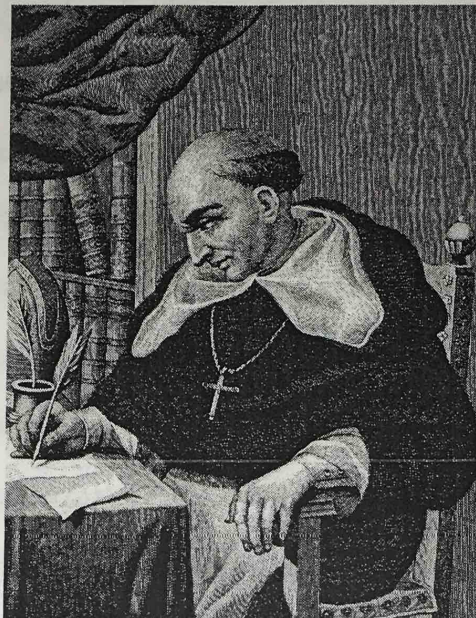


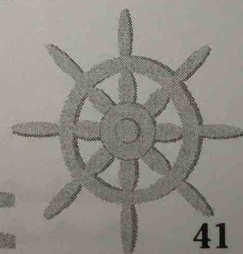
Bartolome de Las Casas' *The Tears of the Indians*

1542



North Wind Picture Archives

These Countreys are inhabited by such a number of people, as if God had assembled and called together to this place, the greatest part of Mankinde. This infinite multitude of people was so created by God, as that they were without fraud, without subtilty or malice, to their natural Governours most faithful and obedient. Toward the Spaniards whom they serve, patient, meek and peaceful, and who laying all contentious and tumultuous thoughts aside, live without any hatred or desire of revenge; the people are most delicate and tender, enjoying such a freble constitution of body as does not permit them to endure labour, so that the Children of Princes and great persons here, are not more nice and delicate then the Children of the meanest Countrey-man in that place. The Nation is very poor and indigent, possessing little, and by reason that they gape not after temporal goods, neither proud nor ambitious...



Bartolome de Las Casas' *The Tears of the Indians*

To these quiet Lambs, endued with such blessed qualities, came the Spaniards like most cruel Tygres, Wolves, and Lions, enrag'd with a sharp and redious hunger; for these forty years past, minding nothing else but the slaughter of these unfortunate wretches, whom with divers kinds of torments neither seen nor heard of before, they have so cruelly and inhumanely butchered, that of three millions of people which Hispaniola it self did contain, there are left remaining alive scarce three hundred persons.

That which led the Spaniards to these unsanctified impieties was the desire of Gold, to make themselves suddenly rich, for the obtaining of dignities & honours which were no way fit for them. In a word, their covetousness, their ambition, which could not be more in any people under heaven, the riches of the Countrey, and the patience of the people gave occasion to this their devilish barbarism. . . . The Indians never gave them the least cause to offer them violence, but received them as Angels sent from heaven, till their excessive cruelties, the torments and slaughters of their Countrymen mov'd them to take Armes against the Spaniards.

From *A Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, by Bartolome de Las Casas

Smallpox

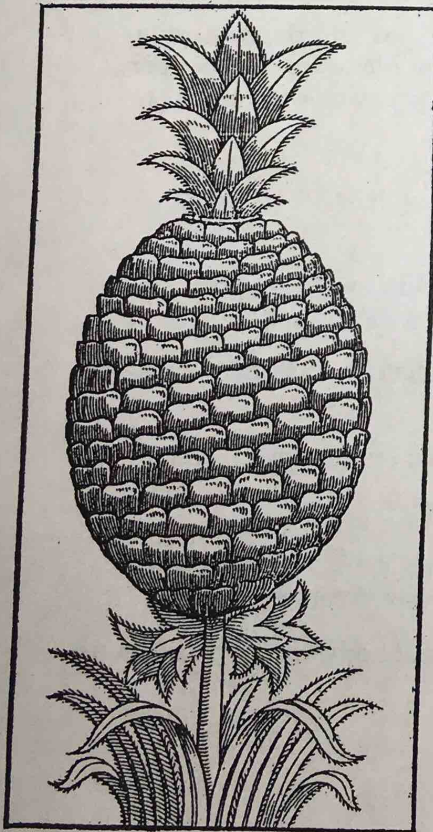
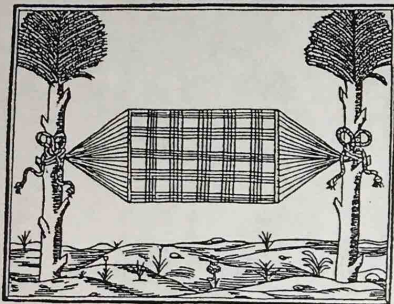
late 1500s



