The Impact of the Encounter on the Americas and Europe

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INTRODUCTION

"The most important event after the creation of the world, excepting the incarnation and death of its creator, is the discovery of the Indies."
Francisco Lopez de Gomara
Chaplain-secretary of Hernando Cortés

"The discovery of America, and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of mankind."
Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*

". . . the most calamitous event in human history."
Cornelius De Pauw (paraphrase, 1768)

"The existence of America was one of the greatest disappointments in the history of Europe."
—C.S. Lewis

Although the foregoing quotes differ in emphasis, their writers would certainly agree that the encounter between peoples from the Eastern and Western Hemispheres dramatically changed the course of world history. In many ways, the arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere marked the beginning of the end for American civilizations of great achievement and variety and led directly to the largest and most tragic demographic collapse in human history. Meanwhile, for the Europeans, the encounter with the Americas provided an immense opportunity to expand, to gain increased influence, and to harness sources of wealth unforeseen by the Columbian voyagers. Further, the combination of the existence of the Americas and their early depopulation resulted in the European decision to enslave and import Africans to labor on the plantations and in the mines of America, thus expanding to America the terrible policy that would rip more than 10 million Africans from their homelands. Thus, one of the results of the encounter was the growth of history's most massive trade in humans, a trade intimately linked to the transformation of the Atlantic world after 1492.[1] The wealth generated from the Americas, largely as a result of the labor of indigenous and African peoples and the Americas' natural bounty, flowed to Europe and fundamentally changed its future. Thus much of world history in the past 500 years has followed in the wake created by Columbus' voyages, for Columbus, while searching for part of his known world, stumbled upon—and initiated the destruction of—the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Although it was ambivalent and painful, the birth of the modern world took place with the European expansion to the Americas, Africa, and Asia. These encounters in the colonial centuries brought into contact two cultural universes that struggled with each other for supremacy, influence, or mere survival; reproduced with each other; and ultimately, in the Americas, disappeared into the background as the fruit of their desires and the society of their hopes and fears moved to center stage. Everywhere that cultures met, all parties were forced to reassess their commonly held opinions concerning the nature of humanity and civil society. In so doing, they initiated the modern idea that humanity is everywhere different and yet everywhere the same.

The following essay will attempt to do justice to the profound impact that the encounter between two worlds had for world history in general and for the specific lifelines of those people who came into direct contact with each other. As such, close attention will be paid to the overall biological results of the encounter and its impact for both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres—all of which will underscore the great interdependence between the two worlds begun by Columbus' voyage.

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THE IMPACT OF THE ENCOUNTER OF TWO WORLDS

The Biological Impact

Alfred Crosby, in *The Columbian Exchange*, argues that the biological changes were the most important transformation brought about by the Columbian voyages.[2] The contact initiated by Columbus, unlike the earlier known contacts made by the Norsemen and possible contacts from Africa and Polynesia, became a permanent encounter between the two worlds—largely because Europe was, in 1492, ready and able to capitalize on the existence of the Americas. The result was that the two worlds, which to the European eye were stunningly different from each other in plant and animal appearances, started this "trend toward biological homogeneity" as one of the key changes in world history since the last ice age.[3]

The most tragic part of this trend toward biological homogeneity resulted from the mixing of human disease pools. The Columbian encounter brought together two worlds that, in their separation over the previous thousands of years, had experienced drastically different disease histories. While the Americas may have had more people than Europe (estimates range between 30-100 million for the Americas and 50-80 million in Europe)[4] the overall population of the Eastern Hemisphere was larger and diseases more prevalent. Europe, Africa, and Asia were the source of smallpox, measles, whooping cough, bubonic plague, malaria, diphtheria, amoebic dysentery, and influenza, all of which were unknown in the Americas—while an American disease, syphilis, was quickly spread eastward where it caused great suffering and death. The peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere had built up immunities to their own diseases to varying degrees, but American peoples had no immunity to the imported diseases and were struck down by the millions. Once continuous contact between the two hemispheres began, ". . . when Columbus brought the two halves of this planet together, the American Indian met for the first time his most hideous enemy: not the white man nor his black servant, but the invisible killers which these men brought in their blood and breath."[5] It is only in recent decades that we have begun to understand the appalling degree of death experienced by Native Americans in the decades after the encounter.

