

Schweikart, Larry and Michael Allen. *A Patriot's History of the United States*. New York: Sentinel, 2004.

INTRODUCTION

Is America's past a tale of racism, sexism, and bigotry? Is it the story of the conquest and rape of a continent? Is U.S. history the story of white slave owners who perverted the electoral process for their own interests? Did America start with Columbus's killing all the Indians, leap to Jim Crow laws and Rockefeller crushing the workers, then finally save itself with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal? The answers, of course, are no, no, no, and NO.

One might never know this, however, by looking at almost any mainstream U.S. history textbook. Having taught American history in one form or another for close to sixty years between us, we are aware that, unfortunately, many students are berated with tales of the Founders as self-interested politicians and slaveholders, of the icons of American industry as robber-baron oppressors, and of every American foreign policy initiative as imperialistic and insensitive. At least Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* honestly represents its Marxist biases in the title!

What is most amazing and refreshing is that the past usually speaks for itself. The evidence is there for telling the great story of the American past honestly—with flaws, absolutely, with shortcomings, most definitely. But we think that an honest evaluation of the history of the United States must begin and end with the recognition that, compared to any other nation, America's past is a bright and shining light. America was, and is, the city on the hill, the fountain of hope, the beacon of liberty. We utterly reject "My country right or wrong"—what scholar wouldn't? But in the last thirty years, academics have taken an equally destructive approach: "My country, always wrong!" We reject that too. Instead, we remain convinced that if the story of America's past is told fairly, the result cannot be anything but a deepened patriotism, a sense of awe at the obstacles overcome, the passion invested, the blood and tears spilled, and the nation that was built. An honest review of America's past would note, among other observations, that the same Founders who owned slaves instituted numerous

ways—political and intellectual—to ensure that slavery could not survive; that the concern over not just property rights, but all rights, so infused American life that laws often followed the practices of the common folk, rather than dictated to them; that even when the United States used her military power for dubious reasons, the ultimate result was to liberate people and bring a higher standard of living than before; that time and again America's leaders have willingly shared power with those who had none, whether they were citizens of territories, former slaves, or disenfranchised women. And we could go on.

The reason so many academics miss the real history of America is that they assume that ideas don't matter and that there is no such thing as virtue. They could not be more wrong. When John D. Rockefeller said, "The common man must have kerosene and he must have it cheap," Rockefeller was already a wealthy man with no more to gain. When Grover Cleveland vetoed an insignificant seed corn bill, he knew it would hurt him politically, and that he would only win condemnation from the press and the people—but the Constitution did not permit it, and he refused. Consider the scene more than two hundred years ago when President John Adams—just voted out of office by the hated Republicans of Thomas Jefferson—mounted a carriage and left Washington even before the inauguration. There was no armed struggle. Not a musket ball was fired, nor a political opponent hanged. No Federalists marched with guns or knives in the streets. There was no guillotine. And just four years before that, in 1796, Adams had taken part in an equally momentous event when he won a razor-thin close election over Jefferson and, because of Senate rules, had to count his own contested ballots. When he came to the contested Georgia ballot, the great Massachusetts revolutionary, the "Duke of Braintree," stopped counting. He sat down for a moment to allow Jefferson or his associates to make a challenge, and when he did not, Adams finished the tally, becoming president. Jefferson told confidants that he thought the ballots were indeed in dispute, but he would not wreck the country over a few pieces of paper. As Adams took the oath of office, he thought he heard Washington say, "I am fairly out and you are fairly in! See which of us will be the happiest!"¹ So much for

protecting his own interests! Washington stepped down freely and enthusiastically, not at bayonet point. He walked away from power, as nearly each and every American president has done since.

These giants knew that their actions of character mattered far more to the nation they were creating than mere temporary political positions. The ideas they fought for together in 1776 and debated in 1787 were paramount. And that is what American history is truly about—ideas. Ideas such as “All men are created equal”; the United States is the “last, best hope” of earth; and America “is great, because it is good.”

Honor counted to founding patriots like Adams, Jefferson, Washington, and then later, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt. Character counted. Property was also important; no denying that, because with property came liberty. But virtue came first. Even J. P. Morgan, the epitome of the so-called robber baron, insisted that “the first thing is character... before money or anything else. Money cannot buy it.”

