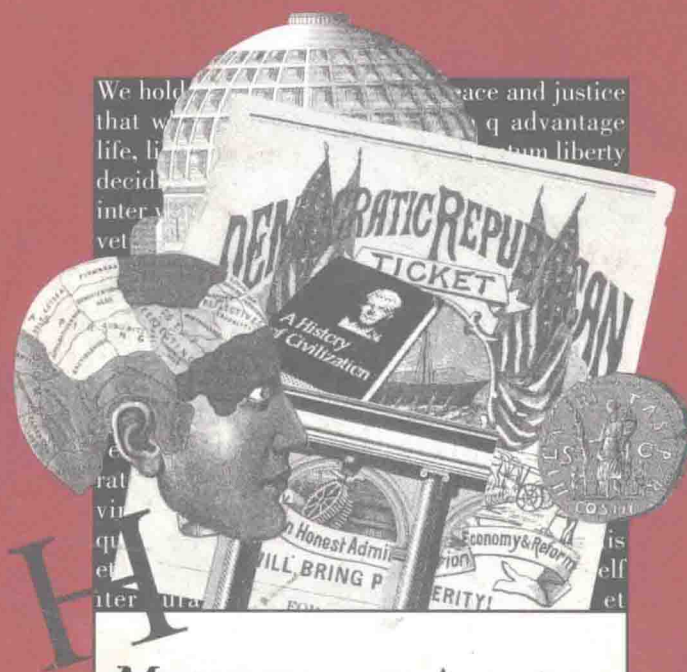


INNOVATIVE
TEACHING TOOLS

MINORITIES IN AMERICA

SECOND EDITION

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MINORITIES IN AMERICA

Second Edition

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CHAPTER 1

THE FACTS BEHIND THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY OVER IMMIGRATION

Allan L. Damon

Im-mi-grate—To enter and settle. . . .—The American Heritage Dictionary

God sifted a whole Nation that He might send Choice Grain over into this Wilderness
—The Reverend Mr. William Stoughton of Massachusetts (1670)

This was no ordinary fishing run for the fifty small boats that entered the Florida Strait from Key West on a late April morning last year. Their course was south by southwest to Mariel, 110 miles distant on the northern coast of Cuba. Their mission: to rescue an unknown number of political refugees who had unexpectedly been granted exit visas by Fidel Castro.

In the weeks that followed, the fifty-boat squadron was joined by hundreds of other vessels of every size and condition, their passage financed by public funds and by members of the Cuban community in Miami. For more than five months the “freedom flotilla” plied the Caribbean, bearing its human cargo to the American mainland. By the end of September, when Castro barred further emigration, 125,000 exiles had reached reception centers in Florida, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania.

At the same time, another exodus had taken place from Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest on earth. Between January and late August of 1980, more than 14,000 refugees had crossed the Caribbean to Florida in open, wooden boats, many of them dangerously overloaded and underprovisioned. One small craft, carrying a hundred passengers, had drifted for two weeks in the broiling sun before it was located and towed to safety by a Coast Guard cutter. Like the Cubans, the Haitians spoke bitterly of the hardship and oppression they had left behind. America, they said, offered them freedom and opportunity unavailable elsewhere; they were willing to risk everything for the new life the nation might provide.

The admission of such refugees has been replicated over and over again through our history: in 1975 when 120,000 Vietnamese were flown here in the two weeks that followed Saigon’s fall; in the “freedom flights” which brought upward of 300,000 Cubans to Florida between 1965 and 1970; in 1956 when

21,000 Hungarians were airlifted to New Jersey in the aftermath of their abortive uprising; indeed, as long ago as 1793 when nearly 20,000 French exiles from revolution in Santo Domingo sought refuge in Pennsylvania. (The exiles were so destitute that the Pennsylvania Assembly authorized a public subscription on their behalf; Congress voted \$15,000 for the cause.) As Thomas Paine had written in *Common Sense*, it was America's unique destiny to "receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind."