Unlike the negative results of the encounter of diseases between the two worlds, the results of the transplantation of plants and animals were more positive, widening the variety of plants available to fit into appropriate soil and climatic conditions, which contributed greatly to the world population boom in the centuries that followed.[6] The perennial problem in Europe of lack of food was substantially alleviated by the introduction of a number of American crops. The most important were corn (Indian maize), potatoes, beans (including green and lima beans), tomatoes, and various types of chili peppers (such as cayenne, paprika, and bell peppers). Not as important as these, but significant for other reasons, was the introduction of chocolate, sweet potatoes, peanuts, squashes of various kinds, cassava, vanilla, sassafras, and numerous nuts such as cashews.[7] The Eastern Hemisphere's animals and plants also had a significant impact in the Americas. Europe, Africa, and Asia had many more domesticated animals than the Americas, including cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, chickens, and horses, many of which were fattened on American grass and were consumed as milk and meat.[8] Indigenous Americans quickly accepted chickens, pigs, dogs, and cats, but were much less enthusiastic over the new plants—including wheat, chickpeas, melons, onions, radishes, salad greens, and grapes.[9]

These new animals multiplied rapidly, roamed widely, and actually did their part to destroy some of the indigenous peoples. The croplands of the sedentary Native American societies, vital to their sustenance, now partly fell victim to the appetites of the imported animals.[10] On the positive side, many of these animals spread far beyond the areas inhabited by Europeans, providing new sources of food and transportation, and the horse transformed the nomadic tribes of the American grasslands. While the horse initially was an important factor in the success of the conquistadors against indigenous warriors, over time its spread throughout the Americas helped many Native Americans become better able to resist the European advance into their territories.[11]

This transference of familar plants and animals was also crucial to inducing Europeans to move to the Americasa, as they preferred their traditional foods. In some places, foods of European origin are still seen as "upper class" foods, while foods of native origin are relegated to the lower classes. The attraction of the Americas to European immigrants was in part dependent upon the availability of familiar plants and animals.[12] In addition, it must be noted that the combination of plants and animals resulting from the encounter made the Europeans in the Americas extremely well fed, a factor that may have been a more significant motivator of immigration than more familiar factors such as the desire for freedom of religion.[13]

The Impact of the Encounter on Europe

The transcendent effect of the encounter on European politics was, no doubt, the transformation and shift in the centers of power from Italy and Germany to the

Iberian Peninsula, and from there, in the following centuries, to England, France, and the Low Countries.

The resulting demographic shifts caused by the lure and promise of wealth, food, fuel, and freedom from religious restrictions that the Americas represented involved relatively negligible percentages of national populations in any one year. But cumulatively these shifts had the effect of removing young adults in their years of greatest vigor from a Europe ravaged by war. Seventeenth-century southern and western Castile were two among many places that felt the drain in population.

By the end of the seventeenth century, more than three million immigrants, of whom 1.5 million were Africans imported as slaves, had entered the Americas. When these people confronted indigenous populations in the tens of millions, the racial mixture resulted in a social hierarchization, the net result of which suggests that "racial discrimination based simply on skin color appears to have developed principally in America."[14] And racial discrimination—along with tobacco and syphilis—is one of the Americas' saddest gifts to the world.

The Americas had a great impact on European trade and economics, an impact that necessitates their consideration as more than historical facts, but rather focuses on their transformation of everyday life.

Two American exports profoundly changed the economic circumstances of Europe and, eventually, the rest of the world: precious metals and new agricultural staples (as previously discussed).

Spain's massive importation of silver—rather than, as generally believed, gold—into the Continent's economy made this metal the new monetary standard in most nations of Western Europe. So great was the quantity of imported silver and gold that an unprecedented rise in commodity prices ensued. In Spain, prices rose in the sixteenth century from three and one-half to five times; France and England later experienced an only slightly smaller level of inflation. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the flood of precious metals subsided, but enough money was available to keep up with the increase in the production of goods (which had resulted from the increasingly monetized [currency-based] economy). Since wages lagged behind rising prices in France and England, though not in Spain, profits increased the incomes of entrepreneurs, thereby stimulating capital formation (the amassing of wealth). More capital became available for the purchase and use of expensive technological innovations and for agriculture, mining, housing, highways, canals, and, of course, colonization. Indeed, while Columbus did not find the sought-after route to Asia, the specie from America did make it possible for Europe to trade with the Far East on a much larger scale.[15] In the meantime, the number of employed laborers drawing wages increased, with the inevitable result that feudalism and the guild system atrophied dramatically.

The increased money economy led to a shift from subsistence and market agricultural production to commercial agriculture, with its accompanying specialization and intensive cultivation; the dawn of giant agri-business concerns had come. The net effect, of course, was increased food production, spurred further by the abundance of new crops borrowed from the Americas. In addition to the many food products previously discussed, other critical American products included timber (much needed for housing and ship building), furs, botanical medicines, tobacco, and cod from North America. Cod, in fact, became one of the most important sources of protein for Europeans. Some of these items were to change the economic landscape of a number of regions, as was the case with the introduction of corn into northern Portugal.

