

## **The Meaning of America**

*Christopher Columbus*

1493 Correspondance

**Quotation:** "They have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they capable of using them"

....The people of this island [Hispaniola] and of all the other islands which I have found and seen, or have not seen, all go naked, men and women, as their mothers bore them, except that some women cover one place with the leaf of a plant or with a net of cotton which they make for that purpose. They have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they capable of using them, although they are well-built people of handsome stature, because they are wondrous timid. They have no other arms than the arms of canes, [cut] when they are in seed time, to the end of which they fix a sharp little stick; and they dare not make use of these, for oftentimes it has happened that I have sent ashore two or three men to some town to have speech, and people without number have come out to them, as soon as they saw them coming, they fled; even a father would not stay for his son; and this was not because wrong had been done to anyone; on the contrary, at every point where I have been and have been able to have speech, I have given them of all that I had, such as cloth and many other things, without receiving anything for it; but they are like that, timid beyond cure. It is true that after they have been reassured and have lost this fear, they are so artless and so free with all they possess, that no one would believe it without having seen it. Of anything they have, if you ask them for it, they never say no; rather they invite the person to share it, and show as much love as if they were giving their hearts; and whether the thing be of value or of small price, at once they are content with whatever little thing of whatever kind may be given to them. I forbade that they should be given things so worthless as pieces of broken crockery and broken glass, and lace points, although when they were able to get them, they thought they had the best jewel in the world....

And they know neither sect nor idolatry, with the exception that all believe that the source of all power and goodness is in the sky, and in this belief they everywhere received me, after they had overcome their fear. And this does not result from their being ignorant (for they are of a very keen intelligence and men who navigate all those seas, so that it is wondrous the good account they give of everything), but because they have never seen people clothed or ships like ours.

## **Utilizing the Native Labor Force**

*Christopher Columbus*

1492 Journal Entries

**Quotation:** "With fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them"

Sunday, 14th of October

...these people are very simple as regards the use of arms, as your Highnesses will see from the seven that I caused to be taken, to bring home and learn our language and return; unless your Highnesses should order them all to be brought to Castile, or to be kept as captives on the same island; for with fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them....

Sunday, 16th of December

...your Highnesses may believe that this island (Hispaniola), and all the others, are as much yours as Castile. Here there is only wanting a settlement and the order to the people to do what is required. For I, with the force I have under me, which is not large, could march over all these islands without opposition. I have seen only three sailors land, without wishing to do harm, and a multitude of Indians fled before them. They have no arms, and are without warlike instincts; they all go naked, and are so timid that a thousand would not stand before three of our men. So that they are good to be ordered about, to work and sow, and do all that may be necessary, and to build towns, and they should be taught to go about clothed and to adopt our customs.

"Journal of the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus, 1492-1493," in E.G. Bourne, *The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot, 985-1503* (New York, 1906), 114, 145-146, 182

## **New World Fantasies**

*Thomas More*

1516 Book Excerpt

**Quotation:** "All slavery, and drudgery...is done by bondsmen"

....When I consider with myself and weigh in my mind the wise and godly ordinances of the Utopians, among whom with very few laws all things be so well and wealthily ordered, that virtue is had in price and estimation, and yet, all things being there common, every man hath abundance of everything.

....No household or farm in the country hath fewer than forty persons, men and women, besides two bondmen, which be all under the rule and order of the good man, and the good wife of the house, being both very sage and discreet persons.... For they dividing the day and the night into twenty-four hours, appoint and assign only six of those hours to work....

In this hall all vile service, all slavery, and drudgery, with all laboursome toil and business, is done by bondmen....

## **The Black Legend**

*Bartolomé de las Casas*

1542 Book Excerpt

**Quotation:** "Great atrocities are committed against the indigenous people"

New Spain [Mexico] was discovered in 1517 and, at the time, great atrocities were committed against the indigenous people of the region and some were killed by members of the expedition. In 1518 the so-called Christians set about stealing from the people and murdering them on the pretence of settling the area. And from that year until this--and it is now 1542--the great iniquities and injustices, the outrageous acts of violence and the bloody tyranny of these Christians have steadily escalated, the perpetrators having lost all fear of God, all love of their sovereign, and all sense of self-respect. Even now, in September 1542, the atrocities get worse by the day, it being the case, as we have said, that the infernal brutality and utter inhumanity of the acts committed have readily increased as time has gone on.

