, Belknap pointed out, two major flaws undercut the new society that formed in the "new world." The first was slavery:

Our astonishment is excited, by considering that the discovery of America has opened a large mart for the commerce in slaves from the opposite continent of Africa. So much has been written and spoken on the iniquity attending this detestable species of traffic, that I need not attempt again to excite the feelings of indignation and horror, which I doubt not have pervaded the breast of every person now present, when contemplating this flagrant insult on the laws of justice and humanity.

I shall only observe, that the first introduction of the negro slave into America, was occasioned by the previous destruction of the native inhabitants of the West India islands, by the cruelty of their Spanish conquerors, in exacting of them more labor than they were able to perform....The commerce of slaves from Africa has proved destructive to human life and happiness, in the same proportions that it has encouraged avarice, luxury, pride and cruelty.

Belknap, clearly a man ahead of his time, was hopeful that slavery would be abolished soon: *But do I not see the dawn of that auspicious day which shall put a stop to this infamous traffic, and shall teach mankind that Africans have a native right to liberty and property as well as Europeans and Americans? May these rights ever be respected, and never more be infringed, especially by those who have successfully contended for the establishment of their own.* Another flaw Belknap recognized resulted from the savagery of Christians who insisted on conversion of all the inhabitants of the lands they conquered. Using Peru as his model, he questioned the need to force obedience from a people whose code of laws *was a work of reason and benevolence, and bore a great resemblance to the divine precepts given by Moses and confirmed by Jesus Christ.*

But when we find that these mild and peaceful people were invaded by avaricious Spaniards, under a pretence of converting them to the catholic faith; when instead of the meek and humble language of a primitive evangelist, we see a bigoted Friar gravely advancing at the head of a Spanish army, and, in a language unknown to the Peruvians, declaring that their country was given to his nation, by the Pope of Rome, God's only vicar on earth, and commanding them to receive their new masters on pain of death; when we consider this parade of arrogant hypocrisy as the signal for slaughter, and see the innocent victims falling by the sword of these ministers of destruction; when we see the whole nation vanquished, disheartened, and either murdered or reduced to slavery, by their savage conquerors; when instead of the worship which they addressed to the luminary of heaven, and which needed but one step more to conduct them to the knowledge of its invisible Creator, we see the pomp of Popish idolatry, with the infernal horrors of the Inquisition introduced into their country; our astonishment is excited to the highest degrees...

If we survey the whole continent, from the first discovery of America, to the present time, the number of converts to Christianity, among the Indians, bears but a small proportion to those, who have been destroyed wither by war, by slavery or by spirituous liquors.

Belknap suggested that looking inward was in order:

If the truths of our holy religion are to be propagated among the savages, it will become us to consider, whether we had not better first agree among ourselves, what these truths are....It is also worthy of consideration, whether the vicious lives and conduct of our people, and especially those on the frontiers, with whom the Indians are most acquainted, be not a great obstruction to the spreading of divine knowledge among them. It is very natural to estimate the goodness of any religion, by the influence which it appears to have on those who profess it; and, if they are to regard the conduct of the people by whom they have been cheated, robbed, and murdered, as a specimen of the influence of Christianity on the human mind, it would be a greater wonder that they should embrace it than reject it.

~ Jeremy Belknap, *A Discourse Intended to Commemorate the Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus*, 36, 46-52

These cautionary words would be echoed through the years by many other observers. The saga of conquest continued, in the destruction of the Aztec civilization, in the tremendous increase in the practice of slavery, and in the continued colonization of the Western Hemisphere by the rising nation-states of Europe.

A Faithful Chronicler

Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, an early admirer of Columbus who translated his logs into Spanish, spent more than forty years in the American colonies. He came as a colonist and was himself an *encomendero*, but as a cleric and faithful Christian he was outraged at the atrocities he saw being committed in the name of God.

In addition to his many other writings, through the years he produced *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* in an attempt to persuade the monarchs in Spain to exert some control over their colonizers. King Ferdinand V was sufficiently moved by Las Casas's testimony to initiate an investigation; his heir Charles V eventually ruled that the procedure of the conquistadors had been illegal and a council should work out a plan by which the colonies could be governed without the force of weapons. However, little changed in actual practice!

Las Casas spent his long life (he died at ninety-two) fighting for the cause of the Indians. One unfortunate conclusion he came to had enormous consequences: he suggested that Africans would make much better slaves than the delicate Indians. Late in life he deeply regretted that suggestion, saying that the right of the blacks is the same as that of the Indians and that the slave trade of Portuguese in Africa was a crime.

The Devastation of the Indies

One can open any page of the writings of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and find descriptions of horrible atrocities. The following is only a sample.

This large island [Hispaniola] was perhaps the most densely populated place in the world. There must be close to two hundred leagues of land on this island, and the seacoast has been explored for more than ten thousand leagues, and each day more of it is being explored. And all the land so far discovered is a beehive of people; it is as though God has crowded into these lands the great majority of mankind.

And of all the infinite universe of humanity, these people are the most guileless, the most devoid of wickedness and duplicity, the most obedient and faithful to their native masters and to the Spanish Christians whom they serve. They are by nature the most humble, patient, and peaceable, holding no grudges, free from embroilments, neither excitable nor quarrelsome. These people are the most devoid of rancors, hatreds, or desire for vengeance of any people in the world. And because they are so weak and complaisant, they are less able to endure heavy labor and soon die of no matter what malady. The sons of nobles among us, brought up in the enjoyments of life's refinements, are no more delicate than are these Indians, even those among them who are of the lowest rank of laborers. 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. Their repasts are such that the food of the holy fathers in the desert can scarcely be more parsimonious, scanty, and poor...

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. And Spaniards have behaved in no other way during the past forty years, down to the present time, for they are still acting like ravening beasts, killing, terrorizing, afflicting, torturing, and destroying the native peoples, doing all this with the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before, and to such a degree that this Island of Hispaniola once so populous (having a population that I estimated to be more than three million), has now a population of barely two hundred persons.

...[On the other islands and the mainland] we can estimate very surely and truthfully that in the forty years that have passed, with the infernal actions of the Christians, there have been unjustly slain more than twelve million men, women, and children. In truth, I believe without trying to deceive myself that the number of the slain is more like fifty million...

It should be kept in mind that their insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world, is the cost of their villainies. And also, those lands are so rich and felicitous, the native peoples so meek and patient, so easy to subject, that our Spaniards have no more consideration for them than the beasts. And I say this from my own knowledge of the acts I witnessed. But I

should not say "than beasts" for, things be to God, they have treated beasts with some respect; I should say instead like excrement on the public squares.