It is not surprising, then, that so many left-wing historians miss the boat (and miss it, and miss it, and miss it to the point where they need a ferry schedule). They fail to understand what every colonial settler and every western pioneer understood: character was tied to liberty, and liberty to property. All three were needed for success, but character was the prerequisite because it put the law behind property agreements, and it set responsibility right next to liberty. And the surest way to ensure the presence of good character was to keep God at the center of one’s life, community, and ultimately, nation. “Separation of church and state” meant freedom to worship, not freedom from worship. It went back to that link between liberty and responsibility, and no one could be taken seriously who was not responsible to God. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” They believed those words.

As colonies became independent and as the nation grew, these ideas permeated the fabric of the founding documents. Despite pits of corruption that have pockmarked federal and state politics—some of them quite deep—and despite abuses of civil rights that were shocking, to say the least, the concept was deeply

imbedded that only a virtuous nation could achieve the lofty goals set by the Founders. Over the long haul, the Republic required virtuous leaders to prosper.

Yet virtue and character alone were not enough. It took competence, skill, and talent to build a nation. That’s where property came in: with secure property rights, people from all over the globe flocked to America’s shores. With secure property rights, anyone could become successful, from an immigrant Jew like Lionel Cohen and his famous Lionel toy trains to an Austrian bodybuilder turned-millionaire actor and governor like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Carnegie arrived penniless; Ford’s company went broke; and Lee Iacocca had to eat crow on national TV for his company’s mistakes. Secure property rights not only made it possible for them all to succeed but, more important, established a climate of competition that rewarded skill, talent, and risk taking. Political skill was essential too. From 1850 to 1860 the United States was nearly rent in half by inept leaders, whereas an integrity vacuum nearly destroyed American foreign policy and shattered the economy in the decades of the 1960s and early 1970s. Moral, even pious, men have taken the nation to the brink of collapse because they lacked skill, and some of the most skilled politicians in the world—Henry Clay, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton—left legacies of frustration and corruption because their abilities were never wedded to character.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, there was a subtle and, at times, obvious campaign to separate virtue from talent, to divide character from success. The latest in this line of attack is the emphasis on diversity—that somehow merely having different skin shades or national origins makes America special. But it was not the color of the skin of people who came here that made them special, it was the content of their character. America remains a beacon of liberty, not merely because its institutions have generally remained strong, its citizens free, and its attitudes tolerant, but because it, among most of the developed world, still cries out as a nation, “Character counts.” Personal liberties in America are genuine because of the character of honest judges and attorneys who, for the most part, still make up the judiciary, and

because of the personal integrity of large numbers of local, state, and national lawmakers.

No society is free from corruption. The difference is that in America, corruption is viewed as the exception, not the rule. And when light is shown on it, corruption is viciously attacked. Freedom still attracts people to the fountain of hope that is America, but freedom alone is not enough. Without responsibility and virtue, freedom becomes a soggy anarchy, an incomplete licentiousness. This is what has made Americans different: their fusion of freedom and integrity endows Americans with their sense of right, often when no other nation in the world shares their perception.

Yet that is as telling about other nations as it is our own; perhaps it is that as Americans, we alone remain committed to both the individual and the greater good, to personal freedoms and to public virtue, to human achievement and respect for the Almighty. Slavery was abolished because of the dual commitment to liberty and virtue—neither capable of standing without the other. Some crusades in the name of integrity have proven disastrous, including Prohibition. The most recent serious threats to both liberty and public virtue (abuse of the latter damages both) have come in the form of the modern environmental and consumer safety movements. Attempts to sue gun makers, paint manufacturers, tobacco companies, and even Microsoft “for the public good” have made distressingly steady advances, encroaching on Americans’ freedoms to eat fast foods, smoke, or modify their automobiles, not to mention start businesses or invest in existing firms without fear of retribution.

