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Reviews

1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus. By Charles C. Mann. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. 466 pages. \$30.00 cloth.

In *1491*, Charles C. Mann knits a fascinating tapestry of peoples who inhabited the Western Hemisphere before sustained contact with Europeans, finding them more numerous and more sophisticated than most popular historians or authors of textbooks have ever supposed. “New” (as in Mann’s subtitle) is a relative term, however. As something of a newcomer to Native American studies, Mann is rarely first on the informational food chain. Henry Dobyns has been publishing on Native American historical demography since 1963, for example, so Mann’s detailed description of his revolutionary work is not really news to those who have been paying attention.

Mann’s precise combination of historical and scientific writing is very informative, especially regarding debates over such subjects as the number of people populating the Western Hemisphere in 1491. If Dobyns is correct in estimating that 90 to 112 million people populated the Western Hemisphere in 1491 and that about 90 percent subsequently died of imported diseases ranging from smallpox to the common cold, that is a death toll of 80 to 100 million people over a century and a half, the largest human holocaust in history and about 20 percent of the world’s population at that time. Mann brilliantly supports his thesis that Native Americans’ problem with Europe wasn’t a deficiency of civilization but vulnerability to imported diseases.

Francisco Pizarro, with 168 men and sixty-two horses, conquered the Incas with a little help from surprise and the collapse of a hierarchy and a great deal of aid from smallpox and other imported pathogens. Likewise, Hernán Cortés was ruthless and shrewd and acquired allies who had been oppressed by the Mexicas (Aztecs), but his small army would not have been able to subdue them without the devastation of disease.

Before the Spanish invasion, the Incas maintained the geographically largest empire in the world of that time, and they did it at high altitude in a more varied ecosystem than any other on Earth. The fact that Andean civilizations developed mainly on a diet of marine protein has challenged

the conventional assumptions of Old World archaeology, which held that organized cultures required a fertile land base and substantial agriculture. The Inca took advantage of steepness by harvesting food and other resources from many different altitudes.

A society without money or markets, the Inca strictly controlled their working population and constructed a hierarchal society in which present-day concepts of individual freedom had little meaning. This structure filled warehouses with food and cloth, however, and banished famine at a time when it was a principal cause of death in the Old World. Goods were distributed by government and kin networks, writes Mann, rather than markets.

Much of Mann's narrative centers in Mesoamerica, the Andes, and the Amazon, with briefer visits to the Mounds-building peoples of the Mississippi Valley and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois). Mann describes the idea of the Iroquois as a formative influence on democracy that is now two or more decades old. In a coda titled "The Great Law of Peace," Mann also mentions Sally Wagner's research on the Iroquois and feminism and Barbara A. Mann and Jerry Fields's work (published in this journal almost a decade ago) that places the founding date of the Confederacy at 1142 CE.

While he is generally accurate, Mann does make an occasional historical error. He writes that Benjamin Franklin met with the Haudenosaunee in 1744 (presumably at the Lancaster treaty council). Franklin actually did not meet with the Iroquois as a diplomat until 1753, at the Carlisle treaty conference. What he did in 1744 (and on other occasions from the 1730s to the 1760s) was print treaty proceedings.

Mann concludes his book with an eloquent salute to cultural amalgamation: "Everywhere that liberty is cherished—Britain to Bangladesh, Sweden to Soweto—people are children of the Haudenosaunee and their neighbors. Imagine—here let me now address non-Indian readers—somehow meeting a member of the Haudenosaunee from 1491. Is it too much to speculate that beneath the swirling tattoos, asymmetrically trimmed hair, and bedizened robes, you would recognize someone much closer to yourself, at least in certain respects, than your own ancestors?" (337). Many people around the world have come to recognize just this. In the last year I've lectured on these ideas at the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland, signed a contract for *Exemplar of Liberty* (originally published in 1991) in Japanese, and seen a detailed book on the subject published in German.

Mann also writes incisively about the Western Hemisphere's linguistic diversity. Roughly 1,200 languages were spoken in North and South America in 1491 in perhaps 180 linguistic families; eighty-six languages in five to fifteen families were spoken in the area now called California alone, making it comparable to all of Europe, where people speak languages in only four families. Juxtaposing linguistic diversity with assertions from the Clovis Point crowd that Native Americans have been in the hemisphere only about ten thousand years, Mann asks how so many languages could have evolved in so short a time. This is a good question and hardly a new one. Thomas Jefferson, who was a student of America's indigenous languages, asked the same question before 1800. Jefferson collected information on Native American

languages all his adult life; after his second term as president ended in 1808, he was ready to write about it. His source material was being shipped from the White House to Monticello when thieves set upon the boat carrying them on the Potomac River. Unhappy that they found only paper, the thieves threw Jefferson's priceless notes, which were worth no money, into the river.