~ Bartolomé de las Casas. *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, translated by Herma Briffault, 37-41

The Spaniards did not content themselves with what the Indians gave them of their own free will, according to their ability which was always too little to satisfy enormous appetite, for a Christian eats and consumes in one day an amount of food that would suffice to feed three houses inhabited by ten Indians for one month. And they committed other acts of force and violence and depression which made the Indians realize that these men had not come from Heaven...

They took up arms, but their weapons were very weak and of little service in offense and still less in defense. (Because of this, the wars of the Indians against each other are little more than games played by children.) And the Christians, with their horses and swords and spears began to carry out massacres and strange cruelties against them. They attacked the towns and spared neither the children nor the aged nor pregnant women nor women in childbed, not only stabbing them and dismembering them but cutting them to pieces as if dealing with sheep in the slaughter house. They laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two or could cut off his head or spill out his entrails with a single stroke of the pike. They took infants from their mothers' breasts, snatching them by the legs and pitching them headfirst against the crags or snatch them by the arms and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter and saying as the babies fell into the water, "Boil there, you offspring of the devil!" Other infants they put to the sword along with their mothers and anyone else who happened to be nearby. They made some low wide gallows on which the hanged victim's feet almost touched the ground, stringing up their victims in lots of thirteen, in memory of Our Redeemer and His twelve Apostles, then set burning wood at their feet and thus burn them alive. To others they attached straw or wrapped their whole bodies in straw and set them afire. With still others, all those they wanted to capture alive, they cut off their hands and hung them round the victim's neck, saying "Go now, carry the message," meaning, Take the news to the Indians who have fled to the mountains... and because on few and far between occasions, the Indians justifiably killed some Christians, the Spaniards made a rule among themselves that for every Christian slain by the Indians, they would slay a hundred Indians.

~ Devastation, 43-45

Another thing must be added: from the beginning to the present time the Spaniards have taken no more care to have the Faith of Jesus Christ preached to those nations than they would have it preached to dogs or other beasts. Instead, they have prohibited the religious from carrying

out this intention, and have afflicted them and persecuted them in many ways, because such preaching would, they deemed, have hindered them from acquiring gold and other wealth they coveted. And today in all the he Indies there is no more knowledge of God, whether He be of wood or sky, or earth, and this after one hundred years int he New World...

~ Devastation, 139

The tyranny exercised by the Spaniards against the indians int he work of pearl fishing is one fo the most cruel that can be imagined. There is no life as infernal and desperate in this century that can be compared with it, although the mining of gold is a dangerous and burdensome way of life. The pearl fishers dive into the sea at a depth of five fathoms, and do this from sunrise to sunset, and remain for many minutes without breathing, tearing the oysters out of their rocky beds where the pearls are formed. They come to the surface with a netted bag of these oysters where a Spanish torturer is waiting in a canoe or skiff, and if the pearl diver shows signs of wanting to rest, he is showered with blows, his hair is pulled, and he is thrown back into the water, obliged to continue the hard work of tearing out the oysters and bringing them again to the surface...

At night the pearl divers are chained so they cannot escape. Often a pearl diver does not return to the surface, for these waters are infested with man-eating sharks of two kinds, both vicious marine animals that can kill, eat, and swallow a whole man...

And it is solely because of the Spaniards' greed for gold that they force the Indians to lead such a life, often a brief life, for it is impossible to continue for long diving into the cold water and holding the breath for minutes at a time, repeating this hour after hour, day after day; the continual cold penetrates them, constructs the chest, and they die spitting blood, or weakened by diarrhea.

~ Devastation, 109-111

Conquest of the Aztecs

In 1519 when the Spanish conquistadors, led by Hernando Cortes, reached the capital city of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan, they gaped in astonishment at its magnificent temples, palaces, and gardens. The Aztec state had reached a climax of development that matched the achievement of Spain, now the greatest power in Europe after the triumphant conclusion of the reconquest.

Aztec prophecies had long foretold the return of Quetzalcoatl and other gods from the sea, so the Aztecs at first assumed the strangers were their long-lost gods. The Spaniards considered

the Aztecs barbarians in spite of their vigorous political, religious, and socio-economic structures, wanted their gold, and tried to Christianize and subject them.

The Empire of Mexico, Sixteenth Century

We Spanish suffer from a strange disease of the heart for which the only known remedy is gold.
Hernando Cortes

~ William Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 3:217-218

Cortes left Cuba with 617 men, eighteen horses, and a small supply of armaments, on his way to subdue the most powerful state on the continents of America.

This was the empire of Mexico; rich, powerful, and inhabited by million of Indians, passionately fond of war, and then headed by Montezuma, whose fame in arms struck terror in the neighboring nations.

The empire of Mexico had existed for ages. Its inhabitants were not a rude and barbarous, but a polished and intelligent, people. Mexico, the capital of the empire, situated in the middle of a spacious lake, was the noblest monument of American industry. It communicated to the continent by immense causeways, which were carried through the lake. The city was admired for its buildings, all of stone, its squares, and market-places; the shops which glittered with gold and silver; and the sumptuous palaces of Montezuma, some erected on columns of jasper, and containing whatever was most rare, curious, and useful.

Cortes, in his march along the coast of Mexico, experienced by little opposition. The natives were terrified at the appearance of the warlike animals, on which the Spanish officers were mounted. The artificial thunder which issued from their hands, and the wooden castles which had wafted them over the ocean, struck a panic, from which they did not recover till their ruin was unavoidable. Wherever the Spaniards marched, they spared neither age nor sex, nothing sacred or profane.

~ John Britten, *Sheridan and Kotzebue*, 6-7

Survival of Stories

Although the conquistadors burned almost all Aztec writings and destroyed their centers of education, a few missionaries (including Bernadino de Sahagun and Diego de Duran) were able

to save some indigenous literature. They transcribed stories and songs memorized and retold by natives into the Latin alphabet so they could record texts in the original words. Because of their efforts, the story of the conquest from the point of view of the victims remains fairly intact.

Reports of the Messengers

*We only came to sleep
We only came to dream
It is not true, no, it is not true
That we came to live on the earth.*

*We are changed into the grass of springtime
Our hearts will group green again
And they will open their petals.
But our body is like a rose tree:
It puts forth flowers and then withers.*

~ Aztec hymn in William Brandon, *The Last Americans*, 109

Thanks to the efforts of dedicated priests, we now have direct reports from natives who survived the massacres and told their stories.

For a long time people had noticed omens and signs of the coming of strangers. King Montezuma sent emissaries to the spot where reports indicated something very unusual was happening. When the emissaries returned *they went directly to the king's palace and spoke to him with all due reverence and humility*, describing the light-skinned, bearded strangers who fished from a small boat and then climbed back into their two towers.