That willingness to welcome the stranger, to offer sanctuary to the oppressed, is firmly based on the democratic ideology of the American Revolution, but it represents as well a pragmatic recognition of the central fact in our existence as a people: since the first Native Americans crossed the Bering Strait thousands of years ago, the American population has consisted solely of immigrants and their descendants. Immigrants from some 106 distinct ethnic groups—no one of which constitutes more than one-seventh of the whole—have transformed our land, shaped our institutions, defined our principles, and formed—in the words of Charles Andrews—"a polychrome, polyglot community" without parallel in history.

FROM A TRICKLE TO A TIDAL WAVE

The migration that produced this pluralism is the largest part of a continuing mass movement that far surpasses in magnitude the legendary journeys of the ancient tribes of Israel or of the wandering Germans in the waning days of the Roman Empire. Since 1600 more than 74,000,000 emigrants have abandoned their homelands worldwide. More than two-thirds of them—some 50,000,000—have come to the United States. (Nearly a tenth—over 7,000,000—have migrated to Canada, the second-ranked "receiver" state.) Not all of them remained here; perhaps 9,000,000 or so merely passed through on their way elsewhere or, after a time, returned home. Nonetheless, our net population gain through immigration, from 1607 to the present, is upward of 40,000,000 men, women, and children who came here in hopes that this might be, as Emerson once wrote, "the country of the Future . . . a country of beginnings. . . ."

Initially their numbers were few. In the two hundred years that followed Jamestown's settlement, immigration was a thin stream flowing out of Europe at irregular intervals. Historians estimate that well under a million immigrants—perhaps as few as 400,000—crossed the Atlantic during those two centuries, and some scholars believe that the growth of the nation's population—3,900,000 in the first census of 1790—was largely the result of natural increase and not of a great influx of the foreign-born. But in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which had served to bar widespread emigration, the European rivulet became a river and then a flood.

Starting in 1820, when a mere 8,385 people (most of them male) passed through the eastern ports of entry, immigration increased decade after decade in

quantum jumps. By 1830 annual arrivals numbered 23,322, and a visiting Frenchman wrote glowingly of “the great flood of civilization” that was pouring over the American landscape “with a wonderful power and an admirable regularity.” In 1840, a total of 84,066 newcomers landed; in 1850 the number had risen to 369,980. Between 1820 and 1860 some 5,000,000 immigrants crossed the seas, their number surpassing in four decades the total 1790 population it had taken nearly two centuries to achieve. With justifiable pride, Oliver Wendell Holmes exulted, “We are the Romans of the modern world—the great assimilating people.”

And still the flood rolled on: 2,300,000 arrivals during the 1860s; 2,800,000 in the 1870s. By 1880 it seemed to some observers that the whole earth was on the move as the human flood became a tidal wave. In the next forty-four years, upward of 25,900,000 men, women, and children were carried to the American shore.

Then, in 1924, it ended. Bowing to pressures that had been building since late in the nineteenth century—from labor, from nativist groups, from state and local leaders, who protested that the nation could no longer absorb so many newcomers—Congress voted to end three hundred years of open immigration. Revising an earlier law (passed in 1921) that had set a maximum annual quota, Congress now established a rigid system, based on national origins, that limited immigration to an annual ceiling of 150,000 entrants, almost all drawn from Northern Europe and the British Isles.

The 1924 law took effect five years later when Congress set up an elaborate quota system based upon the 1790 census. Beginning in 1931, immigration totals dropped below 100,000 annually for the first time since 1862 and remained below that figure until 1946. Despite subsequent policy modifications in the postwar years, immigration continued to be restricted, and although some 14,000,000 persons entered the country between 1925 and 1980, annual immigrant totals never again approached the extraordinary levels of the earlier age. To all intents and purposes, the mass migrations that gave the country its special character are now a thing of the past.

- Since 1920 the native-born population of the United States has steadily increased from 86.8 per cent to an estimated 95.8 per cent in 1980.
- 1907 was the peak immigration year. A total of 1,285,349 persons entered the country. In 1933 just 23,068 arrived, the lowest number since 1831 and the record for this century.
- From 1607 to 1924 immigrants totaled about 36,500,000; from 1925 to 1970, about 9,200,000; from 1971 to 1980 an estimated 4,900,000.
- Since 1968 immigration quotas have permitted a maximum of 170,000 immigrants to enter annually from countries outside the Western Hemisphere (there is a 20,000 ceiling for any one country) and a maximum of 120,000 immigrants annually from countries within the Western Hemisphere on a

first-come, first-served basis. Selected categories ("immediate relatives" of U.S. citizens or "special immigrants" designated by Congress) are granted entry as nonquota immigrants.

