Taking Sides

Issue Two

p. 23, ¶ 1, line 7 – “By sailing westward instead of eastward, Columbus was certain he would find a shorter route to China.”

p. 23, ¶ 2, last sentence – “By the time Columbus arrived, Native Americans numbered approximately 40 million, 3 million of whom resided in the continental regions north of Mexico.”

p. 24, ¶ 1, line 1 – “None of this... should dilute the significance of Columbus’s explorations, which were representative of a wave of Atlantic voyages emanating from Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.”

p. 24, ¶ 2, sentence 2 – “To what extent should we applaud Columbus’s exploits.”

Yes

p. 25, ¶ 1, line 1 – “Admiral [Cristóbal] Colón [Christopher Columbus] spent a total of ninety-six days exploring the lands he encountered on the Ocean Sea – four rather small coralline islands in the Bahaman chain and two substantial coastlines of what he finally acknowledged were larger islands – every one of which he ‘took possession of’ in the name of his Sovereigns.”

p. 25, ¶ 3, line 1 – “It was not that the islands were in need of names... nor indeed that Colón was ignorant of the names that the native peoples had already given them, for he frequently used those original names before endowing them his own.

p. 25, ¶ 3, line 7 – “If this was presumption, it had an honored heritage: it was Adam who was charged by his Creator with the task of naming ‘every living creature,’ including the product of his own rib, in the course of establishing ‘dominion over’ them.”

p. 26, ¶ 2, line 1 – “This business of naming and ‘possessing’ foreign lands was by no means casual. The Admiral took it very seriously, pointing out that ‘it was my wish to bypass no island without taking possession’ (October 15) and that ‘in all regions [I] always left a cross standing’ (November 16) as a mark of Christian dominance.”

p. 26, ¶ 3, line 2 – “Why would the Admiral assume that these territories were in some way unpossessed – even by those clearly inhabiting them – and thus available for Spain to claim?”
p. 26, ¶ 4, line 1 – “Could there be any reason for the Admiral to assume he had reached ‘unclaimed’ shores, new lands that lay far beyond the domains of any the potentates of the East? Can that really have been on his mind – or can it all be explained as simple Eurocentrism, or Eurosuperiority, mixed with cupidity and naivete?”

p. 27, ¶ 5, line 4 – “There was no pretense to objectivity, or any sense that these people might be representatives of a culture equal to, or in any way a model for, Europe’s. Colón immediately presumed the inferiority of the natives, not merely because (a sure enough sign) they were naked, but because (his society could have no surer measure) they seemed so technologically backward.”

p. 28, ¶ 1, line 4 – “Thus did European arms spill the first drops of native blood on the sands of the New World, accompanied not with a gasp or compassion but with a smirk of superiority.”

p. 28, ¶ 2, indented quote – “They ought to be good servants and of good intelligence.” [the whole quote]

p. 28, ¶ 2, line 1 following quote – “No clothes, no arms, no possessions, no iron, and now no religion – not even speech: hence they were fit to be servants and captives. It may fairly be called the birth of American slavery.”

p. 28, ¶ 3, line 6 – “At one point he even sent his crew ashore to kidnap ‘seven head of women, young ones and adults, ans three small children’; the expression of such callousness led the Spanish historian Salvador de Madariaga to remark, ‘It would be difficult to find a starker utterance of utilitarian subjection of man by man than this passage [whose] form is no less devoid of human feeling that its substance.’”

p. 28, ¶ 3, line 11 – “They had migrated to the islands from the mainland at about the time of Christ, occupying the three large islands we now call the Greater Antilles and arriving in Guanahani (Colón’s San Salvador at the end of the Bahamian chain probably around A.D. 900.”

p. 29, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The Tainos were not nearly so backward as Colón assumed from their lack of dress.”

p. 29, ¶ 1, line 15 – “Their houses were not only spacious and clean – as the Europeans noted with surprise and appreciation, used as they were to the generally crowded and slovenly hovels and huts of south European peasantry – but more apropos, remarkably resistant to hurricanes; the circular walls were made of strong cane poles set deep and close together..., the conical roofs of branches and vines closely interwoven on a frame of smaller poles and covered with heavy palm leaves.”
p. 29, ¶ 2, line 1 – “Perhaps the most sophisticated, and most carefully integrated, part of their technology was their agricultural system, extraordinarily productive and perfectly adapted to the conditions of the island environment.”

p. 30, ¶ 1, line 6 – “So little a part did violence play in their system that they seem... to have been a society without war... and even without overt conflict (Las Casas reports that no Spaniard ever saw two Tainos fighting).”

p. 30, ¶ 2, line 1 – “They are the best people in the world and above all the gentlest...”

p. 30, ¶ 2, indented quote – “They became so much our friends that it was a marvel...” [the whole indented quote].

p. 31, ¶ 1, line 1 – “It is to be regretted that the Admiral, unable to see past their nakedness, ... knew not the real virtues of the people he confronted.”

p. 31, ¶ 2, line 3 – “On his third day of exploration – a Sunday at that – he had set out to see ‘where there might be a fortress’ – and from which ‘with fifty men they [the Tainos] could all be subjected and made to do all that one might wish’ (October 14).”