We would argue, with others, that the impact on Europe of its explorations, conquests, and colonization of the Americas precipitated no less a process than the rise of capitalism. Great profits flowed to Europe from plantations in the Americas, which were worked by enslaved Africans—and of course further European profits came from the huge African slave trade itself. The encounter with the Americas spurred economic development and growth, providing opportunities and profits for European entrepreneurs.[16] Ultimately, the wealth from the Americas acted as a catalyst to the coming of the Industrial Revolution, which itself ". . . left Europeans and their descendents overseas richer and with access to more power than the men and women of 1492 ever thought possible," and thus began creating the wide wealth disparities between nations that we now witness.[17]

Equally important to European science were the contributions of the explorations. Navigation techniques were foremost among these. Indeed, after 1492, Europeans—like the Chinese long before—were no longer trapped by a local navigational system that depended on terrestrial landmarks to keep from losing one's way. Meanwhile, European medicine did not fair as well; despite the many excellent drugs imported from the Americas, European ethnocentrism, skepticism, and general conservatism kept their use from becoming widespread. Only cinchona was widely accepted, and from this product, quinine was made, which delivered humanity from the clutches of malaria and thereby facilitated the European colonization of equatorial Africa and the Americas. On the other hand, European map making and the science of geography were, logically, dramatically transformed by the encounter with the

Americas. In fact, classical and medieval geographies were the first and most decisive casualties of the voyages, with the Renaissance emphasis on experience over authority being thoroughly vindicated. The French historian Marcel Bataillon summarized the phenomenon best when he pointed out that the Spaniards had "roamed over as much territory in the 70 years after 1492 as had been explored in the previous 1000 years by other Europeans."

The explorations and conquests moved the previously peripheral nations of Spain and England into the geographical, political, and economic center stage. The Italians continued to look eastward for a preferred route to the Indies and subsequently missed out on a piece of the American pie. Aside from obtaining Italian Somaliland on the Horn of Africa in the late nineteenth century, their efforts at colonization did not occur until the 1930s. As for the French and Germans, their second thoughts on the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were too little and too late to permit them a foothold beyond a few small Caribbean islands, and, for a while, a piece of the northern coast of South America and parts of North America. France's largest holding, Quebec—which spread west of the Appalachians along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers—was lost to the English in 1763 at the close of the Seven Years War (called the French and Indian War in America, 1754-1763) and the vast Louisiana territory was transferred to Spain.

It should be noted that as late as 1560 French descriptions of the world could be found that failed to mention the Americas. Like the so-called Copernican "revolution," which took 100 years to be effectively noticed, European perspectives on the Americas did not dissipate from one day to the next. The encounter with the Americas, after all, could hardly compete with the Reformation, the Turkish threat, the aesthetic renovation of Rome, or the ethnocentrism of the then isolated and peripheral appendage of Asia we know as Europe. The popularity of Amerigo Vespucci's accounts of his expeditions to the Western Hemisphere and his assertion that it was not an island but a land mass all helped to put his name on a map as early as 1507. In spite of the fact that the Spanish avoided the term *America*, it held on with justifiable tenacity.

The encounter between the two worlds also had significance in the cultural and ideological spheres. In the areas of philosophy, anthropology, and law, the central questions posed by the Americas for the Europeans, from Cortés and Bernal Diaz del Castillo to the Emperor himself, could be summarized as follows. First, what is the nature of the indigenous peoples and to what extent is a reanalysis of human nature necessary in light of their variety of institutions, religions, and customs? Second, how were these peoples to be assimilated into European culture (i.e., how should European social and political culture and Christianity be implanted)? Third, how is the legitimacy of European sovereignty and economic supremacy to be established? It is worth noting that these questions of conscience and public policy were never significantly discussed by others but the Spanish who, as Bernal Diaz—the conqueror-historian who fought with Cortés—remarked, "were here to serve God and get rich"—but not necessarily, of course, in that order.

The Renaissance scholars Marsilio Ficino and Pico de la Mirandolla had already gone a long way toward conciliating pagan and Christian forms. The strange idea that a "savage" could be good without being compelled by law or, indeed, civilization, which these scholars anticipated, culminated in the sixteenth century with the French philosopher Montaigne's belief that there is nothing barbarous or savage about the indigenous Americans

> except that we all call barbarous anything that is contrary to our habits. These nations, then, seem barbarous in the sense that they have received very little molding from human intelligence and are still very close to their original simplicity. They are still governed by natural laws and very little corrupted by our own.