- In recent years legal immigration has averaged about 400,000 per year. In 1980 some 800,000 immigrants entered legally, reflecting the refugee status extended by the government to Cubans, Haitians, and Cambodians.
- The number of illegal entrants is unknown; estimates range from 1,000,000 to 8,000,000 total during the last decade. The Immigration and Naturalization Service arrests and deports as many as 500,000 border-crossers each year, most of them unskilled workers from Mexico.

WHERE WE CAME FROM

Despite this century's restrictive legislation, the United States continues to receive hundreds of thousands of newcomers each year, with expectations and uncertainties probably no different from those of their predecessors in the era of mass immigration. What makes their experience different are changes in the immigration laws over the past fifteen years that have dramatically altered both the traditional patterns of immigration and the ethnic composition of the immigrant population.

Nineteenth-century immigration was essentially European. In the years before 1885 most immigrants came from north of the Alps and west of the Elbe River (the so-called old immigration). After 1885 the greatest number came from Southern and Eastern Europe, notably from Italy and Russia (the "new immigration"). The quota laws after World War I generally confirmed and, in the case of the "old immigration," exaggerated that pattern, for the national-origins system was deliberately rigged to favor Northern Europeans over Southern and both at the expense of all others. Since 1968, when the national-origins system was abolished, a significant shift has taken place.

In the period from 1820 to 1978 gross immigration totals, according to the latest published data, show the distribution in Table 1.

The rapid growth of immigration from Asia in the past decade, which these figures reveal, is a result of the abolition of both the national-origins system and a series of exclusionary laws that date back to 1882, when the Chinese were expressly denied the right to enter the United States or to seek citizenship.

Similar discrimination was later extended to the Japanese, and the Immigration Act of 1924 reaffirmed the principle of racial exclusion for all Asians, barring them from seeking citizenship and, because they were so barred, also denying them entry as immigrants.

In 1943, in the midst of World War II, the 1924 act was repealed for the Chinese alone, and they were assigned an annual quota of 105. Nine years later

the McCarran-Walter Act removed all restrictions for other Asians as well but kept the quotas at token levels: 185 for Japan, 105 for China, and 100 for each country in an area designated the Asia-Pacific Triangle.

The removal of all barriers—other than the fixed total of 170,000 immigrants from countries outside the Western Hemisphere—in the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 (effective 1968) produced immediate and remarkable results. In the forty year span from 1920 to 1960 Asian immigrants accounted for roughly 3 per cent of the immigrant total; in 1978 the comparable figure was 40.5 per cent. In 1965, there were 300 immigrants from India, compared with 19,100 thirteen years later. In the eight-year period from 1971 to 1978, over 206,700 Koreans migrated to America, five times as many as had arrived in the preceding twenty years.

But it was the European wave of the last century that provided the broad base of the nation's current population. Although an Immigration Service survey of 800,000 immigrants in New York State in 1979 identified individuals from 164 different countries or dependencies, five nationalities account for over half of the immigrant total since 1820 (through 1978), and another six contributed one-quarter of the whole.

The factors that compelled this mass migration were undoubtedly as varied as the individuals involved. Political and religious motives played a part (as in the extensive migration of the Jews out of Russia during the pogroms at the end of the nineteenth century). But the main reason was probably economic, for the ebb and flow of the immigrant wave is keyed to the rise and fall of the American economy in any given period before the quota system was established in 1924.