Among other massacres was one which took place in Cholula, a great city of some thirty thousand inhabitants. When all the dignitaries of the city and the region came out to welcome the Spaniards with all due pomp and ceremony, the priests to the fore and the high priest at the head of the procession, and they proceeded to escort them into the city and lodge them in the houses of the lord and the leading citizens, the Spaniards decided that the moment had come to organize a massacre (or "punishment" as they themselves express such things) in order to inspire fear and terror in all the people of the territory. This was, indeed the pattern they followed in all the lands they invaded: to stage a bloody massacre of the most public possible kind in order to terrorize those meek and gentle peoples. What they did was the following. They requested the local lord to send for all the nobles and leading citizens of the city and of all the surrounding communities subject to it and, as soon as they arrived and entered the building to begin talks with the Spanish commander, they were seized without anyone outside getting wind of what was afoot. Part of the original request was they should bring with them five or six thousand native bearers and these were mustered in the courtyards when and as they arrived. One could not watch these poor wretches getting ready to carry the Spaniards' packs without taking pity on them, stark naked as they were with only their modesty hidden from view, each with a kind of little net on his shoulders in which he carried his own modest store of provisions. They all got down on their haunches and waited patiently like sheep. Once they were all safely inside the courtyard, together with a number of others who were also there at the time, armed guards took up positions covering the exits and Spanish soldiers unsheathed their swords and grasped their lances and proceeded to slaughter these poor innocents. Not a single soul escaped.

From Cholula they made their way to Mexico City. On their journey, they were showered with thousands of gifts from the great king Montezuma who also sent some of his men to stage entertainments and banquets for them on the way. When they reached the Great Causeway which runs for some two leagues right up to the city itself, they were greeted by Montezuma's own brother and many local dignitaries bearing valuable gifts of gold, silver and apparel from the great lord.

Yet that same day, or so I am reliably informed by a number of eye-witnesses, the Spaniards seized the great king unawares by means of a trick and held him under armed guard of eighty soldiers, eventually putting him in irons.

....The pretext upon which the Spanish invaded each of these provinces and proceeded to massacre the people and destroy their lands--lands which teemed with people and should surely have been a joy and a delight to any true Christian--was purely and simply that they were making good the claim of the Spanish Crown to the territories in question. At no stage had any order been issued entitling them to massacre the people or to enslave them. Yet, whenever the natives did not drop everything and rush to recognize publicly the truth of the irrational and illogical claims that were made, and whenever they did not immediately place themselves completely at the mercy of the iniquitous and cruel and bestial individuals who were making such claims, they were dubbed outlaws and held to be in rebellion against His Majesty.

## **A Critique of the Slave Trade**

*Fray Tomas de Mercado*

1587 Book Excerpt

**Quotation:** "A thousand acts of robbery and violence are committed in the course of bartering and carrying off Negroes"