Montaigne concludes:

> They are still in such a state of purity that it sometimes saddens me to think we did not learn of them earlier, at a time when there were men who were better able to appreciate them than we.

Here, of course, we see one reaction to the view that an indigenous American is a happy or noble savage and a moral giant compared to the corrupt European.

More important than this opinion, which needless to say was not shared by most Europeans, was the fact that the great variety of peoples and customs found in the Americas led to a relativism that contributed to the erosion of the idea that the classical Greek and Roman worlds were the absolute models and that every age is the progressive result of the one that precedes it. Still, this tolerance, this encroachment of relativism, was always limited and usually superficial in contrast to the prevailing humanist and Renaissance commitment to the European as the model of civility. All the charitable ideals surrounding the noble savage theme could not withstand ethnocentrism and lack of religious toleration, with the fear and hostility these engender toward foreigners and all things different.

The specific debate on the nature of the American peoples as carried on by the Spanish intellectuals culminated with papal bulls asserting the humanity of

the indigenous peoples and their capacity to appreciate the tenets of Christianity. As for the question concerning the mode by which they would be assimilated into European culture, the Spanish Counter-Reformation response, precipitated by fear of the Protestant heresies, could be no other than that the indigenous cultures were to be destroyed and the indigenous Americans assimilated to the extent they showed a capacity to function within European polity. Only a few voices, such as Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas, cried out against this resolution.

A discussion of the polemic surrounding the legitimacy of European sovereignty leads us directly to the impact of the discoveries on European law. Even before he set foot in Mexico, Cortes was aware (see the *Requerimiento*) that his was an age busy producing a considerable body of serious writing on the rights and wrongs of conquest and colonial empire-building and the proper treatment of conquered and subject peoples. Again, it was mostly the Spaniards, in contrast to other European colonial powers, who found the need to discuss social justice issues. The most important legal innovations that evolved from these discussions centered on international and public law. Leading the way was a Spanish theologian and jurist named Francisco de Vitoria.

Prior to Vitoria, most theoretical work in international law had centered, not surprisingly, on warfare, particularly on the rules of war and the premises underlying a just war. But America presented with commanding realism a series of problems crying out for juridicial resolution: how were the native peoples to be treated, why should their land and labor be seized, and what laws should apply to them? Vitoria's contributions began with his implicit rejection of Machiavelli's "politics of power." Victory at war was to be considered limited, subject to the justness of the causes leading to war and respect for the common humanity of the vanquished. In place of universal empire or autonomous states, he proposed the notion, which had been anticipated by others, that states form a community of human beings where mutual respect is to be accorded to all and—in contrast to Machiavelli—where all individuals are free to communicate among themselves without being hampered by their leaders. Therefore, he proposed the universal rights of travel, citizenship, trade, and the declaration of the seas and running waters as public areas.[18] Vitoria thereby opened the way for international law to be secularized. He supported religious toleration by denying the right to Christianize by force, and he attacked the belief that lack of faith was grounds enough to forfeit sovereignty and dominion over land. That the arguments advanced in Spain by Las Casas, Vitoria, and others were more than mere intellectual exercises is attested to by the fact that the Crown issued the New Laws of 1542 and many other regulations that, however much they were disregarded in the Americas, established the Crown as a moderating force against the more extreme and systematic abuses of the colonists.

In the area of the general public law, the encounters and conquests contributed to upholding Vitoria's position, which opposed the Pope's claims to temporal jurisdiction or to being both spiritual and temporal master over the whole earth, including the realms of nonbelievers. The Pope's spiritual competence extended only to Christians, declared Vitoria, and he has temporal jurisdiction only in so far as it is necessary for the control of religious matters. As for the ruling monarch, in direct contrast to Machiavelli's position, which was probably unknown to Vitoria, he stated that the consent of the people is necessary to legitimize the sovereignty of the king. While these ideas were also motivated by events beyond those precipitated by the encounters between the two worlds, their effect on Vitoria's thought is undeniable. Nor can one deny that the Roman Catholic doctrine of marriage was profoundly influenced by the problems presented by the native marriage customs. And as for ideas emerging from what became the United States, its one early contribution to European law was the idea of the right to counsel, although admittedly this influence was slow in coming, since England did not adopt this innovation until 1836.