The marked surge in immigration after 1850 can be tied to several concurrent developments, among them the introduction of steamships and the safer travel they provided. The industrial growth of the United States and the westward

TABLE 1. WHERE WE CAME FROM

<i>Area</i>	<i>1961–1970</i>		<i>1971–1978</i>		<i>1820–1978</i>	
	<i>Number of Immigrants</i>	<i>Total %</i>	<i>Number of Immigrants</i>	<i>Total %</i>	<i>Number of Immigrants</i>	<i>Total %</i>
Europe	1,100,000	33.8	664,000	19.0	36,200,000	74.4
The Americas	1,700,000	51.7	1,600,000	45.1	9,000,000	18.6
Asia	427,000	12.9	1,200,000	33.4	2,900,000	5.9
Africa	29,000	0.9	55,000	1.6	131,000	0.3
Australia/ New Zealand	19,000	0.6	19,000	0.5	120,000	0.2
Other	5,000	0.2	13,000	0.4	307,000	0.6
Total	3,280,000		3,551,000		48,658,000	

Note: All totals have been rounded off.

movement together led to a demand for manual labor in the East as the native-born population pushed beyond the Mississippi. At the same time, rapid population growth in Europe (earlier in northern and western countries, later in the southern and eastern) closed traditional avenues of economic advancement. Revolutions, epidemics, and crises like the Irish potato famine were instrumental in the decision of many to emigrate.

WHO WE WERE

Who and what the immigrants were remains subject to popular misconception, however, if only because it is obviously difficult to create a single model for more than 40,000,000 people over a three- or four-hundred-year span. Nevertheless, much of the pressure to build restrictive legislation, notably the national-origins system after 1924, was generated by stereotyping. The poverty which many immigrants experienced in their early years in the country was often automatically equated—in a time-worn American formulation—with shiftlessness. Broken English or a foreign tongue signified low intelligence. Unfamiliar customs or styles of dress were cause for derision or complaint.

Ironically, that stereotype of the European peasant has been permanently carved into the base of the Statue of Liberty in the unintentionally condescending lines of Emma Lazarus' poem that speaks of the tired, the poor, the "wretched refuse" of Europe's teeming shores.

Undoubtedly there were many who were unfitted for settling in a new land, but in general, immigration was not for the faint-hearted, the unimaginative, or the dull. As George Santayana once pointed out, most immigrants had exercised a kind of self-selection: the lazy, the rich, and the well-connected remained at home. The immigrants were those whose "wilder instincts," Santayana wrote, "tempted them beyond the horizon. The American is accordingly the most adventurous, or the descendant of the most adventurous, of Europeans."

It could not have been otherwise. As Oscar Handlin wrote in his classic, *The Uprooted* (1951), "America was the land of separated men," who were forced to make the painful transition from "the tried old to the untried new." They were strong enough to bear leaving friends and family behind, to endure steerage, and to enter nakedly into an alien culture where language, custom—even the forms of work—were unfamiliar.

- Nearly half of all immigrants have reported their occupational status on entry. Of those reporting from 1820 to 1920, only 1.5 per cent were professionals. Farmers or farm laborers made up 23.6 per cent, and 20.2 per cent were nonfarm manual laborers. Those identified as skilled craftsmen or as engaged in commerce constituted 11.2 per cent. Another 43.4 per cent were recorded as general labor or household servants.

- Comparable categories reported from 1971 to 1978 include 10.2 per cent professional, 2.7 per cent managerial, 5.0 per cent skilled craftsman, 3.8 per cent clerical, 3.7 per cent manual labor, and 1.6 per cent farm labor. (In this period, 60 per cent of the immigrants listed no occupation on entry.)

TRYING TO LEGISLATE THE TIDE

Unlike the French and Spanish who contended with them for empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English came to America to stay. After several false starts, Parliament, in 1618, settled on three key policies—applied in time in every New World colonial venture: 1) land was made easily available to almost all settlers at relatively low cost; 2) the rights of English settlers were the same as those who remained in England; and 3) a measure of political freedom—gradually expanded as the colonies developed—was provided in representative