The Founders—each and every one of them—would have been horrified at such intrusions on liberty, regardless of the virtue of the cause, not because they were elite white men, but because such actions in the name of the public good were simply wrong. It all goes back to character: the best way to ensure virtuous institutions (whether government, business, schools, or churches) was to populate them with people of virtue. Europe forgot this in the nineteenth century, or by World War I at the latest. Despite rigorous and punitive face-saving traditions in the Middle East or Asia, these twin principles of liberty and virtue have never been

adopted. Only in America, where one was permitted to do almost anything, but expected to do the best thing, did these principles germinate.

To a great extent, that is why, on March 4, 1801, John Adams would have thought of nothing other than to turn the White House over to his hated foe, without fanfare, self-pity, or complaint, and return to his everyday life away from politics. That is why, on the few occasions where very thin electoral margins produced no clear winner in the presidential race (such as 1824, 1876, 1888, 1960, and 2000), the losers (after some legal maneuvering, recounting of votes, and occasional whining) nevertheless stepped aside and congratulated the winner of a different party. Adams may have set a precedent, but in truth he would do nothing else. After all, he was a man of character.

CHAPTER ONE

The City on the Hill, 1492–1707

The Age of European Discovery

God, glory, and gold—not necessarily in that order—took post-Renaissance Europeans to parts of the globe they had never before seen. The opportunity to gain materially while bringing the Gospel to non-Christians offered powerful incentives to explorers from Portugal, Spain, England, and France to embark on dangerous voyages of discovery in the 1400s. Certainly they were not the first to sail to the Western Hemisphere: Norse sailors reached the coasts of Iceland in 874 and Greenland a century later, and legends recorded Leif Erickson’s establishment of a colony in Vinland, somewhere on the northern Canadian coast. Whatever the fate of Vinland, its historical impact was minimal, and significant voyages of discovery did not occur for more than five hundred years, when trade with the Orient beckoned.

Marco Polo and other travelers to Cathay (China) had brought exaggerated tales of wealth in the East and returned with unusual spices, dyes, rugs, silks, and other goods. But this was a difficult, long journey. Land routes crossed dangerous territories,

including imposing mountains and vast deserts of modern-day Afghanistan, northern India, Iran, and Iraq, and required expensive and well-protected caravans to reach Europe from Asia. Merchants encountered bandits who threatened transportation lanes, kings and potentates who demanded tribute, and bloodthirsty killers who pillaged for pleasure. Trade routes from Bombay and Goa reached Europe via Persia or Arabia, crossing the Ottoman Empire with its internal taxes. Cargo had to be unloaded at seaports, then reloaded at Alexandria or Antioch for water transport across the Mediterranean, or continued on land before crossing the Dardanelles Strait into modern-day Bulgaria to the Danube River. European demand for such goods seemed endless, enticing merchants and their investors to engage in a relentless search for lower costs brought by safer and cheaper routes. Gradually, Europeans concluded that more direct water routes to the Far East must exist.

The search for Cathay's treasure coincided with three factors that made long ocean voyages possible. First, sailing and shipbuilding technology had advanced rapidly after the ninth century, thanks in part to the Arabs' development of the astrolabe, a device with a pivoted limb that established the sun's altitude above the horizon. By the late tenth century, astrolabe technology had made its way to Spain. Farther north, Vikings pioneered new methods of hull construction, among them the use of overlapping planks for internal support that enabled vessels to withstand violent ocean storms. Sailors of the Hanseatic League states on the Baltic coast experimented with larger ship designs that incorporated sternpost rudders for better control. Yet improved ships alone were not enough: explorers needed the accurate maps generated by Italian seamen and sparked by the new inquisitive impulse of the Renaissance. Thus a wide range of technologies coalesced to encourage long-range voyages of discovery.

Political changes, a second factor giving birth to the age of discovery, resulted from the efforts of several ambitious European monarchs to consolidate their possessions into larger, cohesive dynastic states. This unification of lands, which increased the taxable base within the kingdoms, greatly increased the funding available to expeditions and provided better military protection (in

the form of warships) at no cost to investors. By the time a combined Venetian-Spanish fleet defeated a much larger Ottoman force at Lepanto in 1571, the vessels of Christian nations could essentially sail with impunity anywhere in the Mediterranean. Then, in control of the Mediterranean, Europeans could consider voyages of much longer duration (and cost) than they ever had in the past. A new generation of explorers found that monarchs could support even more expensive undertakings that integrated the monarch's interests with the merchants'.