The king sent gifts to the person he presumed to be the god Quetzalcoatl, and the messengers dressed Cortes in all the finery: a mask with golden earrings, a vest decorated with feathers from the quetzal bird, a collar with a disk of gold in its center, a blue cloak known as "the ringing bell," a mirror with little bells. *In his hand they placed the shield with its fringe and pendant of quetzal feathers, its ornaments of gold and mother-of-pearl.* Finally they set before him black sandals of fine soft rubber and laid out many other objects of divine finery for him to see.

The Captain asked them: "And is this all? Is this your gift of welcome? Is this how you greet people?"....

Then the Captain gave orders, and the messengers were chained by the feet and by the neck. When this had been done, the great cannon was fired off. The messengers lost their senses and fainted away. They fell down side by side and lay where they had fallen.

Later they paddled furiously to get back to their city. Some of them even paddled with their hands, so fierce was the anxiety burning in their souls. They told the king about the cannon:

“A thing like a ball of stone comes out of its entrails: it comes out shooting sparks and raining fire....If the cannon is aimed against a mountain, the mountain splits and cracks open. If it is aimed against a tree, it shatters the tree into splinters...”

The messengers also said: ‘Their trappings and arms are all made of iron. They dress in iron and wear iron casques on their heads. Their swords are iron; their bows are iron; their shields are iron; their spears are iron. Their deer carry them on their backs wherever they wish to go. These deer, our lord, are as tall as the roof of a house.’

The strangers’ bodies are completely covered, so that only their faces can be seen. Their skin is white, as if it were made of lime. They have yellow hair, though some of them have black. Their beards are long and yellow. Their hair is curly, with very fine strands.

‘Their dogs are enormous, with flat ears and long, dangling tongues. The color of their eyes is a burning yellow; their eyes flash fire and shoot off sparks. Their bellies are hollow, their flanks long and narrow. They are tireless and very powerful. They bound here and there, panting, with their tongues hanging out. And they are spotted like an ocelot.’

When Montezuma heard this report, he was filled with terror. It was as if his heart had fainted, as if it had shriveled. It was as if he were conquered by despair.

~ Miguel Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 26, 30-31

Destruction



Spanish battle the Aztecs

As the Spaniards marched across land to the capital city, they attacked towns and villages mercilessly; other native groups joined them out of fear and also because of longstanding hostility toward the Aztecs, whose own patterns of conquest and enslavement had oppressed their neighbors for decades. The Aztec leader Montezuma heard all the reports of massacres and battles, debated how to receive the conquistadors, and decided a peaceful welcome would be best.

The Lady Malinche

In addition to horses and cannons, Cortes had another significant advantage: the former slave, highly valued as a translator, who became his mistress, the lady Malinche. A brilliant linguist, theoretician, and diplomat, Malinche paved the way for Cortes's troops with her speeches, which combined persuasion and threat and benefited from her understanding of the history and culture of the various nations of the region. She was so clever and valuable that "some historians are almost tempted to think of her as the real conqueror of Mexico" (Brandon, 100).

When the invaders reached Tenochtitlan, Montezuma had them quartered in the palace of his father, an immense house with many rooms and walls of sculptured stone. Several days of polite visits between the Aztec leader and the Spaniards followed, until the guests took the host

prisoner. Malinche spent a couple of hours convincing Montezuma it would be to his advantage to come along quietly, and from then on he was in the custody of the Spaniards, still administering the affairs of the kingdom and treated with respect, but giving them enormous quantities of gold and ordering his subjects to follow their bidding. For several months the natives, overawed by the Spaniards' ferocity and their amazing greed for gold, housed and fed their guests.

Massacre



Pedro de Alvarado

But in the spring, while Cortes was away battling with another conquistador, Panfillo de Narvaez, the Spaniards left behind under the direction of Pedro de Alvarado murdered celebrants at the fiesta of Toxcatl.

Outraged Aztec citizens immediately retaliated with javelins, arrows, and spears. The Spaniards took refuge in the palace, where they shackled Montezuma in chains. The Aztecs, who had been so generous with food and supplies under orders

from their king, now refused to feed the Spanish and waited for them to die of hunger.

Cortes returned with extra troops and the battle raged for four days. When Cortes forced Montezuma to try to calm his furious subjects, the grieving king said, "what more does Malinche want from me?" (Brandon, 107). In the attempt Montezuma was killed, by either the angry Aztecs or the desperate Spaniards. After losing three-fourths of their troops, the Spanish retreated; Cortes and Malinche escaped.

Massacre at the Fiesta of Taxcatl

At a moment in the fiesta, when the dance was loveliest and then song was linked to song, the Spaniards ran forward, armed as if for battle. They closed all the entrances and passageways, posted guards so no one could escape, and began to slaughter all the people.

They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor.

They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.

They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen, and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape.

Some attempted to force their way out, but the Spaniards murdered them at the gates. Others climbed the walls, but they could not save themselves. Those who ran into the communal houses were safe there for a while; so were those who lay down among the victims and pretended to be dead. But if they stood up again, the Spaniards saw them and killed them.

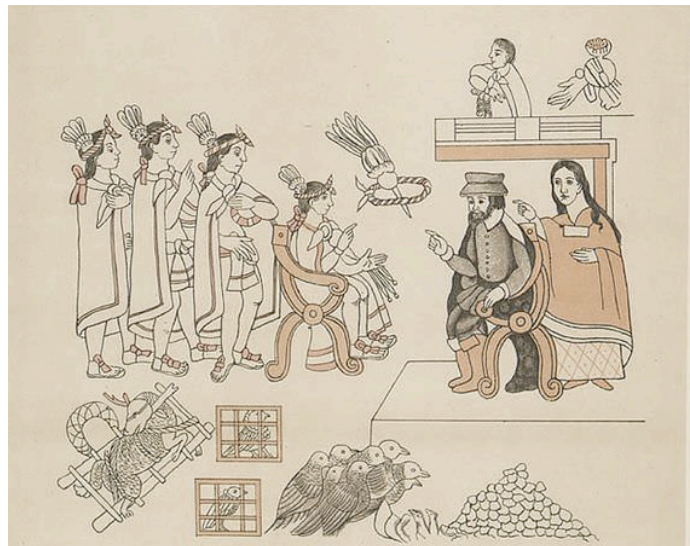
The blood of the warriors flowed like water and gathered into pools. The pools widened, and the stench of blood and entrails filled the air.

~ Miguel Leon-Portillo, *The Broken Spears*, 75-76

The Final Conquest

Meeting between Cortés and Montezuma as depicted in the *Codex Durán*

A period of relative normalcy followed. But disease, the second line of assault against natives, this time in the form of a smallpox epidemic, decimated the population. A second onslaught from the Spanish was not far behind. Long, devastating battles kept the capital under siege for eighty days. Finally the Spanish were successful in vanquishing the natives. It is estimated that almost half a million people lost their lives in the war:



240,000 Aztecs and 170,000 Spaniards, plus 30,000 members of other tribes who fought with the Spanish.