American Museum of Natural History

ALPHABET OF THE AMERICAS

Things that the Americas Gave to the World



- A avocado, amaranth, asphalt
- B buffalo (bison), beaver pelts, black bears, barbeque
- C canoe, corn, caucus, chocolate, cocoa, cassava, chicle, cotton, cashews, chayotes, catfish, chilis, cayenne, cranberries
- D democracy, dyes, dog sleds
- E ecology
- F fertilizer, food preservation
- G gum, guano deposits, grits
- H hammock, hominy, hickory nuts
- I impeachment, ipecac, igloo, iguana
- J jerky, Jerusalem artichoke
- K kidney beans, kayaks
- L libraries, long pants, llamas
- M milpa, moccasins, manioc, medicines, maple syrup
- N nuts, names (half of the state names in USA)
- O Oklahoma
- P potatoes, parrots, pumpkins, peanuts, popcorn, pineapple, passenger pigeon, pear cactus, parkas, peppers, pomegranate, passion fruit, papaya, pecan, paprika, persimmons, prairies
- Q quinine, quinoa
- R rubber, raccoons
- S squash, silver, sisal, sunflowers, sweet potatoes, succotash, sorghum molasses, snowshoes
- T turkey, tapioca pudding, tomatoes, tortillas, tobacco, tar, tamales, tipi
- U USA constitution (influenced by Iroquois)
- V vanilla
- W wild rice, witch hazel, words (several thousand words in English and Spanish), white potatoes, wigwam
- X xylophone (the marimba is of both African and American origin)
- Y yams
- Z zero, zucchini

THE FIRST FEW DAYS

The Journal of Christopher Columbus

Friday, October 12, 1492. In order that they might feel great friendship toward us, because I knew that they were a people to be delivered and converted to our holy faith by love rather than by force, I gave to some of them some red caps and some glass beads, which they hung round their necks, and many other things of little value. At this they were greatly pleased and became so entirely our friends that it was a wonder to see.

Afterwards they came swimming to the ships' boats, where we were, and brought us parrots and cotton thread in balls, and spears and many other things, and we exchanged them for other things, such as small glass beads and hawks' bells, which we gave to them. In fact, they took all and gave all, such as they had, with good will, but it seemed to me that they were a people very deficient in everything.

They all go naked as their mothers bore them, and the women also, although I saw only one very

young girl. And all those whom I did see were youths, so that I did not see one who was over thirty years of age; they were very well built, with very handsome bodies and very good faces. Their hair is coarse almost like the hairs of a horse's tail and short; they wear their hair down over their eyebrows, except for a few strands behind, which they wear long and never cut. Some of them are painted black, and they are the color of the people of the Canaries, neither black nor white, and some of them are painted white and some red and some in any color that they find. Some of them paint their faces, some their whole bodies, some only the eyes, and some only the nose.

They do not bear arms or know them, for I showed them swords and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are certain reeds, without iron, and some of these have a fish tooth at the end, while others are pointed in various ways.

They are all generally fairly tall, good looking and well proportioned. I saw some who bore marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to them to ask how this came about, and they indicated to me that people came from other islands, which are near, and wished to capture them, and they defended themselves. And I believed and still believe that they come here from the mainland to take them for slaves.

They should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since I see that they very soon say all that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no creed. Our Lord willing, at the time of my departure I will bring back six of them to Your Highnesses, that they may learn to talk.