Third, the Protestant Reformation of 1517 fostered a fierce and bloody competition for power and territory between Catholic and Protestant nations that reinforced national concerns. England competed for land with Spain, not merely for economic and political reasons, but because the English feared the possibility that Spain might catholicize numbers of non-Christians in new lands, whereas Catholics trembled at the thought of subjecting natives to Protestant heresies. Therefore, even when economic or political gains for discovery and colonization may have been marginal, monarchs had strong religious incentives to open their royal treasuries to support such missions.

Portugal and Spain: The Explorers

Ironically, one of the smallest of the new monarchical states, Portugal, became the first to subsidize extensive exploration in the fifteenth century. The most famous of the Portuguese explorers, Prince Henry, dubbed the Navigator, was the brother of King Edward of Portugal. Henry (1394–1460) had earned a reputation as a tenacious fighter in North Africa against the Moors, and he hoped to roll back the Muslim invaders and reclaim from them trade routes and territory.

A true Renaissance man, Henry immersed himself in mapmaking and exploration from a coastal center he established at Sagres, on the southern point of Portugal. There he trained navigators and mapmakers, dispatched ships to probe the African coast, and evaluated the reports of sailors who returned from the Azores. Portuguese captains made contact with Arabs and Africans in coastal areas and established trading centers, from which they brought ivory and gold to Portugal, then transported slaves to a

variety of Mediterranean estates. This early slave trade was conducted through Arab middlemen or African traders who carried out slaving expeditions in the interior and exchanged captive men, women, and children for fish, wine, or salt on the coast.

Henry saw these relatively small trading outposts as only the first step in developing reliable water routes to the East. Daring sailors trained at Henry's school soon pushed farther southward, finally rounding the Cape of Storms in 1486, when Bartholomew Dias was blown off course by fantastic winds. King John II eventually changed the name of the cape to the Cape of Good Hope, reflecting the promise of a new route to India offered by Dias's discovery. That promise became reality in 1498, after Vasco de Gama sailed to Calicut, India. An abrupt decline in Portuguese fortunes led to her eclipse by the larger Spain, reducing the resources available for investment in exploration and limiting Portuguese voyages to the Indian Ocean to an occasional "boatload of convicts." Moreover, the prize for which Portuguese explorers had risked so much now seemed small in comparison to that discovered by their rivals the Spanish under the bold seamanship of Christopher Columbus, a man the king of Portugal had once refused to fund.

Columbus departed from Spain in August 1492, laying in a course due west and ultimately in a direct line to Japan, although he never mentioned Cathay prior to 1493. A native of Genoa, Columbus embodied the best of the new generation of navigators: resilient, courageous, and confident. To be sure, Columbus wanted glory, and a motivation born of desperation fueled his vision. At the same time, Columbus was "earnestly desirous of faking Christianity to heathen lands." He did not, as is popularly believed, originate the idea that the earth is round. As early as 1480, for example, he read works proclaiming the sphericity of the planet. But knowing intellectually that the earth is round and demonstrating it physically are two different things.

Columbus's fleet consisted of only three vessels, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María, and a crew of ninety men. Leaving port in August 1492, the expedition eventually passed the point where the sailors expected to find Japan, generating no small degree of anxiety, whereupon Columbus used every managerial

skill he possessed to maintain discipline and encourage hope. The voyage had stretched to ten weeks when the crew bordered on mutiny, and only the captain's reassurance and exhortations persuaded the sailors to continue a few more days. Finally, on October 11, 1492, they started to see signs of land: pieces of wood loaded with barnacles, green burrbrushes, and other vegetation.⁸ A lookout spotted land, and on October 12, 1492, the courageous band waded ashore on Watling Island in the Bahamas, where his men begged his pardon for doubting him.