Slavery

African Civilization



Clotilde, shown in this mural, was a schooner which brought the last cargo of African slaves into the United States through Mobile in 1859

In the sixteenth century, Central Africa was a territory of peace and happy civilization. Traders traveled thousands of miles from one side of the continent to another without molestation. The tribal wars from which the European pirates claimed to deliver the people were mere sham fights; it was a great battle when half a dozen men were killed. It was on a peasantry in many respects superior to the serfs in large areas of Europe that the slave trade fell.

Tribal life was broken up and millions of detribalized Africans were let loose upon each other....Violence and ferocity became the necessities for survival. The stockades of grinning skulls, the human sacrifices, the selling of their own children as slaves, these horrors were the product of an intolerable pressure on the African people, which became fiercer through the centuries as the demands of industry increased and the methods of coercion were perfected....

~ C.L.R. James, *Amistad I*, 120-121

Song of the Bornu Slaves

*Where are we going?
Where are we going?
Where are we going, Rubee?**
*Hear us, save us,
make us free.
Send our Arka**
Down from thee!
Here the Ghiblee Wind is blowing,
strange and large the world is growing!
Tell us, Rubee,
where are we going?
Where are we going, Rubee?*

*Bornu! Bornu!
Where is Bornu!
Where are we going, Rubee?
Bornu-land was rich and good,
wells of water, fields of food;
Bornu-land we see no longer.*

*Here we thirst, and here we hunger,
Here the Moor man smites in anger;
where are we going, Rubee?*

** gold*

*** freedom papers*

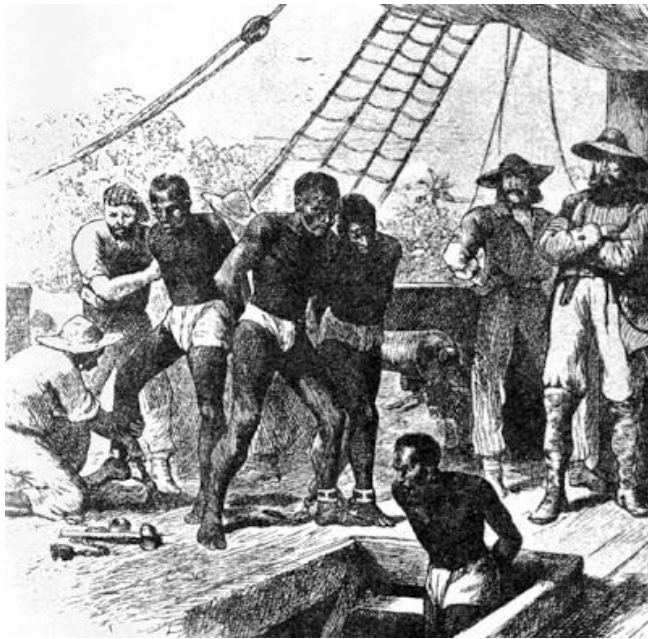
African Slaves

A revival of the ancient institution of slavery occurred in the twelfth century to facilitate the production of sugar. Europeans needed to find a Christian source of sugar so they wouldn't have to depend on Moslem North Africa or the Middle East. Venetians, Catalonians, Genoese, and others established sugar plantations in Cyprus, and a brisk slave trade developed to provide workers.

At first, the slaves were Moslems and Christians taken as prisoners in raids from the Black Sea area. By the early fourteenth century the Mediterranean trade expanded to include captives from sub-Saharan Africa brought to the plantations by professional slave traders.

As plantations spread to Crete, Sicily, and Spanish cities, the international slave trade grew. A gift of ten Africans from the coast of Guinea to Henry the Navigator of Portugal led to more importation of blacks. At first they were used as house servants, but along with the creation of more plantations in Portuguese territories came a greater reliance on African slaves as field workers.

The Middle Passage



Artist rendition of a slave ship.

Crew and captives alike were reduced to a brutish state during the crossing, all exposed to disease and death. The total disregard for human life is described in a report to the British House of Commons:

The Negroes were chained to each other hand and foot, and stowed so close that they were not allowed above a foot and a half for each in breadth. Thus rammed...like herring in a barrel, they contracted...fatal disorders; so that they who came to inspect them in the morning had...to pick up dead slaves out of their rows, and to unchain...[them] from the bodies of their wretched fellow-suffers....

~ Quoted in Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *Out of Africa*, 43

New Possibilities

Sugar plantation

Voyages to the West opened up many possibilities, among them the transportation of slaves as a source of labor. A small number of black slaves was brought to the newly discovered continent for the first time in 1502. Slavery continued to be interconnected with sugar production. Hispaniola first exported sugar in 1522; by the mid-1550s



sugar plantations were thriving in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Mexico. Brazil became a major producer of sugar in the late 1500s.

England entered the slave trade in the 1560s. The first black slaves in Virginia in 1619 came by accident, brought by a Dutch captain who had captured them from a Spanish ship.

Three different models were evident early on in the “new world”: in the highlands of Mexico and Peru, a few Spanish controlled the predominantly Indian population; in North America, a large number of whites held all the power, and the relatively few Indians and blacks had none; in the South Atlantic (Caribbean) area, the white planter elite dominated a primarily black population which included a small number of Indians.

Life on the Republic

A character in Charles Johnson’s novel, *Middle Passage*, recounts a scene on the Republic, a ship out of New Orleans that regularly transported slaves from the West Coast of Africa. Although fictionalized, the story of the slaves’ degradation is based on similar tales told by survivors. The captain of the Republic, Ebenezer Falcon, fancied seeing the slaves dance to music played by the ship’s mate, Tommy Meadows, a crewman, and Ngonyama, one of the slaves, were in charge of bringing the slaves up from the hold of the ship to see the light of day and fill their lungs with sea air.

Twenty blacks were brought from below to dance them a bit to music from Tommy’s flute and let them breathe. They climbed topside and stood crushed together; blinded by the sun, for that morning the weather was fair, yet hushed. Meadows and Ngonyama searched the fusty spaces between decks for Africans unable to come up on their own.

There were always a few of these since Ebenezer Falcon rearranged their position after the storm. He was, as they say, a “tight-packer,” having learned ten years ago from a one-handed French slaver named Captain Ledoux that if you arranged the Africans in two parallel rows, their backs against the lining of the ship’s belly, this left a free space at their rusty feet, and that, given the flexibility of bone and skin, could be squeezed with even more slaves if you made them squat at ninety-degree angles to one another. Flesh could conform to anything.

So when they came half-dead from the depths, these eyeless contortionists emerging from a shadowy Platonic cave, they were still and sore and stank of their own vomit and feces....Meadows snapped his head away, his nose wrinkled, and he splashed buckets of salt water on them, then told Tommy to play....