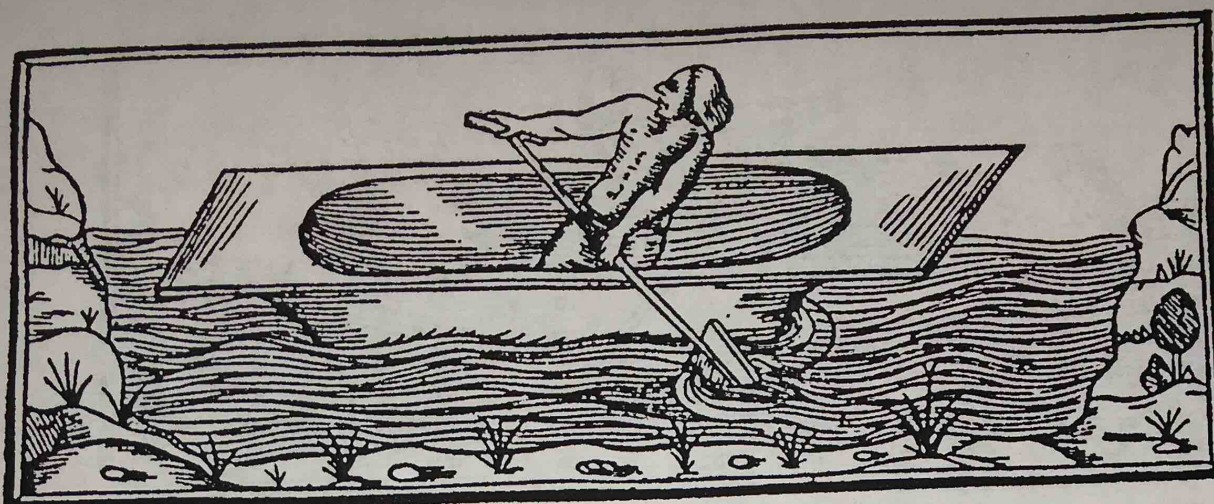
Saturday, October 13th. As soon as day broke, there came to the shore many of these men, all youths, as I have said, and all of a good height, very handsome people.... Their eyes are very lovely and not small. They are not at all black, but the color of Canarians.... Their legs are very straight, all alike; they have no bellies but very good figures.

They came to the ship in boats, which are made of a tree-trunk like a long boat and all of one piece.

COLUMBUS'S JOURNAL

READING DEEPLY

1. What attitudes does Columbus have about the people he encounters (the "Indians")? Summarize these and then give at least three quotes from his journal as evidence.
2. Based on what you read in his journal, what does it appear that Columbus cares about, what he wants? Give several quotes as evidence.
3. Based on Columbus's observations, what if anything can you tell about the kind of people the "Indians" are — what they value, how they treat other people, etc.? If you don't think you can tell anything about the Indians from Columbus's journal, give your reasons for why not.



Oviedo, 1547

European illustration of a Native dugout canoe.

They are very wonderfully carved, considering the country, and large, so that in some forty or forty-five men came. Others are smaller, so that in some only a solitary man came. They row them with a paddle, like a baker's peel, and they travel wonderfully fast. If one capsizes, everyone at once begins to swim and right it, baling it out with gourds which they carry with them.

They brought balls of spun cotton and parrots and spears and other trifles ... and they gave all for anything that was given to them. And I was attentive and labored to know if they had gold, and I saw that some of them wore a small piece hanging from a hole which they have in the nose, and from signs I was able to understand that, going to the south or going round the island to the south, there was a king who had large vessels of it and possessed much gold. I tried to make them go there, and afterwards saw that they were not inclined for the journey.

I decided to wait until the afternoon of the following day, and after that to leave for the southwest, for, as many of them indicated to me, they said that there was land to the south and to the southwest and to the northwest, and that those of the northwest often came to attack them. So I decided to go to the southwest, to seek the gold and precious stones....

The people also are very gentle and, since they long to possess something of ours and fear that nothing will be given to them unless they give something, when they have nothing, they take what they can and immediately throw themselves into the water and swim. But all that they do possess, they give for anything which is given to them, so that they exchange things even for pieces of broken dishes and bits of broken glass cups....