Columbus continued to Cuba, which he called Hispaniola. At the time he thought he had reached the Far East, and referred to the dark-skinned people he found in Hispaniola as Indians. He found these Indians "very well formed, with handsome bodies and good faces," and hoped to convert them "to our Holy Faith by love rather than by force" by giving them red caps and glass beads "and many other things of small value." Dispatching emissaries into the interior to contact the Great Khan, Columbus's scouts returned with no reports of the spices, jewels, silks, or other evidence of Cathay; nor did the khan send his regards. Nevertheless, Columbus returned to Spain confident he had found an ocean passage to the Orient.

Reality gradually forced Columbus to a new conclusion: he had not reached India or China, and after a second voyage in 1493—still convinced he was in the Pacific Ocean—Columbus admitted he had stumbled on a new land mass, perhaps even a new continent of astounding natural resources and wealth. In February 1493, he wrote his Spanish patrons that Hispaniola and other islands like it were "fertile to a limitless degree," possessing mountains covered by "trees of a thousand kinds and tall, so that they seem to touch the sky."¹² He confidently promised gold, cotton, spices—as much as Their Highnesses should command—in return for only minimal continued support. Meanwhile, he continued to probe the Mundus Novus south and west. After returning to Spain yet again, Columbus made two more voyages to the New World in 1498 and 1502.

Whether Columbus had found parts of the Far East or an entirely new land was irrelevant to most Europeans at the time. Political distractions abounded in Europe. Spain had barely evicted

the Muslims after the long Reconquista, and England's Wars of the Roses had scarcely ended. News of Columbus's discoveries excited only a few merchants, explorers, and dreamers. Still, the prospect of finding a waterway to Asia infatuated sailors; and in 1501 a Florentine passenger on a Portuguese voyage, Amerigo Vespucci, wrote letters to his friends in which he described the New World. His self-promoting dispatches circulated sooner than Columbus's own written accounts, and as a result the term "America" soon was attached by geographers to the continents in the Western Hemisphere that should by right have been named Columbia. But if Columbus did not receive the honor of having the New World named for him, and if he acquired only temporary wealth and fame in Spain (receiving from the Crown the title Admiral of the Ocean Sea), his place in history was never in doubt. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison, a worthy seaman in his own right who reenacted the Columbian voyages in 1939 and 1940, described Columbus as "the sign and symbol [of the] new age of hope, glory and accomplishment."

Once Columbus blazed the trail, other Spanish explorers had less trouble obtaining financial backing for expeditions. Vasco Núñez de Balboa (1513) crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean (as he named it). Ferdinand Magellan (1519–22) circumnavigated the globe, lending his name to the Strait of Magellan. Other expeditions explored the interior of the newly discovered lands. Juan Ponce de León, traversing an area along Florida's coast, attempted unsuccessfully to plant a colony there. Pánfilo de Narváez's subsequent expedition to conquer Tampa Bay proved even more disastrous. Narváez himself drowned, and natives killed members of his expedition until only four of them reached a Spanish settlement in Mexico.

Spaniards traversed modern-day Mexico, probing interior areas under Hernando Cortés, who in 1518 led a force of 1,000 soldiers to Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City. Cortés encountered powerful Indians called Aztecs, led by their emperor Montezuma. The Aztecs had established a brutal regime that oppressed other natives of the region, capturing large numbers of them for ritual sacrifices in which Aztec priests cut out the beating hearts of living victims. Such barbarity enabled the

Spanish to easily enlist other tribes, especially the Tlaxcalans, in their efforts to defeat the Aztecs.

Tenochtitlán sat on an island in the middle of a lake, connected to the outlying areas by three huge causeways. It was a monstrously large city (for the time) of at least 200,000, rigidly divided into nobles and commoner groups. Aztec culture created impressive pyramid-shaped temple structures, but Aztec science lacked the simple wheel and the wide range of pulleys and gears that it enabled. But it was sacrifice, not science, that defined Aztec society, whose pyramids, after all, were execution sites. A four-day sacrifice in 1487 by the Aztec king Ahuitzotl involved the butchery of 80,400 prisoners by shifts of priests working four at a time at convex killing tables who kicked lifeless, heartless bodies down the side of the pyramid temple. This worked out to a "killing rate of fourteen victims a minute over the ninety-six-hour bloodbath."¹⁵ In addition to the abominable sacrifice system, crime and street carnage were commonplace. More intriguing to the Spanish than the buildings, or even the sacrifices, however, were the legends of gold, silver, and other riches Tenochtitlán contained, protected by the powerful Aztec army.