Snapping together his three-piece flute and touching it to lips shaped in that strangely mad, distant smile unreadable as a mask, he let his chest fall, forcing wind into wood that transformed his exhalations into a rill of sound-colors all on board found chilling—less

music....than the boy's air alchemized into emotion, or the song of hundred-year-old trees from which the narrow flute was torn.

One side of Falcon's face tightened. "Me thinks that's too damned melancholy. Even niggers can't dance to that. A lighter tune, if you will, Tommy." The cabin boy obeyed, striking up a tune of lighter tempo. Falcon, pleased, tapped his foot, stopping only to stare as Ngonyama and Meadows carried an African's corpse from below.

As with previous cases like these, Falcon ordered his ears sliced off and preserved below in oil to prove to the ship's investors that he had in fact purchased in Bangalang as many slaves as promised. This amputation proved tough going for Meadows, for the last stages of rigor mortis froze the boy hunched forward in a grotesque hunker, like Lot's wife. Hence, after shearing off his ears, they toted him to the rail as you might a chair on the ship's figurehead, then found him too heavy to heave over.

~ Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*, 120-121

Abolitionist Song

*Where are we going?
Where are we going?
Hear us, save us, Rubees!
Moons of marches from our eyes,
Bornu-land behind us lies;
Hot the desert wind is blowing,
Wild the waves of sand are flowing!
Hear us, tell us,
Where are we going?
Where are we going, Rubees?*

~ Song recorded by abolitionists and published by John Greenleaf Whittier in Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *Out of Africa*, 42

Black Labor



Women working in the cotton fields

By 1650, there were more blacks than Europeans in the Americas. Africans were superior to any other national group in their ability to resist disease because they'd been exposed to the greatest variety of human illnesses. All of Europe agreed that without black slave labor America would face absolute ruin. A decree of King Louis XIV of France from 1670 reads, "There is nothing which contributes more to the development of the colonies and the cultivation of their soil than the laborious toil of the Negroes" (Williams, 136).

Catastrophe for Africa

The consequences of the slave trade were catastrophic for Africa. The developing social, economic, and political systems, as well as such by-products as craftsmanship, weaving, metalwork, and agriculture, took second place to a trade which led to the domination of a slave system in most of the states. For nearly two centuries European interests in West Africa were limited to building forts where traders could pick up slaves, captured in the interior through raids or tribal wars by local potentates looking for wealth and power.

Scholars estimate that over four centuries between eleven and fifteen million men, women, and children were deported and survived the horrors of the "middle passage" to reach America. Many more than that figure died during the wars of captivity and the crossing, when three out of every ten perished.

The figures for the West Indies alone are striking: of every one hundred captives who left the African coast, eight-four reached the West Indies; one-third of these died in three years. Therefore, for every fifty-six slaves on the plantations at the end of three years, forty-four had perished (Williams, 147).

Daily Lives of Slaves



Slaves waiting to be sold

The slave was a slave for life, and any children were destined to slavery. It was the very empire of death, a slow death, even if the life-span of the slave, virtually throughout the Americas, was estimated at seven years. Work under the supervision of a taskmaster was from sunrise to sunset and was enforced by the discipline of the whip....

Tortures reserved for rebellious or lazy slaves were not evidence of the particular cruelty of some masters, but simply part of the structure of the daily practice of slavery. To apply a red-hot iron to the tender parts of the slave, to tie him to a stake so that insects gnawed him to death, to burn him alive, to chain him, to set dogs or snakes at his heels, to rape negresss, served above all to express absolute domination.

~ Laennec Hurbon, "The Slave Trade and Black Slavery in America," *Concilium*, 111

A Boon for Capitalism



Confederate bill

In spite of the depreciation from death among the cargo, the slave trade realized enormous profits and was central to the growth of capitalism. It "kept the wheels of metropolitan industry turning;

it stimulated navigation and shipbuilding and employed seamen; it raised fishing villages into flourishing cities; it gave sustenance to new industries based on the processing of colonial raw materials; it yielded large profits which were plowed back into metropolitan industry; and finally, it gave rise to an unprecedented commerce..." (Williams, 148).

Later Contacts and Devastation

1637: Massachusetts Bay

The phrase "God is an Englishman" sums up the prevailing attitude of the churchmen who left England and formed the early colonies on the eastern coast of the 'new world.'

John Winthrop, founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was clear about the reason the English could take over the Indians' lands: that which is common to all belongs to none. This "savage" people pretended to rule over many lands without title or property.

The Puritans came to build the new Jerusalem. They fled from the king and his bishops, leaving behind taxes and wars, hunger and diseases, and threats of change in the old order. Winthrop, who was a Cambridge lawyer born into a noble family, operated out of the assumption that God Almighty, in his most holy and wise providence, had determined that some members of mankind must be rich, some poor, some powerful and some powerless.

In commenting on the devastation of Indian communities by smallpox, Winthrop came up with another assumption about God's will: Smallpox was sent by God as a method of clearing the land and obliging English colonists to occupy it.

~ See Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 220-221

In the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, contacts between Europeans and North American Indians were of two types. Expeditions of explorers set out from the newly emerging nation-states of England, France, and Portugal in attempts to match Spain's stunning successes in Central and South America, and fishing crews hired for merchants sailed from ports of Europe's Atlantic coast looking for cheap sources of protein.

Later in the sixteenth century, French merchants developed a specialized fur trade with the Algonquin hunters in eastern Canada. As a result, the natives became dependent on a very unpredictable industry, began to compete with each other, and, as in many other places, suffered greatly from exposure to European diseases.

England's Role

England became the primary colonizer in North America for a variety of reasons. Of the European nations, England was the furthest along in capitalist development.

Members of the gentry had bought or leased land from feudal lords, raising crops and/or livestock to sell. As the population increased, smaller producers suffered from competition to the point that they were forced to sell their own labor and become indentured servants of travel to North America and settle as colonizers.

Driven out of England by overpopulation, a shortage of tillable land, growing extremes of wealth and poverty, and the breakdown of effective institutions of social control under a rapidly diversifying and changing economy, they migrated to the "new world" where within a century, due to their presence and attitudes, similar conditions prevailed. "Despite the intentions and beliefs of many participants, then, the effect of colonization had not been to halt or reverse the processes forming preindustrial England but to carry them across the Atlantic." (Salisbury, 237).

Attitudes of Virginians

Conway Whittle Sams wrote an account of the colonization of Virginia from the point of view of the colonists:

The Conquest of Virginia involves the dealings of Englishmen, who became Virginians, with two inferior races. The country they came to acquire was occupied by the one, and, no sooner had they established a foothold here, than there was imported from Africa another.

... The real object of the colony was to secure for England, and for Protestantism, a part of the New World then being explored, claimed and occupied by other European Powers, that is, by France and by Spain, both of them Catholic Powers. ...