Sunday, October 14th. At dawn, I ordered the ship's boat and the boats of the caravels to be made

ready, and I went along the island in a north-north-easterly direction, to see the other part, which lay to the east, and its character, and also to see the villages. And I soon saw two or three, and the people all came to shore, calling us and giving thanks to God. Some brought us water, others various eatables: others, when they saw that I was not inclined to land, threw themselves into the sea and came, swimming, and we understood that they asked us if we had come from heaven. One old man got into the boat, and all the rest, men and women, cried in loud voices: "Come and see the men who have come from heaven; bring them food and drink."

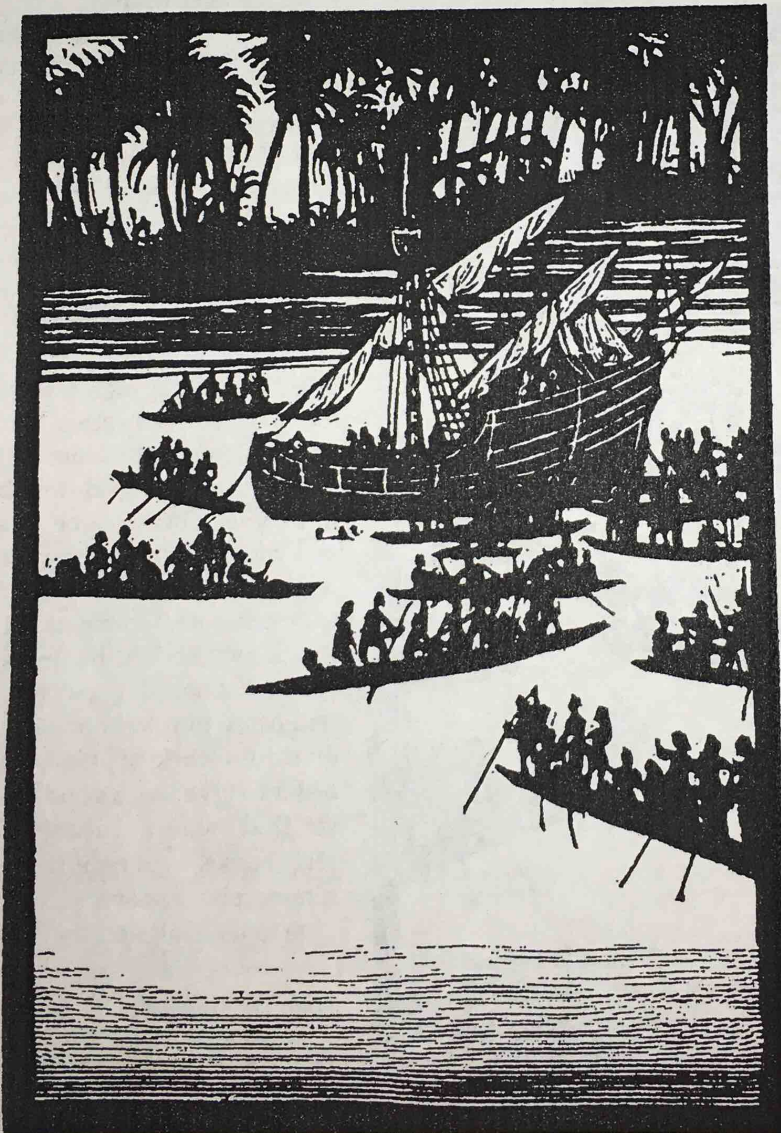
Many came and many women, each with something, giving thanks to God, throwing themselves on the ground and raising their hands to the sky, and then shouting to us that we should land. But I feared to do so, seeing a great reef of rocks which encircled the whole of that island, while within there is deep water and a harbor large enough for all the ships of Christendom, the entrance to which is very narrow....

And in order to see all this, I went this morning, that I might be able to give an account of all to Your Highnesses and also say where a fort could be built. I saw a piece of land, which is formed like an island although it is not one, on which there were six houses; it could be converted into an island in two days, although I do not see that it is necessary to do so, for these people are very unskilled in arms, as Your Highnesses will see from the seven whom I caused to be taken in order to carry them off that they may learn our language and return. However, when Your Highnesses so command, they can all be carried off to Castile or held captive in the island itself, since with fifty men they would be all kept in subjection and forced to do whatever may be wished....