Cortés first attempted a direct assault on the city and fell back with heavy losses, narrowly escaping extermination. Desperate Spanish fought their way out on Noche Triste (the Sad Night), when hundreds of them fell on the causeway. Cortés's men piled human bodies—Aztec and European alike—in heaps to block Aztec pursuers, then staggered back to Vera Cruz. In 1521 Cortés returned with a new Spanish army, supported by more than 75,000 Indian allies. This time, he found a weakened enemy who had been ravaged by smallpox, or as the Aztecs called it, "the great leprosy." Starvation killed those Aztecs whom the disease did not: "They died in heaps, like bedbugs," wrote one historian. Even so, neither disease nor starvation accounted for the Spaniards' stunning victory over the vastly larger Aztec forces, which can be credited to the Spanish use of European style disciplined shock combat and the employment of modern firepower. Severing the causeways, stationing huge units to guard each, Cortés assaulted the city walls from thirteen brigantines the Spaniards had hauled overland, sealing off the city. These brigantines proved "far more

ingeniously engineered for fighting on the Aztecs' native waters than any boat constructed in Mexico during the entire history of its civilization." When it came to the final battle, it was not the brigantines, but Cortés's use of cannons, muskets, harquebuses, crossbows, and pikes in deadly discipline, firing in order, and standing en masse against a murderous mass of Aztecs who fought as individuals rather than a cohesive force that proved decisive.

Spanish technology, including the wheel-related ratchet gears on muskets, constituted only one element of European military superiority. They fought as other European land armies fought, in formation, with their officers open to new ideas based on practicality, not theology. Where no Aztec would dare approach the godlike Montezuma with a military strategy, Cortés debated tactics with his lieutenants routinely, and the European way of war endowed each Castilian soldier with a sense of individual rights, civic duty, and personal freedom nonexistent in the Aztec kingdom. Moreover, the Europeans sought to kill their enemy and force his permanent surrender, not forge an arrangement for a steady supply of sacrifice victims. Thus Cortés captured the Aztec capital in 1521 at a cost of more than 100,000 Aztec dead, many from disease resulting from Cortés's cutting the city's water supply. But not all diseases came from the Old World to the New, and syphilis appears to have been retransmitted back from Brazil to Portugal.

If Europeans resembled other cultures in their attitude toward conquest, they differed substantially in their practice and effectiveness. The Spanish, especially, proved adept at defeating native peoples for three reasons. First, they were mobile. Horses and ships endowed the Spanish with vast advantages in mobility over the natives. Second, the burgeoning economic power of Europe enabled quantum leaps over Middle Eastern, Asian, and Mesoamerican cultures. This economic wealth made possible the shipping and equipping of large, trained, well-armed forces. Nonmilitary technological advances such as the iron-tipped plow, the windmill, and the waterwheel all had spread through Europe and allowed monarchs to employ fewer resources in the farming sector and more in science, engineering, writing, and the military. A natural outgrowth of this economic wealth was improved

military technology, including guns, which made any single Spanish soldier the equal of several poorly armed natives, offsetting the latter's numerical advantage. But these two factors were magnified by a third element—the glue that held it all together—which was a western way of combat that emphasized group cohesion of free citizens. Like the ancient Greeks and Romans, Cortés's Castilians fought from a long tradition of tactical adaptation based on individual freedom, civic rights, and a "preference for shock battle of heavy infantry" that "grew out of consensual government, equality among the middling classes," and other distinctly Western traits that gave numerically inferior European armies a decisive edge. That made it possible for tiny expeditions such as Ponce de León's, with only 200 men and 50 horses, or Narváez's, with a force of 600, including cooks, colonists, and women, to overcome native Mexican armies outnumbering them two, three, and even ten times at any particular time.