The colony was conducted in an as orderly a way as possible by persons of the highest character who were at the head of movement in England. ... Religion was a vital feature of the Colony, daily morning and evening prayers being regularly held and attended by the Colonists.

With kindly intentions towards the Indians, and with a high purpose before them, abundantly shown by the solemn public statements that were made on that subject, yet, in carrying out the movement, war with the native inhabitants became inevitable, because they would not accept the situation as the English would have them accept it.

~ Conway Whittle Sams, *The Conquest of Virginia*, 5, 15, 16

Puritanism

The adverse circumstances experienced by many during the seventeenth century led to the popularity of religious beliefs which elevated family-oriented economic independence to the status of a divine character trait. Puritans viewed their economic and social crises as evidence of the deep sinfulness of the world, and they tried to separate themselves from it. The need for hard work and self-discipline in a fiercely competitive, rapidly changing economy (quite different from the seasonal agricultural work of their ancestors) plus the need for certainty as the old order declined gave Puritanism a strong appeal.

Its worldview provided economic activities with a spiritual base. A person was “called” to a vocation; fulfilling material goals could at the same time insure a place in heaven. The certainty that they were among the few elect who would be saved by God legitimized Puritans’ individual pursuits and gave them a basis of identity stronger than kinship and geographical ties.

In the 1630s the Archbishop of Canterbury tried to force religious uniformity, in a new phase of the Inquisition. Persecution became an additional motive for migration. Thousands of English Puritans, perceiving themselves as righteous and deprived, hungry for land, desperate for social and cultural order, fled to America.

Indians reacted to their arrival with the goal of maintaining equilibrium and tried to interact as best they could with this new breed of human being. However, the Puritans saw the Indians as not only an obstacle to attaining what they wanted but also as complete inversion of their ideal world. They turned their quests for land into crusades against the “savages” as they struggled for control over the environment and its inhabitants. Conversion of the natives to Christianity would be an extension of God’s will and glory. The antagonism of settlers toward natives set the stage for the later rise of racism in the society that developed in the “new world.”

Manifest Destiny

The New England puritans gave the concept of “the American dream” the high visionary meaning it has carried to our own time. To them, and to us, the “discovery of America” became prophecy and promise, “God’s country,” “manifest destiny.”

Other Renaissance explorers and emigrants discovered America as a geographical entity; they put it on the European map of the world. The Puritans discovered America in scripture, precisely as a biblical scholar discovered the meaning of some hitherto obscure text, and they proceeded to put it on the map of sacred history.

America, they explained, was nothing less than the new promised land, held in reserve by God for His latter-day saints.

And what of those who were already acting as the stewards of that promised land?

The misnomer "Indian" is emblematic of the way language could be used, in defiance of historical fact, to denigrate a host of native peoples, each with distinctive traditions and institutions, as "primitives," "savage," "childlike innocents," and so on. This was the way of all the emigrant groups, including the Puritans. But the Puritans went one crucial step further. They "discovered" in the Indians the antagonists to the new chosen people. For other emigrants, the Indians were cultural inferiors, requiring the white gifts of religion and civilization. For the Puritans they were primarily the villains in a sacred drama...

~ Charles M. Segal and David C. Stineback, *Puritans, Indians, and Manifest Destiny*, 16-17

Changes in the Land

*Spread the word of your religion,
Convert the whole world in you can,
Kill and slaughter those who oppose you
It's worth it if you save one man.*

*Take the land to build your churches,
A sin to tax the house of God,
Take the child while she is supple,
Spoil the mind and spare the rod.*

*Go and tell the savage native
That he must be Christianized.
Tell him, end his heathen worship
And you will make him civilized.*

*Like an ever circling vulture,
You descend upon your prey,
Then you pick the soul to pieces
And you watch while it decays.*

*Missionaries, missionaries,
Go leave us all alone.
Take your white God to your white man,
We've a God of our own.*

~ From a song by Floyd Westerman, in *Marxism and Native Americans*, 18

In a very real and tangible sense... “New England,” as we know it in history, was “made” when Indian lands were expropriated for use by English settlers. For it was by that process that the land was removed from a “natural” economy, wherein it was treated as a sacred phenomenon whose powers and gifts were thought to be controlled by supernatural forces, and placed in a nascent capitalist economy where (though hedged in certain respects by the authorities of town, colony, and empire) it became fundamentally a commodity owned by individuals to be bought and sold as they saw fit.

~ Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*, 239

Missionaries

Throughout the hemisphere the conquest followed similar patterns. Initial physical attacks against natives were followed by more subtle—but ultimately just as deadly—attacks on their cultures by missionaries. Churches and missions opened the way for other colonizers. They exploited people, divided families, removed children, robbed natural resources, and forced a shift in traditional values.

Voices of Dissent

Petalesharo

Petalesharo, a principal chief of the Pawnee Indians, gave the following speech at a conference in 1822 which President Monroe also attended. The president had urged the chief and his people to follow “the way of peace” and to be friendly with the people of the United States. In his reply Petalesharo refers especially to the missionaries:

My Great Father: Some of your good chiefs, as they are called (missionaries), have proposed to send some of their good people among us to change our habits, to make us work and live like the white people.

I will not tell a lie—I am going to tell the truth. You love your country—you love your people—you love the manner in which they live, and you think your people brave. I am like you, my Great Father, I love my country—I love my people—I love the manner in which they live, and think myself and my warriors brave.

Spare me then, Father; let me enjoy my country, and pursue the buffalo, and the beaver, and the other wild animals of our country, and I will trade their skins with your people. I have grown up, and lived thus long without work—I am in hopes you will suffer me to die without it.

We have plenty of buffalo, beaver, deer and other wild animals—we have also an abundance of horses—we have everything we want—we have plenty of land, if you will keep your people off of it.

It is too soon, my Great Father, to send those good men among us. We are not starving yet—we wish you to permit us to enjoy the chase until the game of our country is exhausted—until the wild animals become extinct. Let us exhaust our present resources before you make us toil and interrupt our happiness—let me continue to live as I have done.

~ W.C. Vanderwerth, ed., *Indian Oratory*, 80-82

Red Jacket



Red Jacket

In the late eighteenth century, a young Moravian missionary asked permission to open a mission on Indian land. In refusing his request, Red Jacket, a famous orator and warrior among Seneca Indians, gave a challenge:

Your forefathers crossed the great water and landed on this island. Their numbers were small. They found friends and no enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men and had come here to enjoy their religion...We gave them corn and meat, they gave us poison in return....

You say there is but one way to workshop and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why are not all agreed, as you can all read the book?

We are told that your religion was given to your forefathers, and has been handed down from father to son. We also have a religion, which was given to our forefathers, and has been handed down to us their children. We worship in that way. It teaches us to be thankful for all the favors we receive, to love each other, and to be united. We never quarrel about religion.