Monday, October 15th. To this island I gave the name Santa Maria de la Concepcion, and about sunset, I anchored to learn if there were gold there, because those whom I had caused to be taken in the island of San Salvador told me that there they wore very large golden bracelets on the legs and arms.

I can well believe that all that they said was a ruse [a trick] in order to get away. It was nevertheless my wish not to pass any island without taking possession of it, although when one had been annexed [claimed], all might be said to have been. And I anchored and was there until today, Tuesday, when at dawn I went ashore in the armed boats and landed.

The people, who were many, were naked and of the same type as those of the other island of San Salvador; they allowed us to go through the island and gave us what we asked of them. And as the wind blew more strongly across from the southeast, I was unwilling to wait and went back to the ship.



A large canoe was alongside the caravel Niña, and one of the men of the island of San Salvador, who was in her, threw himself into the sea and went off in it, and during the evening before midnight the other threw himself overboard ... and went after the canoe, which fled so that there was not a boat that could have overtaken it, since we were a long way behind it. In the end it reached land and they left the canoe, and some of my company went ashore after them, and they all ran off like chickens....

These islands are very green and fertile and the breezes are very soft, and it is possible that there are in them many things, of which I do not know, because I did not wish to delay in finding gold, by discovering and going about many islands. And since these men give these signs that they wear it on their arms and legs, and it is gold because I showed them some pieces of gold which I have, I cannot fail, with the aid of Our Lord, to find the place it comes from.

Being in the middle of the channel between these two islands, that of Santa Maria and this large island, to which I gave the name Fernandina, I found a man alone in a canoe on his way from the island of Santa Maria to that of Fernandina. He was carrying with him a piece of their bread, about as large as the fist, and a gourd of water and a piece of brown earth, powdered and then kneaded, and some dried leaves, which must be a thing highly prized among them, since already at San Salvador they presented me with some of them....

He came alongside the ship. I made him come on board, as he asked to do so, and caused him to bring his canoe on board also and all that he had with him to be kept safe. I commanded that bread and honey should be given to him to eat, and something to drink, and thus I will carry him to Fernandina and will give him back all his belongings, in order to give him a good opinion of us, so that when, please God, Your Highnesses send here, those who come may receive honor and the Indians will give to us of all that they have.

From The Journal of Christopher Columbus, ed. by Cecil Jane (New York: Bramhall House, 1960). Paragraph breaks have been added.

COLUMBUS DAY

BY JIMMIE DURHAM

*In school I was taught the names
Columbus, Cortez, and Pizzaro and
A dozen other filthy murderers.
A bloodline all the way to General Miles,
Daniel Boone and General Eisenhower.*

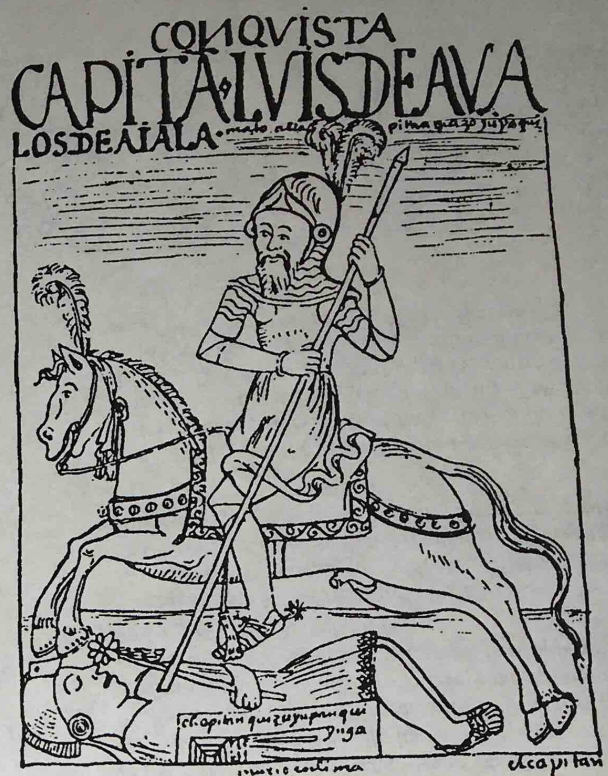
*No one mentioned the names
Of even a few of the victims.
But don't you remember Chaske, whose spine
Was crushed so quickly by Mr. Pizzaro's boot?
What words did he cry into the dust?*