Although it took Europe more than a century to focus its cultural lenses enough to make out a coherent image of the Americas, some political concepts and cultural notions imposed themselves on European consciousness and institutions with alarming speed. One belief, the consequences of which were devastating for North American natives, was the idea of America as a land of empty spaces lying fallow. The English philosopher John Locke generalized this belief into a type of justification for appropriating whatever the Europeans considered unused land for "the benefit of mankind":

> God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it to them for their benefit . . . it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational . . .[19]

Of course, the reality was far removed from the notion that the Americas were empty, and, as Francis Jennings argued in *The Invasion of America*, "the American land was more like a widow than a virgin. Europeans did not find a wilderness here; rather, however involuntarily, they made one."[20]

America as a land innocent of any previous teaching of the gospel represented a laboratory where the assumptions regarding natural law could be tested. No wonder that America became the setting for a series of utopia

texts such as Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Tommaso Campanella's *Civitas solis* (1623), and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627). Even for Shakespeare, America was a testing ground where the premises of human nature could be tried beyond the confines of revelation. Though modeled after an English peasant, Caliban, in *The Tempest,* is meant to be, after all, an indigenous American. Here, in a world free from European conventions but wealthy beyond all dreams, the wildest hopes of a shrunken Europe were nourished. John Rastell, who referred to the Western Hemisphere as *America* as early as 1519, summed it up when he pictured America as "an avenue to riches and glory." And Sir Walter Raleigh was not far behind when he declared his intention to sail to America "to see new worlds for gold, for praise, for glory."

In contrast to Montaigne, Thomas More, and Amerigo Vespucci, who had earlier envisioned America as a good place because it was free from European culture and polity, the English philosophers John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, along with most Spaniards, saw in America not a symbol of freedom but an invitation to exploit and appropriate, and thereby to implant European customs on a new soil. Locke and Hobbes imagined America as not so much a "New World" but as a larger Europe. After all, when Hobbes referred to America, it was only to point out that there, where a state of nature existed, life was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short . . . for savage people in many places of America have no government at all." Locke, unlike Hobbes, learned from America that communism, rather than anarchy, was the true state of human beings in nature. This insight would forever plague the English perception of North American native peoples, all of whom would be attacked as ignorant of the virtues of private property and personal wealth.

Unfortunately, in the areas of art and literature, the impact of the Americas was thoroughly blunted, as indigenous aesthetics failed to influence European artists. Nonetheless, Bernal Diaz compared the native artists in Mexico to Pedro Berruguete and Michaelangelo. But Europeans did little more than indiscriminately mix indigenous American motifs. Through their humanist spectacles they distorted native elements: in European scenes of the Americas, Brazilian Indians are found in Mexico, Patagonians (natives of southern Argentina) are located in central New York, Florida Indians wield Brazilian clubs, Natchez Indians in Louisiana use a North Carolina temple, Pocahontas wears a (Brazilian) Tupinamba feather costume, and the Aztecs live in Renaissance castles. The classical images along with the Oriental and African were transferred to the Americas, and as a consequence, the average European's image of the Americas' indigenous peoples, landscapes, customs, and languages were but a faint echo of reality—200 years after Columbus set foot on Hispaniola! Nonetheless, one very effective influence on European art was the rise of collectionism and the "invention" of museums as a result of the influx of American and Egyptian artifacts into the homes of wealthy Europeans. America, however, soon became a common motif, though greatly distorted, in European literature ranging from Edmund Spencer's *Faerie Queene* to Shakespeare's Brave New World in *The Tempest*—to say nothing of Spanish letters including Cervante's *Don Quixote.*

Lastly, much could be said in the areas of religion and language. In summary, the discoveries made Christianity a truly catholic faith, that is, if not universal at least disseminated worldwide, as the Spaniards proved willing to force their religion on the indigenous peoples they encountered while failing to respect indigenous religions. To do this, new methods of missionization were developed, and theological questions had to be answered (not the least significant of which were the possibility of salvation for innocent pagans, the origin of the native peoples, and the role of the devil as the originator of idolatry). Furthermore, in that fateful year, 1492, the first grammar of a European language was published, thus making possible the codification and systematic study of indigenous languages by the missionaries. This study resulted in many theoretical and practical contributions to linguistics. In addition, the voyages assisted in the linguistic convergence of peoples in Europe who had been slowly separating as a result of the fragmenting nature of increased usage of Vulgar Latin and the regional vernaculars, of which Columbus' writings are an excellent example. In his writings, one can note the mixture of Portuguese, Spanish, Genoese, Latin, and the new American lexicon. The obvious linguistic consequences, such as the introduction of hundreds of words into European languages, are eclipsed by the one transcendent effect of the encounter with the Americas: in the same way that it universalized Christianity, it made of English and Spanish significant political and international languages, in contrast to Italian or German. And as for Portuguese, today it would be only slightly less restricted in the world scene than Italian were it not for the Americas.

So much for the impact on Europe of its explorations, conquests, and colonization of the Americas. Significant as these were—indeed, as noted, it probably led to the rise of capitalism—the encounter was slow in being felt and even slower in becoming a central concern. The average European's beliefs, customs, and lifestyle were not dramatically affected by the Americas in the first centuries following Columbus's voyages. However, the reverse was the case for the peoples of the Americas.