The Great Spirit has made us all, but He has made a great difference between His white and red children....Since He has made so great a difference between us in other things, why may we not conclude that He has given us a different religion according to our understanding? *The Great Spirit does right. He knows what is best for His children; we are satisfied.*

We do not wish to destroy your religion, or take it from you. We only want to enjoy our own. We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people

are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.

~ Roger Moody, ed., *The Indigenous Voice*, 1:247

Legacies of the Conquest

Gifts to the Indians

Hubert Bancroft, an energetic New Englander was successively, secretary of the Navy, ambassador to Great Britain, Prussia, and the German Empire, and the president of various scholarly societies during the nineteenth century. Writing in 1883, he asked some critical questions:

What should we do were a foreign power to come in ships to our shore and begin to slaughter our animals, to stake off our land and divide it among themselves? We should drive them away if we were able; but if we found them the stronger, we should employ every art to destroy them, and in so doing regard ourselves as patriots performing a sacred obligation.

This is the Indian's crime; and in so doing we call him cunning, revengeful, hateful, diabolical. But the white man brings him blankets, it may be said, brings him medicine, tells him of contrivances, teaches him civilization. These things are exactly what the savage does not want, and what he is much better off without. The white man's comforts kill him almost as quickly as do his cruelties; and the teachings of Christ's ministers are abhorrent if they are coupled with the examples of lecherous and murderous professors of Christianity....

White men have killed fifty Indians where Indians have killed one white man, and this, notwithstanding that nine-tenths of all injuries inflicted have been perpetrated by white invaders.

A thousand Indian women have been outraged by men whose mothers had taught them the Lord's prayer, where one white woman has been injured by these benighted heathen. At any time in the history of America I would rather take my chances as a white woman among savages, than as an Indian woman among white people.

~ H.H. Bancroft, *Collected works in 1492: Discovery/Invasion/Encounter*, 72

Genocide

...In other areas, the Indian whom typhus does not kill dies of hunger or hardship.

There are corpses in the fields and in the plazas, and there are houses filled with them in which all died and no one remained to tell of it.

Throughout Mexico the pestilence is raising such a stink of putrefaction and smoke that we Spaniards have to about holding our noses.

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, 150

From the second voyage, the two others later undertaken by Columbus, and the many mounted thereafter by other explorers from not only Spain but also other countries in Europe, comes the legacy of a resounding clash between strikingly different cultures. The overpowering of one by the other led to many of the agonies we suffer from today. Racism and environmental destruction are two that immediately come to mind.

Very quickly, the inhabitants of the “new world” discovered that the Spaniards and, later, colonizers from other parts of Europe, notably England, France, and Holland, wanted only their gold, or silver, or pearls, or fur, or land. They themselves were most likely to be killed or enslaved.

Furthermore, the Europeans brought the diseases that ran rampant in the area that had once been so filled with health. “The raging epidemics of Europe’s most tragic centuries repeated themselves in America. Not even the most brutally deprived of the conquistadors was able purposely to slaughter Indians on the scale that the gentle priest unwittingly accomplished by going from his sickbed ministrations to lay his hands in blessing on his Indian converts” (Jennings, 22).

Researchers now give the figure of ninety percent decline in population within a century after European contact, much of it due to the viruses and microbes introduced from the “old world.” The natives of the West had no immunity to such diseases as influenza, typhus, pneumonia, tuberculosis, measles, pleurisy, diphtheria, or smallpox.

Statistics aren’t reliable for many reasons, including the inaccurate estimates of the original size of the population, but the region of Hispaniola can serve as an example. A detailed census taken in 1514 listed twenty-eight thousand people in the area that housed eight million twenty years earlier. “That is more than decimation; it is carnage of more than ninety-nine percent, something we must call closer to genocide, and within a single generation. By 1542, according to Las Casas, who was there at the time, only two hundred Tainos remained” (Sale, 161).

It is also known that in central Mexico, the population decreased from thirty million to four million in a few decades. The rapid, massive decline in population, referred to as “the most extreme demographic disaster in human history” (Ortiz, 8), was caused by colonial warfare, massacres, massive deportations of natives as slaves, overwork in the mines, starvation or malnutrition after food production broke down, and suicide, as well as epidemics.

All the socioeconomic factors increased the Indians’ vulnerability to the strange new diseases that began to plague them. They were psychologically as well as physically unprepared for such an overwhelming onslaught.

Day of the Indian

In 1997 representatives of nine different tribes issued the following message:

...We want to say that the 22nd of April, 1500, when Pedro Alvarez Cabral stepped for the first time on these lands, was the beginning of the expansion of western civilization and the beginning of the end of the indigenous societies.

With the passage of the years, our destruction was intensified, carried out by western civilization. The most diverse instruments of degradation were used in the massacre of the indigenous groups. Factors contributing to this process were sicknesses brought by the white man which had until then been unknown to us, the plundering of our lands, and the application of colonialists and ethnocentric educational methods which did not respect our political, economic and religious structure.

So much so that in the sixteenth century the Indians were considered irrational animals, and it was necessary for Pope Paul III to declare to the public of the time that we were human beings, with body and soul. But in spite of this, the destruction of the indigenous people continued.

~ Roger Moody, ed., *The Indigenous Voice*, 356

Dietary Legacy

A legacy of those colonial days which continues is the custom of eating dirt. Lack of iron produces anemia, and instinct leads Northeastern children to eat dirt to gain the mineral salts which are absent from their diet of manioc starch, beans, and—with luck—dried meat. In former times this “African vice” was punished by putting muzzles on the children or by hanging them in willow baskets far above the ground.

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*, 75

Ripple Effects

The ripple effects of the environmental destruction wrought on the land by the colonists were far-reaching.

The destruction of old-growth forests meant the elimination of certain intricate niches and their microbial and faunal patterns, the emigration of bird and animal populations, and the invasion of pioneer species that prevented the natural succession from ever producing again the great trees or the carpets of native wildflowers. Local and regional climatic changes followed, with new conditions of wind, temperature, humidity, and soil moisture, and even seasons that proved inhospitable to many kinds of plants and animals but to which the vast numbers of new European species—cattle, pigs, horses, rats, dandelions, and so on—adapted rapidly, without predators or pathogens to hinder them.

All in all, the presence of just a few hundred thousands of the European branch of the human species, within just a century after its landing, did more to alter the environment of North America, in some places and for many populations quite irretrievably, than the many millions of the American branch had done in fifteen centuries or more.

~ Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 291-292

Destruction of the Environment

Besides killing the people with their weapons, demands, and diseases, the Europeans brought about great destruction to the physical environment.

Plant forms were imported with no thought of their effect on the land. Wheat and chickpeas, staples of the Mediterranean diet, withered and died in the heat, and although other plants fared slightly better, at least at first the Spanish seemed to make no effort to adopt the much more productive Taino crops and methods of agriculture.