*What was the familiar name
Of that young girl who danced so gracefully
That everyone in the village sang with her —
Before Cortez' sword hacked off her arms
As she protested the burning of her sweetheart?*

*That young man's name was Many Deeds,
And he had been a leader of a band of fighters
Called the Redstick Hummingbirds, who slowed
The march of Cortez' army with only a few
Spears and stones which now lay still
In the mountains and remember.*

*Greenrock Woman was the name
Of that old lady who walked right up
And spat in Columbus' face. We
Must remember that, and remember
Laughing Otter the Taíno who tried to stop
Columbus and was taken away as a slave.
We never saw him again.*

*In school I learned of heroic discoveries
Made by liars and crooks. The courage
Of millions of sweet and true people
Was not commemorated.*



*Let us then declare a holiday
For ourselves, and make a parade that begins
With Columbus' victims and continues
Even to our grandchildren who will be named
In their honor.*

*Because isn't it true that even the summer
Grass here in this land whispers those names,
And every creek has accepted the responsibility
Of singing those names? And nothing can stop
The wind from howling those names around
The corners of the school.*

*Why else would the birds sing
So much sweeter here than in other lands?*

Durham is of Cherokee heritage and an artist, poet, and native-rights activist. Columbus Day is from a book of defiant poems by the same name (Minneapolis: West End Press, 1983).

BROKEN SPEARS LIE IN THE ROADS

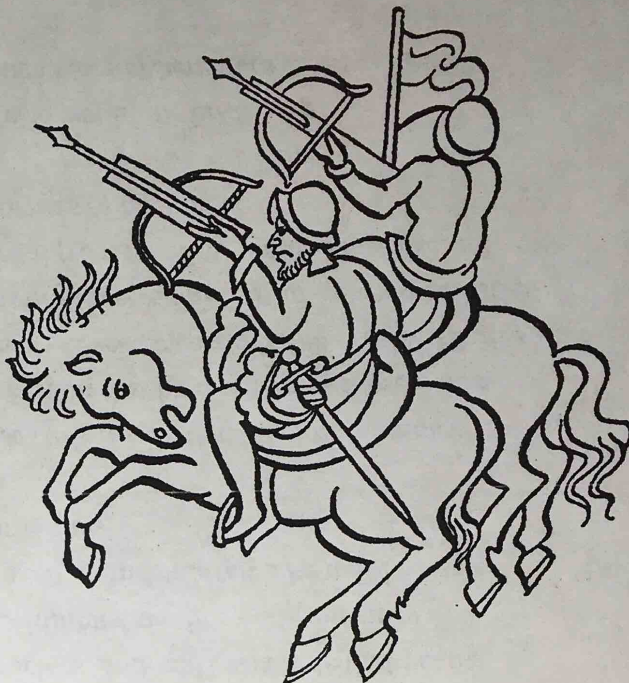
BY AN AZTEC POET

*Broken spears lie in the roads;
we have torn our hair in our grief.
The houses are roofless now, and their walls
are red with blood.*

*Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas,
and the walls are spattered with gore.
The water has turned red, as if it were dyed,
and when we drink of it,
it has the taste of brine.*

*We have pounded our hands in despair
against the adobe walls,
for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead.
The shields of our warriors were its defense,
but they could not save it.*

*We have chewed dry twigs and salt grasses;
we have filled our mouths with dust
and bits of adobe;
we have eaten lizards, rats and worms....*



This song of sorrow was written by an Aztec chronicler describing the conquest of Tenochtitlán, the great capital city of the Aztecs located on a low-lying island (where Mexico City stands today). The city had at least a quarter of a million inhabitants, with great causeways across the surrounding lake, aqueducts to bring in drinking water, canals, drawbridges, temples, towers, flat-topped pyramids, and a great central marketplace.

The Spaniards led by Hernando Cortez entered the city in November 1519 looking for gold; they remarked that they had never seen a place so well regulated and arranged. In August, 1521, they sacked the city, leaving it in ruins.