The lives of all of them were to be impacted, with frequently dreadful and deadly results, and transformed beyond recognition within one century. It is to this theme that we now turn.

The Impact of the Encounter on the Americas

The historian Thomas H. Greer, the typical spokesperson for the European perception of American events, asserted that:

> By an accident of history, the explorations took place at a time when the Europeans held decisive technological advantages over the peoples of the rest of the world. Nothing in the history of world relations has proved more fateful than this far-flung (and unequal) encounter between Europe and the other continents.[21]

We propose an alternative interpretation that is more ethnographically precise and less ethnocentric.

First, we note an important correction. In 1492, both the Chinese and the Moslems were as well-poised technologically as the Europeans to venture out to the Americas. One of the most fateful historical puzzles is why one of them did not initiate the explorations to the Western Hemisphere, especially since the Chinese had already sailed open waters to East Africa. The answer to this puzzle may lie in the fact that while the Europeans were desperately interested in gaining a secure route to the spices of the East, both the Moslems and Chinese had other priorities. The Moslems already controlled the land routes to Asia and were focusing on expanding their power into India, Java, and southeastern Europe, while the Chinese turned their interests to affairs internal and close to home. Indeed, although the Chinese admiral Cheng Ho had, between 1405 and 1433, made seven long-distance voyages with large fleets, in 1436—for internal reasons, related partly to the defense of the northern border—further construction of seagoing ships was banned and voyages ceased. Thus China, more than a full half-century ahead of the Europeans in seagoing experience, turned inward, rejecting the opportunities that the maritime horizon might offer.[22]

Rather than an accident of history, an accident of ecology and a totally different perspective on the nature of humanity and warfare were the primary causes for the differential effects the encounters had on the peoples who came in contact, at least in the core regions of the Andes and Mesoamerica.

First of all, Mesoamerica (Mexico and Central America) lacked draft animals, and other than dogs and turkeys, there were few animals fit for domestication. More important than this ecological deficit was the fact that the staple crop, corn (Indian maize), is a botanically more complicated plant to domesticate than wheat or some of the other key Old World cereals. Therefore, Western civilization, with its large domesticated animals and wheat (which is practically domesticated in its wild state), evolved in Mesopotamia, from the first experiments in domestication of plants to the emergence of small village life, in a matter of a few generations. However, in Mesoamerica, corn began to be domesticated about 5000 B.C., but small village life was not possible until approximately 1500 B.C. This huge gap in cultural evolution potential between these two regions, due to ecological factors, resulted in the sixteenth-century meeting of Iron Age Europeans and Bronze Age American Indians—who in fact had no bronze but whose social organization in the core city-states, unlike some of the bands on the peripheries, had long surpassed the sociocultural level of the late Stone Age (neolithic).

From the time of the first contacts until today, more than ecology and much more than geography separated indigenous Americans from Europeans. To most of the peoples of the Americas, the world, the cosmos, and the human race were integrally bound in a religious framework in which the sacred seemed to penetrate everything, making it difficult to draw a border around what was and was not profane. The dichotomy between secular and religious that so preoccupied late medieval and Renaissance thought would have been a totally alien contrast to indigenous intellectuals. The tangled web of religion spread over so many acts and institutions that the Aztec and Inca response to the Spanish intruders necessarily appears bizarre to the secular mind. Thus it is crucial, in order to understand the specific course of the encounter in the Americas, to fully appreciate the indigenous world view (which will be reconstructed in the Mesoamerican, South American, and Caribbean essays).

After noting these general differences between the two worlds, we can now turn our attention to some examples of the impact on the indigenous peoples of the initial encounters and colonization. Here we will limit discussion to the state-level civilizations like those of the Nahuas (the Aztecs and their Nahuatl-speaking neighbors), the Mayas, and the Quechuas (popularly referred to as Incas). Outside of the unintended holocaust resulting from the introduction of deadly diseases for which the peoples of the Americas had no immunities, the most important consequences of European contact were the socioeconomic and cultural transformations imposed on the indigenous communities.