It is public opinion and knowledge that no end of deception is practiced and a thousand acts of robbery and violence are committed in the course of bartering and carrying off Negroes from their country and bringing them to the Indies and to Spain.... Since the Portuguese and Spaniards pay so much for a Negro, they go out to hunt one another without the pretext of a war, as if they were deer; even the very Ethiopians, who are different, being induced to do so by the profit derived. They make war on one another, their gain being the capture of their own people, and they go after one another in the forests where they usually hunt.... In this way, and contrary to all justice, a very great number of prisoners are taken. And no one is horrified that these people are ill-treating and selling one another, because they are considered uncivilized and savage. In addition to the pretext, of parents selling their children as a last resort, there is the bestial practice of selling them without any necessity to do so, and very often through anger or passion, for some displeasure or disrespect they have shown them.... The wretched children are taken to the market place for sale, and as the traffic in Negroes is so great, there are Portuguese, or even Negroes themselves, ready everywhere to buy them. There are also among them traders in this bestial and brutal business, who set boundaries in the interior for the natives and carry them off for sale at a higher price on the coasts or in the islands. I have seen many acquired in this way. Apart from these acts of injustice and robberies committed among themselves, there are thousands of other forms of deception practiced in those parts by the Spaniards to trick and carry off the Negroes finally as newly imported slaves, which they are in fact, to the ports, with a few bonnets, gewgaws, beads and bits of paper under which they give them. They put them aboard the ships under false pretenses, hoist anchor, set sail, and make off towards the high seas with their booty.... I know a man who recently sailed to one of those Islands and, with less than four thousand ducats for ransom, carried off four hundred Negroes without license or registration.... They embark four and five hundred of them in a boat which, sometimes, is not a cargo boat. The very stench is enough to kill most of them, and, indeed, very many die. The wonder is that twenty percent of them are not lost.

J.A. Saco, *Historia de la Escalvitud de la Raza Africana*, Tomo II, pp. 80-82

## A Rationale for New World Colonization

*Richard Hakluyt*

1584 Essay

**Quotation:** "All our...trades in all Europe...may...[count] for little... [compared with] America"

...All the commodities of all our old decayed and dangerous trades in all Europe, Africa, and Asia...may in short space [count] for little or nothing [compared with]...that part of America which lieth between 30 and 60 degrees of northerly latitude, if by our slackness we suffer not the French or others to prevent us....

For all the statutes that hitherto can be devised, and the sharp execution of the same in punishing idle and lazy persons, for want of sufficient occasion of honest employments, cannot deliver our commonwealth from multitudes of loiterers and idle vagabonds. Truth it is that through our long peace and seldom sickness (two singular blessings of Almighty God) we are grown more populous than ever heretofore; so that now there are...so many, that they can hardly live one by another, nay rather they are ready to eat up one another; yea many thousands of idle persons are within this realm, which having no way to be set on work, be either mutinous and seek alteration in the state, or at least very burdensome to the commonwealth and often fall to pilfering and thieving and other lewdness, whereby all the prisons of the land are daily pestered and stuffed full of them, where either they pitifully pine away or else at length are miserably hanged, even 20 at a clap out of some jail. Whereas if this voyage [to the New World] were put in execution, these petty thieves might be condemned for certain years in the western parts, especially in Newfoundland, in sawing and felling of timber and masts of ships, and deal boards; in burning of the firs and pine trees to make pitch, tar, rosin, and soap ashes; in beating and working of hemp for cordage; and, in the more southern parts, in setting them to work in mines of gold, silver, copper, lead, and iron; in dragging for pearls and coral; in planting of sugar canes, as the Portugales [Portuguese] have done in Madeira; in maintenance and increasing of silk worms for silk, and in dressing the same; in gathering of cotton whereof there is plenty; in tilling of the soil there for grain; in dressing of vines whereof there is great abundance for wine; olives, whereof the soil is capable, for oil; trees for oranges, lemons, almonds, figs, and other fruits, all which are found to grow there already;...in building of forts, towns, churches; in powdering and barrelling of fish, fowls, and flesh, which will be notable provision for sea and land; in drying, sorting, and packing of features, where of may be had there marvelous great quantity.....

In sum, this enterprise will minister matter for all sorts and states of men to work upon; namely, all several kinds of artificers, husbandmen, seamen, merchants, soldiers, captains, physicians, lawyers, divines, cosmographers, hydrographers, astronomers, historiographers; yea, old folks, lame persons, women, and young children, by many means...shall be kept from idleness, and be made able by their own honest and easy labour to find themselves without surcharging others.

Richard Hakluyt, "A Discourse on Western Planting," *Maine Historical Society Collections*, 2nd Ser., *Documentary History of the State of Maine* (Cambridge, 1877), II, 36-41