More to the point, no native culture could have conceived of maintaining expeditions of thousands of men in the field for months at a time. Virtually all of the natives lived off the land and took slaves back to their home, as opposed to colonizing new territory with their own settlers. Indeed, only the European industrial engine could have provided the material wherewithal to maintain such armies, and only the European political constructs of liberty, property rights, and nationalism kept men in combat for abstract political causes. European combat style produced yet another advantage in that firearms showed no favoritism on the battlefield. Spanish gunfire destroyed the hierarchy of the enemy, including the aristocratic dominant political class. Aztec chiefs and Moor sultans alike were completely vulnerable to massed firepower, yet without the legal framework of republicanism and civic virtue like Europe's to replace its leadership cadre, a native army could be decapitated at the head with one volley, whereas the Spanish forces could see lieutenants fall and seamlessly replace them with sergeants.

Did Columbus Kill Most of the Indians?

The five-hundred-year anniversary of Columbus's discovery was marked by unusual and strident controversy. Rising up to challenge the intrepid voyager's courage and vision—as well as the establishment of European civilization in the New World—was a crescendo of damnation, which posited that the Genoese navigator was a mass murderer akin to Adolf Hitler. Even the establishment of European outposts was, according to the revisionist critique, a regrettable development. Although this division of interpretations no doubt confused and dampened many a Columbian festival in 1992, it also elicited a most intriguing historical debate: did the esteemed Admiral of the Ocean Sea kill almost all the Indians? A number of recent scholarly studies have dispelled or at least substantially modified many of the numbers generated by the anti-Columbus groups, although other new research has actually increased them. Why the sharp inconsistencies? One recent scholar, examining the major assessments of numbers, points to at least nine different measurement methods, including the time-worn favorite, guesstimates.

1. Pre-Columbian native population numbers are much smaller than critics have maintained. For example, one author claims “Approximately 56 million people died as a result of European exploration in the New World.” For that to have occurred, however, one must start with early estimates for the population of the Western Hemisphere at nearly 100 million. Recent research suggests that that number is vastly inflated, and that the most reliable figure is nearer 53 million, and even that estimate falls with each new publication. Since 1976 alone, experts have lowered their estimates by 4 million. Some scholars have even seen those figures as wildly inflated, and several studies put the native population of North America alone within a range of 8.5 million (the highest) to a low estimate of 1.8 million. If the latter number is true, it means that the “holocaust” or “depopulation” that occurred was one fiftieth of the original estimates, or 800,000 Indians who died from disease and firearms. Although that number is a universe away from the estimates of 50 to 60 million deaths

that some researchers have trumpeted, it still represented a destruction of half the native population. Even then, the guesstimates involve such things as accounting for the effects of epidemics—which other researchers, using the same data, dispute ever occurred—or expanding the sample area to all of North and Central America. However, estimating the number of people alive in a region five hundred years ago has proven difficult, and recently several researchers have called into question most early estimates. For example, one method many scholars have used to arrive at population numbers—extrapolating from early explorers' estimates of populations they could count—has been challenged by archaeological studies of the Amazon basin, where dense settlements were once thought to exist. Work in the area by Betty Meggers concludes that the early explorers' estimates were exaggerated and that no evidence of large populations in that region exists. N. D. Cook's demographic research on the Inca in Peru showed that the population could have been as high as 15 million or as low as 4 million, suggesting that the measurement mechanisms have a “plus or minus reliability factor” of 400 percent! Such “minor” exaggerations as the tendencies of some explorers to overestimate their opponents' numbers, which, when factored throughout numerous villages, then into entire populations, had led to overestimates of millions.

2. Native populations had epidemics long before Europeans arrived. A recent study of more than 12,500 skeletons from sixty-five sites found that native health was on a “downward trajectory” long before Columbus arrived.² Some suggest that Indians may have had a nonvenereal form of syphilis, and almost all agree that a variety of infections were widespread. Tuberculosis existed in Central and North America long before the Spanish appeared, as did herpes, polio, tick-borne fevers, giardiasis, and amebic dysentery. One admittedly controversial study by Henry Dobyns in *Current Anthropology* in 1966 later fleshed out over the years into his book, argued that extensive epidemics swept North America before Europeans arrived. As one authority summed up the research, “Though the Old World was to contribute to its diseases, the New World certainly was not the Garden of Eden some have depicted.” As one might expect, others challenged

Dobyns and the “early epidemic” school, but the point remains that experts are divided. Many now discount the notion that huge epidemics swept through Central and North America; smallpox, in particular, did not seem to spread as a pandemic.