The Spaniards were rarely successful at Europeanizing the natives they encountered who belonged to the contact-period generation. However, they managed both to restructure the indigenous society and, to the extent that Christian-Hispanic ideologies made meaningful inroads, to secularize and Hispanicize critical aspects of

the native world view. The relations of an indigenous American to other people and to what the West understands as nature became desacralized enough to erode many of the basic premises about the identity and character of the gods, the structure of the empirical world, and the ritual underpinnings of social intercourse. In short, the indigenous world was shaken to its deepest foundations when the contact-period generation gave way to the one that followed, one raised when Christian teachings and European sociopolitical ideals were having a significant impact on indigenous consciousness and social structure. Even the rituals of the deeply spiritual Franciscan friars, who shouldered the lion's share of the proselytizing efforts, seemed semantically thin when compared to the richly symbolic ceremonies that had accompanied almost every act of precontact life. It came as no surprise that time and time again the Christian priests complained that before the conquests the peoples of the Americas had shown more commitment to religious affairs than after the introduction of Christianity. Indeed, the Nahua, Maya, and Inca resisted Christian beliefs quite successfully, but the effects of the Church's institutions, practices, and ideals on their personal and public lives could neither be avoided nor overcome.

With the death and destruction of much of the indigenous nobility, especially the political, military, and religious leadership, the cultural traditions, which constituted the links that held together the city-state polities and alliances, collapsed, leaving in place only the local leaders and the customs and beliefs of the peasant communities. The latter were in turn affected by Christian practices and ideology so that new forms by which to understand the Spaniards, based on indigenous preconceptions, arose to replace the initial rejections and hopes that had characterized the first encounters. From a political perspective, what we observe is the remnants of the nobility demoted to the level of local administrators serving as intermediaries between colonial demands and local responses. Socioeconomically speaking, the majority of the indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, particularly where chiefdom and state-level forms of organization had existed, were initially massed together in *encomiendas*, grants of native labor made to soldiers and others as recompense for significant service to the Crown. These labor units, usually drawn from specified towns or hamlets, were responsible for the production of foodstuffs, the payment of tribute, the feeding of the Spaniards in the cities, mining duties, personal service for the *encomenderos*, and service on public works. The encomenderos who held grants were formally, if not always in practice, responsible for seeing to the Christianization and what they called the "civilization" of their charges. This system of forced labor was notoriously exploitive and oppressive, and it led, particularly in England, to the creation of the Black Legend: the English view of Spanish colonization as an inhuman series of wanton acts of destruction, torture, and murder.[23]

This anti-Spanish propaganda, which has contributed until the present to the formation of attitudes toward Hispanics by English-speaking people, was (and continues to be) countered by the pro-Spanish White Legend, which represents the conquests and colonization as ultimately fortunate events that made possible the introduction of Christianity (i.e., salvation) and "civilization" (European customs, institutions, practices, and beliefs). Both legends have much that is stridently incorrect or exaggerated, since the conquests and colonization led to a reality that cannot be described in simple terms. Yet today it is understandably the Black Legend that has dominated the thinking about these events common among many scholars, nationalist Latinos, pro-indigenous native peoples, and Latino indigenists who focus on the violence, death, and destruction the Spaniards wrought. Meanwhile, pro-Spanish intellectuals and others who see the Americas as fundamentally European communities tend to highlight the cultural achievements of the Spaniards while minimizing their abuses. It should be noted that the English formed their view of Spanish treatment of the peoples of the Americas prior to their own efforts at colonizing. They had convinced themselves that "the Cannibals to be sure would receive rough treatment; but those who would join with the English, whether the Cimarrons of the south or the good Indians of the north, would enjoy gentle government, civility, Christianity, superior technology, and abundance."[24] All too unfortunately, "at Roanoke in the winter of 1585-86, English plans and hopes for America had come up against their first serious encounter with the continent and its peoples. In that encounter, neither Englishmen nor native Americans lived up to expectations. Doubtless the expectations had been too high, but it is always a little sad to watch men lower their sights. And Roanoke was only the beginning."[25] Needless to say, after English efforts at colonization had begun and their own high-minded—and theoretical—intentions were compromised, the actual English devastation of indigenous life in North America suggests that England's continued use of the Black Legend was meant to incite anti-Spanish propaganda rather than serve as a reminder of what not to do.

The introduction of wheat, sheep, and cattle significantly affected indigenous food production to the point of causing widespread famines and the pricing of corn beyond the means of the depressed peasants. This weakening of the rural communities created additional space for Spanish inroads into the hinterland. However,

nothing contributed more to the Hispanization of the local communities than the demographic collapse of the indigenous peoples through epidemics of smallpox, measles, and whooping cough, along with the resulting famines and systematic practices of overwork accompanied by undernourishment. For instance, in less than a century after the initial conquests, the population of central Mexico plummeted—from a number ranging from 11,000,000 to 25,000,000 down to just over 1,000,000. This decline, coupled with the approximately 300,000 Spaniards who immigrated during the same time span and an almost equal number of enslaved Africans led to the formation of Hispanicized mestizo (Spanish-Indian) and a variety of mixed castes (Spanish-Indian-African) that eventually came to constitute the majority of the population. In the core areas of the Americas, this massive destruction of indigenous populations helped to push the indigenous cultural presence to the background of social, political, and cultural life. The extinction of dozens, if not hundreds, of indigenous languages—and the accompanying displacements and suffering implied by this—was one of the many casualties of this demographic decimation. Whole towns were destroyed in order to bury the dead in the rubble, as there were insufficient gravediggers to do the job.