TABLE 2. THE LEADING “SENDER” STATES, 1820–1878

<i>State</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Peak Year</i>
Germany	6,978,000	14.3	1882
Italy	5,294,000	10.9	1907
Great Britain	4,898,000	10.01	1888
Ireland	4,723,000	9.7	1851
Austria-Hungary	4,315,000	8.9	1907
Canada	4,105,000	8.4	1924
Russia	3,374,000	6.9	1913
Scandinavia	2,525,000	5.2	1882
Denmark	(364,000)	(0.7)	
Finland	(33,000)	(0.1)	
Norway	(856,000)	(1.8)	
Sweden	(1,272,000)	(2.6)	
Mexico	2,124,000	4.4	1978
West Indies			
(including Cuba)	1,249,000	2.6	1977
France	751,000	1.5	1851
Greece	655,000	1.3	1907
China	528,000	1.1	1882
Poland	516,000	1.1	1921
Portugal	446,000	0.9	1907
Japan	406,000	0.8	1907
Philippines	390,000	0.8	1977
Turkey	385,000	0.8	1913
Netherlands	359,000	0.7	1882

Note: All totals have been rounded off

assemblies and later, in New England, in the town meetings. All three helped attract substantial numbers of settlers.

Both the home government and the colonial assemblies eagerly recruited colonists and readily extended citizenship, landowning rights, and other civil protections to them. In 1740 Parliament ruled that any alien who had resided on British territory for seven consecutive years was entitled to full citizenship.

To encourage migration, the various governments established protections for indentured servants, those who sold themselves into bound service for two to seven years in return for passage. At the conclusion of their contract, such persons were given full freedom and civil rights. Called redemptioners, they are estimated to have composed between 60 and 77 per cent of the immigrants through 1776.

After the Revolution the Founding Fathers viewed immigration with the same ambivalence that continues today. Alexander Hamilton argued in 1791 that it was of primary importance "to open every possible avenue to emigration from abroad . . ." because the newcomers, skilled artisans in particular, would provide useful, productive labor and encourage the rapid expansion of American manufacturing. Moreover, as George Washington put it, there was an ideological commitment to actively seek out "not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions. . . ."

On the other hand, there was the lingering fear expressed by Thomas Jefferson that the fugitives might carry with them the very contagion of tyranny and despotism they had fled Europe to avoid. En masse, he believed, they would threaten the republican virtues of the government, introduce turbulence, and turn the nation into "a heterogenous [*sic*], incoherent, distracted mass." While individual artisans would be most welcome ("Spare no expense in obtaining them . . . they will teach us something we do not know"), he argued that no "extraordinary encouragements" should be given to mass immigration.

For most of the century, the federal government set no limitations on immigration, while some thirty states actively recruited overseas. The only barriers, in fact, were those erected by European states. (England, for example, prohibited the emigration of skilled artisans until 1820.) But as the century wore on, population pressures in Europe encouraged foreign states to assist those who wished to leave, as did the British and Irish authorities who helped Irish emigrants flee the great famine of 1846.

The federal government generally assumed an overseer's role (as Parliament had in colonial times) leaving most of the responsibility for enforcing immigration and naturalization laws to the states. In 1790 Congress set a two-year residency requirement for citizenship. (The naturalization period was briefly extended to fourteen years in 1798—by the Federalist majority in Congress, who were alarmed at the eagerness with which immigrants were joining the Democrats.) With Jefferson's inauguration in 1801, the residency requirement was set at five years—where it has remained since.

By 1855 nearly two-thirds of all immigrants were entering the country through New York. (By the end of the century, that figure would rise to three-fourths.) The reception center was Castle Garden, a converted opera house at the tip of Manhattan that provided a hospital, a low-cost restaurant, and free baths. Incredibly it was run as a volunteer operation, its unpaid staff offering a wide range of employment and housing services. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the volume of immigration threatened to overwhelm the states, and, responding to demands for increased federal participation, Congress passed a comprehensive law in 1882 that opened the way to a complete federal take-over. Within a decade, the government had created a permanent Immigration Service with broad powers to set health standards, to manage immigration law, and to arrange deportation proceedings for any aliens who failed to meet the required criteria for entry. In 1892 Ellis Island was opened on the site of an old naval arsenal as the principal reception center.

Beginning with the 1882 law, the government gradually developed a policy of restricted immigration. For the first time, Congress established strict standards of admissibility. As we have seen, Chinese immigrants were barred outright; so were convicts, "lunatics," and persons likely to become public charges. In 1891 the list was extended to include polygamists, persons with "loathsome or contagious diseases," and contract laborers. Twelve years later anarchists and prostitutes were denied entry. In 1907 the Japanese, like the Chinese, were barred simply because of their race. In 1917 Congress required a literacy test for every immigrant. Any person over sixteen who could not read at least thirty words in English or some other language was to be sent home. By the end of World War I immigration law defined nearly one hundred separate conditions that might make an alien excludable.