Mann indicates more than once that the story he tells here is a radical recast of the staid descriptions of most Native Americans in many schoolbooks even today, in which a few proto-Indians chased large mammals across the Bering land bridge perhaps eight thousand to ten thousand years ago. This image was popularized in 1834 (four years after the Removal Act was signed by Andrew Jackson) by the historian George Bancroft, who wrote that pre-Columbian North America was "an unproductive waste. . . . Its only inhabitants were a few scattered tribes of feeble barbarians, destitute of commerce and of political connection" (13). Bancroft's convenient intellectual rationale justified the seizure of land without guilt by members of a culture raised on assumptions of "development" and the "highest and best" use of land.

Mann describes Natives of the Beni region in the southwest Amazon Valley (present-day northeastern Bolivia) constructing vast arrays of earthworks linked by causeways, thickly populated by people who harvested the trees and fished the rivers from large arrays of weirs. Before the arrival of Columbus, many more people lived in the Americas than in Europe, Mann asserts, and they often were healthier than many Europeans, having, until Europe brought its plagues to these shores, "none of the pox scars or rickety limbs common on the other side of the Atlantic" (44). Natives in Amazonia were, writes Mann, "in the midst of terra-forming the Amazon when Columbus showed up and ruined the whole thing" (311).

Indigenous Americans also often were "taller and more robust than those who wanted to move in" (44), according to Mann. William Wood, a contemporary observer, is quoted by Mann as having said that the Indians of New England were "more amiable to behold [though only in Adam's finery (i.e., naked)] than many a compounded fantastic [English dandy] in the newest fashion" (44). Many of the Europeans of the early 1600s hadn't taken a bath in their lives and, in point of fact, thought that regular bathing could harm their health.

The Bering Strait theory has been taking its lumps lately, not in the least from discoveries by Thomas Dillehay of the University of Kentucky (and others) suggesting that the oldest-known indigenous settlements in the Americas date back at least thirty thousand years—and that they are in present-day Chile, about as far as one can get from the Bering land bridge and still occupy land in the Western Hemisphere. Monte Verde was excavated between 1977 and 1985; Dillehay and his colleagues published their findings in detail between 1989 and 1997. The late Vine Deloria Jr. also had been lobbing salvos at the Bering Strait theory for many years.

Even if much of his material is not today's news, Mann writes with a sense of discovery and an uncommon acuity that will engage a large non-Indian audience with new ways of looking at Native civilizations before Columbus. Not just anyone can carry this message to the readers of *Science*, *Nature*, *Atlantic*

Monthly, and the *New York Times*, and Mann has done all of this. Thus Mann's writing in general and this book in particular have immense sociopolitical value. Mann has synthesized many lines of research that point in similar directions, and he has done so in an unusually elegant, persuasive manner suitable for a large audience. This book is well worth reading because of his on-the-scenes descriptions and rich style, as well as his facility with scientific subjects (such as genetics and the effects of climate change on ancient societies), which he ably integrates with archaeology and history.

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American Indian Themes in Young Adult Literature. By Paulette F. Molin. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2005. 200 pages. \$40.00 cloth.

Arlene Hirschfelder's foreword to Paulette Molin's *American Indian Themes in Young Adult Literature* states that teachers, librarians, and publishers are not sufficiently familiar with American Indian literature to distinguish usefully authentic work from damagingly bad writing. Thus, many of the books selected for school curricula are full of stereotypes and outright misinformation. They misrepresent and trivialize American Indians and often are written by non-Natives who create characters who want to be Indian—and truly believe that they can be by the power of mere proximity. Such books only serve to perpetuate enduring and false myths about Native Americans. School curricula also rarely include ethnic literature at times other than Multicultural Awareness Week. Molin's book addresses these issues faced by teachers and librarians and by parents of young students as well. Her effort is a brave and necessary one by an acclaimed scholar in the field, but this book's usefulness is hindered by several shortcomings.

For instance, the first chapter, aptly titled "Wildest Imaginings about Indians: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction by Non-Indian Authors," fails to discuss several of the most popular books taught in American secondary schools. Molin makes no mention whatsoever of Forrest Carter's autobiography, *The Education of Little Tree*, which has sold more than 1.5 million copies and which some consider the prototype of young adult American Indian literature. It was later learned that Forrest Carter was a fraud. He was in fact Asa Carter, a former Klu Klux Klan leader and the ghostwriter of George Wallace's infamous "Segregation forever!" speech. *The Education of Little Tree* was not remotely autobiographical. Carter was not Cherokee, had no Cherokee grandparents, and had never attended an Indian boarding school (he was sent, rather, to an all-white orphanage). The book is full of stereotypes, yet it is still widely read in schools simply because many teachers and librarians are unaware of the controversy—indeed, just the other day, I had a discussion with an eighth-grade English teacher who was about to order *Little Tree* for his class. If Molin had addressed this important issue, perhaps authentic young-adult novels written by American Indians eventually would supplant