3. There is little evidence available for estimating the numbers of people lost in warfare prior to the Europeans because in general natives did not keep written records. Later, when whites could document oral histories during the Indian wars on the western frontier, they found that different tribes exaggerated their accounts of battles in totally different ways, depending on tribal custom. Some, who preferred to emphasize bravery over brains, inflated casualty numbers. Others, viewing large body counts as a sign of weakness, deemphasized their losses. What is certain is that vast numbers of natives were killed by other natives, and that only technological backwardness—the absence of guns, for example—prevented the numbers of natives killed by other natives from growing even higher.

4. Large areas of Mexico and the Southwest were depopulated more than a hundred years before the arrival of Columbus. According to a recent source, “The majority of Southwesternists... believe that many areas of the Greater Southwest were abandoned or largely depopulated over a century before Columbus’s fateful discovery, as a result of climatic shifts, warfare, resource mismanagement, and other causes.” Indeed, a new generation of scholars puts more credence in early Spanish explorers’ observations of widespread ruins and decaying “great houses” that they contended had been abandoned for years.

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

Technology and disease certainly played prominent roles in the conquest of Spanish America. But the oppressive nature of

the Aztecs played no small role in their overthrow, and in both Peru and Mexico, “The structure of the Indian societies facilitated the Spanish conquest at ridiculously low cost.”²² In addition, Montezuma’s ruling hierarchical, strongly centralized structure, in which subjects devoted themselves and their labor to the needs of the state, made it easy for the Spanish to adapt the system to their own control. Once the Spanish had eliminated Aztec leadership, they replaced it with themselves at the top. The “common people” exchanged one group of despots for another, of a different skin color.

By the time the Aztecs fell, the news that silver existed in large quantities in Mexico had reached Spain, attracting still other conquistadores. Hernando de Soto explored Florida (1539–1541), succeeding where Juan Ponce de León had failed, and ultimately crossed the Mississippi River, dying there in 1542. Meanwhile, marching northward from Mexico, Francisco Vásquez de Coronado pursued other Indian legends of riches in the Seven Cities of Cibola. Supposedly, gold and silver existed in abundance there, but Coronado’s 270-man expedition found none of the fabled cities, and in 1541 he returned to Spain, having mapped much of the American Southwest. By the 1570s enough was known about Mexico and the Southwest to attract settlers, and some two hundred Spanish settlements existed, containing in all more than 160,000 Europeans.

Traveling with every expedition were priests and friars, and the first permanent building erected by Spaniards was often a church. Conquistadores genuinely believed that converting the heathen ranked near—or even above—the acquisition of riches. Even as the Dominican friar and Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas, sharply criticized his countrymen in his writings for making “bloody, unjust, and cruel wars” against the Indians—the so-called Black Legend—a second army of mercy, Spanish missionaries, labored selflessly under harsh conditions to bring the Gospel to the Indians. In some cases, as with the Pueblo Indians, large numbers of Indians converted to Christianity, albeit a mixture of traditional Catholic teachings and their own religious practices, which, of course, the Roman Church deplored. Attempts to suppress such distortions led to uprisings such as the 1680 Pueblo

revolt that killed twenty-one priests and hundreds of Spanish colonists, although even the rebellious Pueblos eventually rejoined the Spanish as allies.

Explorers had to receive from the king a license that entitled the grantee to large estates and a percentage of returns from the expedition. From the estates, explorers carved out ranches that provided an agricultural base and encouraged other settlers to immigrate. Then, after the colonists had founded a mission, the Spanish government established formal forts (presidios). The most prominent of the presidios dotted the California coast, with the largest at San Diego. Royal governors and local bureaucrats maintained the empire in Mexico and the Southwest with considerable autonomy from Spain. Distance alone made it difficult for the Crown to control activities in the New World.

A new culture accompanied the Spanish occupation. With intermarriage between Europeans and Indians, a large mestizo population (today, referred to as Mexican or Hispanic people) resulted. It generally adopted Spanish culture and values.