In vetoing an earlier literacy bill in 1915, Woodrow Wilson wrote that the nation had, in the past, "generously kept our doors open to all," excepting those who were clearly unfit by reason of disease or criminal record or the like. Now, he said, Congress was proposing "to turn away from tests of character and of quality and impose tests which exclude and restrict." Was this, he asked, "the conscious . . . desire of the American people?"

Within six years he had his answer. In 1921 Congress passed the first of the quota laws, which would dominate immigration policy for the next generation—all designed to reduce the immigrant flow from Southern and Eastern Europe and to prohibit entirely immigration from Asia. The last of these, the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, passed over the veto of President Truman, added a provision empowering the Immigration Service to screen all applicants for signs of "subversive behavior."

Current policy is contained in the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. There already had been erosion of the quota system through various postwar measures allowing the entry of certain national groups, as in the Displaced Persons directives signed by President Truman in successive years from 1945 to 1952. Moreover, the role

America had assumed as “leader of the free world” stood in sharp contrast to the exclusionary policies embodied in immigration law.

The Hart-Celler Act retained an annual quota as necessary to orderly growth but removed the artificial—and often biased—criteria of past admissions practices in favor of broadly based standards that gave all nationalities equal access on a first-come, first-served basis. Extra-quota status was extended to certain classes of immigrants (among them, immediate relatives of naturalized citizens and persons with special technical skills). Other reforms made it easier for the President to admit refugees, as in the Cuban exodus in 1981.

Now more than a decade old, the Hart-Celler Act has changed the face of the immigrant population, three-fourths of whom in recent years have been Asians or Latin Americans. Its liberalized provisions for nonquota entry have led to a steady increase in the number of aliens seeking permanent residence and of refugees requesting asylum. From 1978 to 1980 nearly 2,000,000 legal immigrants entered the country, pushing the immigration rate above 2.8 per thousand U.S. population for the first time in half a century. In addition, upward of 1,000,000 aliens illegally crossed the nation’s borders. Responding to public alarm over that sudden surge of immigrants, President Reagan and some members of Congress argued that existing policies were out of control and that the Hart-Celler Act needed revision.

In mid-March, 1981, Senator Walter D. Huddleston of Kentucky introduced a comprehensive reform bill that would limit total immigration to 350,000 aliens a year, eliminate all special status admissions above that ceiling, and restrict the entry of refugees by forcing the President to admit them under the annual quota or to borrow against future quotas. The Huddleston bill, jointly sponsored by eight other senators, also called for civil and criminal penalties for employers who hire illegal aliens and proposed tripling the size of the Border Patrol to 6,000 officers.

By midsummer, the Reagan administration offered further legislation to deal with illegal border-crossers. Arguing that “no free and prosperous nation can by itself accommodate all those who seek a better life,” Mr. Reagan asked Congress to consider three specific measures: a law to prohibit the hiring of illegal aliens (punishable by a civil fine of up to \$1,000 for each person so hired); the granting of legal status to the several million illegal aliens already residing here (provided they had entered the United States before January 1, 1980); and the creation of a “guest worker” program whereby 100,000 Mexicans would be admitted over two years to take jobs for which domestic labor was unavailable or in short supply.

As in earlier periods of high unemployment and economic distress, the lines are again drawn between those who argue for sharply reduced quotas and those who invoke the past as evidence that the nation must continue to accept responsibility for the oppressed from other lands. And once again Congress and the President must strike a delicate balance between them.

CHAPTER 2

COLUMBUS AND GENOCIDE

Edward T. Stone

On April 17, 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic monarchs of Castile, signed the Capitulations of Santa Fe, the agreement by which Christopher Columbus, one-time wool-weaving apprentice in Savona, Italy, undertook a voyage of discovery to the western Atlantic.