*The poem is from the dramatic and very readable illustrated history, in brief stories, about the arrival of the conquistadors, direct from native Aztec documents, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, edited by Miguel Leon-Portilla (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990, pb. edition). Illustrations by Alberto Beltran.*



ALL PIGS ON DECK? The Columbus Myth and the Environment

BY BILL BIGELOW

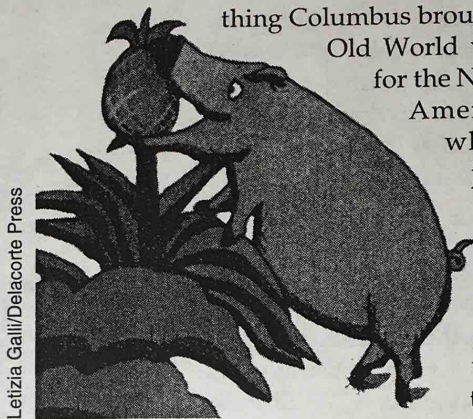
In all the traditional grade school stories, Columbus plants a flag and takes possession of the land, implicitly telling children that land is property, a thing to be owned and controlled by humans. Indeed, the children's tales imply that its possession is the first order of business, and is required for all subsequent progress. Columbus soon builds a fort on the land, a symbol of that progress.

The presentation of the Columbus story to children as the birth of "our" civilization marginalizes other cultural patterns that children could also come to recognize as "ours," such as those of the Taíno people on Guanahani and Hayti. As discussed elsewhere in *Rethinking Columbus*, the Taínos lived for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years on these islands in what today we'd call an ecologically sustainable relationship. How did they do it? How did they view their connections to the earth? What myths and traditions carried this alternative worldview?

By 1493, on Hayti, Spaniards were cutting down entire forests to plant sugar cane. The assorted animals the Spaniards brought (sheep, goats, horses, chickens, cattle, pigs, etc.), when mentioned at all to children, are presented as further symbols of Columbus's initiative and creativity, leading inexorably to today's thing-rich society.

In just a few years, the eight pigs Columbus brought with him in 1493 had multiplied such that "all the mountains swarmed with them." They ran amok, eating everything in sight and dramatically disrupting the ecological balance in Hayti. But where in the curriculum are children urged to consider the ecological consequences of the human "progress" Columbus initiated? The Discovery myth promotes an active *not-asking* about environmental concerns.

One publisher searching for a market niche during the Columbus Quincentennial in 1992 published an illustrated children's book, *All Pigs on Deck*. In it, Columbus allows "a little man" to bring his pigs on the second voyage. The book's illustrations show delighted Indians petting and feeding the smiling pigs. With utter disregard for the ecological history of the Caribbean, the book concludes: "So at least one



Letizia Galli/Delacorte Press

thing Columbus brought from the Old World was suitable for the New. Now, in America today, when we eat juicy sausages and pork chops, barbecued ribs and Virginia hams, we can thank that little man and, of course,

Christopher Columbus!" (*Barbeque* is a Taíno word, but Columbus even gets credit for that.)

Like the stories of later "explorers" that children will encounter, the Columbus tale is the narrative of a rootless, community-less man, doggedly seeking individual knowledge, wealth, and glory. The natural world figures into the story only as so many "things" to be used in one individual's quest for riches and happiness. As but the first chapter in a longer curricular journey that picks up and extends these themes, the metaphors wandering through the Discovery myth are hostile to long-term ecological sustainability. They support a narrow self-centered ideology that neglects more responsible visions.

Bill Bigelow teaches in Portland, Oregon, and is an editor of *Rethinking Schools*.

Additional Reading:

Bowers, C.A., *The Culture of Denial: Why the Environmental Movement Needs a Strategy for Reforming Universities and Public Schools*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998.

Palmer, Paula, J. Sánchez, and G. Mayorga, *Taking Care of Sibö's Gifts: An Environmental Treatise from Costa Rica's KéköLdi Indigenous Reserve* (obtain from Paula Palmer, 4500 19th St. #188, Boulder CO 80304; \$12 each).

Sale, Kirkpatrick, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*, New York: Knopf, 1990.