The animals brought by the Spanish: dogs, cattle, horses, and pigs, dominated and then destroyed native habitats, including carefully-nurtured conuco farms which featured companion planting. They depleted the native grass species and stripped the ground cover, thereby causing erosion.

Invasive plants also had a very negative effect, especially some that were produced for profit such as sugar. Mono-drop open-field planting, in long rows, required cutting and clearing the forests, as opposed to the Taino method of digging a hole and dropping in a seed, which had nourished both human being and the eco-system for centuries.

Another long-lasting negative legacy was the new system of land ownership that created an elite class and denied ownership to indigenous populations, so they couldn't possibly continue their careful cultivation methods.

In a few decades soils were eroded, rivers began to fill up with silt and sometimes went dry, forests were destroyed, and the climate was altered. By 1498 Columbus wrote that in the Cape Verde Islands he couldn't see a single green thing and observed that everything had become dry and sterile.

Two decades after Columbus's tenure as governor, Alonso de Zuaso wrote to a friend at the Spanish court, "If I were to tell you all the damage that has been done, I should never make an end....Although these islands had been, since God made the earth, prosperous and full of people lacking nothing they needed; yet...they were laid waste, inhabited only by wild animals and birds, and useless indeed for the service either of God or of Their Highnesses." Some years later de Las Casas wrote of Hispaniola: "It was the first to be destroyed and made into desert" (Sale, 165-166). But, as we now know all too well, not the last.

Later, in North America, environmental devastation continued. Beavers and other fur-bearing animals; herbivores like deer, moose, antelope, caribou, elk, and wood bison; and game birds like turkeys, ducks, geese, and passenger pigeons were vastly depleted in numbers if not totally exterminated by 1640.

Forests were cleared both to get lumber and to make room for cash crops like tobacco. In Virginia by the end of the seventeenth century, half a million acres had been deforested and such species as white oak, white cedar, and black walnut were exterminated.

Different Worldviews

There was a great difference in the attitude taken by the Indian and the Caucasian toward nature, and this difference made of one a conservationist and of the other non-conservationist of life. The Indian, as well as all other creatures that were given birth and grew, were sustained by the common mother—earth. He was therefore kin to all living things and he gave to all creatures equal rights with himself. Everything of earth was loved and revered.

The philosophy of the Caucasian was, "Things of the earth, earth"—to be belittled and despised...

Forests were mowed down, the buffalo exterminated, the beaver driven to extinction and his wonderfully constructed dams dynamited, allowing flood waters to wreak further havoc, and the very birds of the air silenced. Great grass plains that sweetened the air have been upturned; springs, streams, and lakes that lived no longer ago than my boyhood have dried, and a whole

people harassed to degradation and death. The white man has come to be the symbol of extinction for all things natural to this continent.

~ Chief Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* in *Rethinking Columbus*, 84

Conquest Myth

European explorers and invaders discovered an inhabited land. Had it been pristine wilderness then, it would possibly be so still today, for neither the technology nor the social organization of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had the capacity to maintain, of its own resources, outpost colonies thousands of miles from home. Incapable of conquering true wilderness, the Europeans were highly competent in the skill of conquering other people, and that is what they did. They did not settle a virgin land. They invaded and displaced a resident population...

The basic conquest myth postulates that America was virgin land, or wilderness, inhabited by non people called savages; that these savages were creatures sometimes defined as demons, sometimes as beasts "in the shape of men"; that their mode of existence and cast of mind were such as to make them incapable of civilization and therefore of full humanity; that civilization was required by divine sanction or the imperative of progress to conquer the wilderness and make it a garden; that the savage creatures of the wilderness being unable to adapt to any environment other than the wild, stubbornly and viciously resisted God or fate, and thereby incurred their suicidal extermination; that civilization and its bearers were refined and ennobled in their contest with the dark powers of the wilderness; and that it all was inevitable.

~ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, 15

Conquest Reality

The story is not a pleasant one. The dramatic meeting of two civilizations had dire consequences that continue to plague the descendants of the main players. One of the greatest tragedies is that the conquerors failed to recognize the true riches they had stumbled upon: the fertile, life-giving land; the wide variety of experiments in human relations practiced by the inhabitants, and especially the patterns of respect for nature and "right living" honored throughout the hemisphere.

Even as the settlers took advantage of the primeval richness of the soil to grow their crops, the pristine quality of the lakes and rivers to provide fish and fur, and the teeming wildlife to give them meat, they saw the land only as a wilderness to be brought under man's control. Even as

they used the government of the Iroquois Confederacy as the model for their own and adopted the crops developed by natives as the basis of the agriculture, they thought of Indians as “savage.”

Never once in their arrogance did they stumble upon the single fact that in subsuming the wilderness and the Indian within their synthesis they were irrevocably cutting themselves off from the very substance of the new life they were forging in North America.

~ Winona LaDuke, “Natural to Synthetic and Back Again,” *Marxism and Native Americans*, ii

Challenge by the Natives

From the beginning of the conquest, individuals and groups within the nations encountered by the explorers challenged the worldviews of the invaders. Tundama was the defender of the Sogamoso area in what is now Columbia, which contained an ancient shrine. In 1541, Baltasar Maldonado made Tundama an offer of peace that included a demand of tribute. His reply hints of the hundreds of years of resistance to come:

I am not so barbarous, famous Spaniard, not to believe peace to be the center on which the bounds of this world depend; but do not think I'm unaware that the grand words with which you offer it to me are much belied by your harsh behavior.

Who will say that Tundama should give to the vassal the tribute due to the king? I cannot serve someone who serves his king so badly. According to your own accounts of the King of Spain's clemency, it is not credible that he should send you to kill and rob us so.

More barbarian than the Panches and the Muzos [rival tribes], you bath your horses' mouths in our blood, which they drink out of hunger and thirst and which you spill to display your cruelty. You desecrate the sanctuaries of our gods and sack the houses of men who haven't offended you. Who would choose to undergo these insults, being not insensitive? Who would omit to rid himself of such harassment, even at the cost of his life?

You well know that my people were bred with no fewer natural privileges than yours. We now know that you are not immortal or descended from the sun. Since your people refuse tax and tyranny you cannot be surprised that mine do, with determination.

Note well the survivors who await you, to undeceive you that victory is always yours.

~ Gordon Brotherston, ed., *Image of the New World*, 48

Our Task

The legacies of the conquest will be with us for years to come. Now it is time to look at the history of the event in a new way, to let the voices of the oppressed speak to us, to tell us their memories and share their wisdom, to teach us from their vast experience of living on earth.

Unless the conditions that foster oppression are addressed with the urgency and direction they demand, we will continue to suffer from the ignorance, blindness, and greed that have diminished human possibilities during the centuries since 1492.

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