Columbus was in his forty-first year. After forsaking his father's loom in Savona he had spent some nine years in obscurity in Portugal, where his only known occupations were those of petty trader in sugar for an Italian commercial firm and maker and purveyor of maps and marine charts in collaboration with his younger brother Bartolomé. During this period he married a poor but aristocratic young Portuguese woman who bore him a son; he also supposedly made one or more sea voyages in an unidentified capacity.

Some time in those years he had conceived his enterprise of discovery. Finding no acceptance of it in Portugal, he had come to Castile in the early months of 1485 after his wife's death. There he had eked out a precarious living as an itinerant peddler of books and maps, existing partly on charitable handouts from noble patrons whom he had managed to interest in his enterprise.

Now the fruition of his dream was at hand. The Capitulations provided that:

1. Columbus was to be admiral of "all those islands and mainland in the Ocean Sea which by his hand and industry he would discover and acquire the title to be hereditary and the office to be equal in pre-eminences and prerogatives to that of the High Admiral of Castile."

2. He would be "viceroy and governor general of all the said islands and mainland." In a subsequent royal provision signed a few days later, Columbus was specifically granted the power, as admiral, viceroy, and governor, to "hear and dispatch all civil and criminal proceedings pertaining to the said offices of the admiralty, viceroyalty and governorship" and to "punish and castigate the delinquents."

3. For his personal enrichment he was to have 10 percent of all the removable assets of the newly discovered lands, including gold, silver, pearls, and precious stones, and the trade therein was to be a crown monopoly under his control. He was to receive an additional 12½ percent in return for his pledge to contribute an eighth part of the cost of the expedition.

How a ragged and indigent foreigner whose only known experience at sea had been as a travelling commercial agent and earlier as a common seaman and who had not set foot on a ship in the seven years he had been in Spain could thus acquire by the stroke of a pen a station equal to that of the highest-ranking officer of the Castilian navy—indeed, how he could have wrung from these two powerful and able sovereigns such extraordinary concessions—is a fascinating story in itself, but it need not detain us here. Of far more significance in their tragic portent were the provisions of the agreement that gave to the former weaver's apprentice the absolute power of life and death over tens of thousands of innocent human beings. His incapacity to discharge that responsibility justly and humanely would be distressingly demonstrated in the years that were to follow.

The somber chronicle of the events that ended in the genocide of the peaceful Arawaks of the Caribbean islands is amply documented in Columbus' own letters and journals and in the pages of his most ardent admirer, Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, the great contemporary historian of the West Indies who believed Columbus had been divinely inspired to make the Discovery. But Las Casas was a thoroughly honest writer, and he did not hesitate to pass harsh judgment on his hero for initiating and carrying on the wholesale enslavement for profit of the gentle natives who had affectionately welcomed Columbus and his fellow argonauts to the New World. Throughout his long life Las Casas was an impassioned crusader for the rights and survival of the hapless Indians—his "poor innocents," as he called them—whose cruel oppression by the Spanish invaders he laid square at Columbus' door.

However controversial this Dominican priest may have been in his lifetime, however subjective and even irritating to his readers may be his interminable moralizing and expounding of God's will, Las Casas' monumental history remains without question the greatest single source of our knowledge of that milestone in human affairs. Born to an upper-class family in Seville, Las Casas was eighteen at the time of the voyage of discovery. His father went with Columbus on the second voyage in 1493 and was among the first colonists on the island of Haiti, which the Spaniards called La Isla Española (Spanish Island). Young Las Casas joined the colony in 1502 and for a time led the life of a landholder in this first Spanish settlement in the New World. But his sensitive mind and heart were sickened by the cruel oppression of the natives. He took the vows of the Dominican order and resolved to devote the rest of his life to their cause, a resolve he never relinquished until the end of his life, at ninety-two. For three years he was bishop of Chiapas in southern Mexico; he then returned to Spain for the last time in 1547, becoming a permanent resident of the monastery of San Gregorio in Valladolid. He began his *Historia de las Indias* in 1527, while he was still on Española, but did not complete it until thirty years later. He had become well acquainted with Diego, Columbus' legitimate son and his successor as Admiral of the Indies, and with Diego's highborn wife, Maria de Toledo, niece of