In summary, every aspect of indigenous American life was affected by the encounters, some obviously more than others. In politics, law, and economics, the colonial impositions were overwhelmingly new and, beyond the more isolated, local cases, generally contrasted with ancient indigenous forms. And as could be expected, indigenous American geography was fundamentally modified. The secularization of formerly sacred mountains, rivers, canyons, and precipices implied a new cognitive and cultural landscape. Indigenous peoples, politically united under the overarching administration of the Spaniards, exchanged former hostilities and alliances for new ones and created new territorial boundaries and ethnic mixtures. For example, Tlaxcalans were sent to colonize both Guatemala and the far north of Mexico, and some indigenous people were sent to or immigrated to Peru and Spain. Indeed, some members of the family of Motecuhzoma and the Inca historian Garcilaso de la Vega made a new life in Europe.

New arts and crafts, as well as agricultural techniques such as plowing, were also introduced—with significant consequences. Meanwhile, many traditional occupations were driven underground and marginalized, including the work of priests and curers; were fully suppressed, including precontact political, judicial, and military posts; or died out from obsolescence, including manuscript painting, featherworking, jewelry making, and the production and maintenance of the religious paraphernalia of the many traditional cults. Much unemployment and underemployment, rootlessness, and alienation necessarily followed. But as the aesthetic tastes and practices changed, many indigenous people took up European trades that called for new tools and methods; as a result, by the second half of the sixteenth century, most indigenous crafts had been deeply influenced by European practices. In the fine arts, Renaissance concepts such as perspective, shading, and three-dimensionality supplemented the traditional two-dimensional line drawings. And of course, much of the complex world of indigenous symbolism and iconography was soon lost as artists trained in the indigenous styles died out or were Europeanized. On the language front, missionary scholars alphabetized the vernaculars into Latin script, abolishing most of the indigenous writing systems. And in the area of medicine, the religious context of most traditional American practices drove the missionaries to end many useful curing rituals and to avoid many ceremonial as well as pragmatic herbs. In contrast, native influence on colonial Spanish culture was circumscribed and less profound. Symbolic of this contrast is the introduction of cattle and sheep into the countryside versus the excessive use of diminutives in Mexican Spanish as a result of Nahuatl's use of the diminutive as an honorific.

In conclusion, it should now be clear that the voyage of Columbus set in motion forces that had the most profound impact upon the future history of all of the Earth's inhabitants. Separated by great oceans, with plants and animals unique to their own hemispheres, distinct disease experiences, and human cultural gulfs, the two separate worlds became tied together in a union that tremendously changed what otherwise would have been their futures. For better and worse, Columbus initiated a process that created an interdependent world, with the mixing of peoples and the Earth's biology taking place within an increasingly global economy.

ENDNOTES

1. Alfred Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians" (American Historical Association, 1987), p. 11 .
2. Alfred Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972), p. xiv.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
4. Alfred Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," p. 19; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987) p. 4.
5. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, p. 31, 37.
6. Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," pp. 18-19.
7. Jorge Klor de Alva, "The Ibero-American Experience (The Colonial Period: XV-XVIII Centuries)" in *1988 Conference Proceedings, of the Ibero-American Heritage Curriculum Project*, p. 21.
8. Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," p. 17.
9. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, p. 66 and p. 98.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
11. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, pp. 102 and 104.
12. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, pp. 106-107.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
14. Woodrow Borah, "The Mixing of Populations," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old,* Fredi Chlappelli, editor. Vol. 2. (Berkeley: University of California, 1976) p. 718.
15. Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," p. 14.
16. Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," pp. 14-16.
17. Crosby, "The Columbian Voyages, the Columbian Exchange, and Their Historians," p. 17.
18. Etienne Grisel, "The Beginnings of International Law and General Public Law Doctrine: Francisco de Vitoria's De Indiis Prior" in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, vol. I, p. 342.
18. Arthur J. Slavin, "The American Principle from More to Locke," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, Vol. 1, p. 158.
20. Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976) p. 30.
21. Thomas H. Greer, *A Brief History of Western Man* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) p. 240.
22. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000* , pp. 4-13.
23. William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558-1660* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1971)
24. Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975) p. 24.
25. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom*, pp. 42-43.