p. 31, ¶ 3, line 7 – “it may have been that Colón began his explorations with nothing more than an idea of establishing some sort of entrepôt on these islands, a fortress protected trading post rather like the one that the Portuguese had established, and Colón perhaps had visited, on the Gold Coast of Africa at El Mina.”

p. 32, ¶ 3, line 7 – “But assume it he did, and even Morison suggests that ‘every man in the fleet from servant boy to Admiral was convinced that no Christian need do a hand’s turn of work in the Indies; and before them opened the delightful vision of growing rich by exploiting the labor of docile natives.”

p. 33, ¶ 3, line 4 – “Only one notable stop was made, at a narrow bay some 200 miles east of La Navidad, where a party Colón sent ashore discovered, for the first time, some Indians with bows and arrows.”

p. 33, ¶ 4, line 4 – “After just two bows were sold, the Indians turned and ran back to the cover of the trees where they kept their remaining weapons and, so the sailors assumed, ‘prepared... to attack the Christians and capture them.’ When they came towards the Spaniards again brandishing ropes – almost certainly meaning to trade these rather than give up their precious bows – the sailors panicked and ‘being prepared as always the Admiral advised them to be,’ attacked the Indians with swords and halberds, gave one ‘a great slash in the buttocks’ and shot another in the breast with a crossbow.”
Note: The detrimental role that misunderstandings and miscommunication played in Indian-European interaction.

p. 33, ¶ 5, line1 – “And did the Admiral object to this, transgressing as it did his previous ideal of trying to maintain good relations with the natives so as to make them willing trading partners, if not docile servants?”

p. 33, last ¶, whole ¶ – “It was not the first time (or the last) that Colón was able to delude himself…”

No

p. 35, ¶ 1, line 8 – “And in truth, Columbus’s manifest errors and downright incapacities as a leader of men, anywhere but on the sea, played into the hands of his critics and properly made him the target of protests. His failures in leadership provoked atrocities against the Caribbean natives and harsh punishment, including executions, of Spaniards as well.”

p. 35, ¶ 2, line 1 – “The temptation to project modern categories back upon earlier historical periods is always strong.”

p. 36, ¶ 1, line 3 – “We would do well to recall… that the Spanish record after Columbus is complex and not wholly bad, particularly in its global elaboration of native rights.”

p. 36, ¶ 2, line 1 – “In Columbus the man, several conflicting currents existed side by side.”

Note: Any social or historical theory that does not acknowledge the inherent complexity of humans, and subsequently human action, is fundamentally flawed.

p. 36, ¶ 2, line 8 – “Chapter 119 of History of the Indies concludes with the judgement that both brothers mistakenly began to occupy land and exact tribute owing to ‘the most culpable ignorance, which has no excuse, of natural and divine law.’”

Definition: “Exact tribute” means to collect some form of taxes or tariff.

p. 36, ¶ 3, indented quote, the whole quote – “Truly, I would not dare blame the admiral’s…”

p. 36, ¶ 5, line 3 – “…we should remember that Columbus was placed in unprecedented circumstances and should not be judged in the same way as we would a modern anthropologist.”
p. 37, ¶ 1, indented quote, the whole quote – “The European scale of values was different from ...

p. 37, ¶ 1, line 1 following indented quote – “If we wish to task Columbus for all the asymmetries that ensued, we should credit him as well for this initial attempt, later repeated by many Spanish governors and theologians, to find some just route through the thicket of massive cultural difference.”

p. 38, ¶ 1, line 1 – “The January 2 entry... indicates that Columbus had some ulterior motives in placating the natives. But that does not negate his genuine good feeling toward them or his gratitude for their generosity.”

p. 38, ¶ 1, line 7 – “Despite the great evils that would come later, this altruism was not without its own modest legacies.”

p. 40, ¶ 1, line 10 – “But if we think we should condemn Aztec human sacrifice as wrong – not simply a different cultural form, but wrong – then we must admit there are universal principles that also allow us to criticize improper European use of force, enslavement, and exploitation.”

p. 40, ¶ 3, line 1 – “A fairer reading of the record...” [plus entire indented segment]

p. 41, ¶ 1, line 4 – “Since all governments tax in some fashion, Spain was doing only what caciques and Carib conquerors...” [through the whole remaining ¶]

p. 41, ¶ 2, line 1 – “Fernández-Armesto argues that Columbus’s recourse to violence on Hispaniola resulted mostly from his basic inability to rule well, from ‘misjudgement rather than wickedness.’”

p. 42, ¶ 2, line 5 – “Not only were some of the colonists unusually violent, but many Spanish gentlemen who had come expecting easy wealth resented Columbus, the need to work, and the unhealthy conditions on the island.”

p. 42, ¶ 4, line 1 – “All these attempts at neat categorization assume that we can define a man, as well as a historical period, with far sharper boundaries than is ever the case. The mixture of human weakness and human greatness in even a key figure is never easy to calculate.”

p. 43, ¶ 1 line 2 – “If the preceding pages show anything, they show that Columbus, like the rest of us, was not simply good or bad. As a great human spirit, both his virtues and faults appear larger and more vivid than they do in most people.”