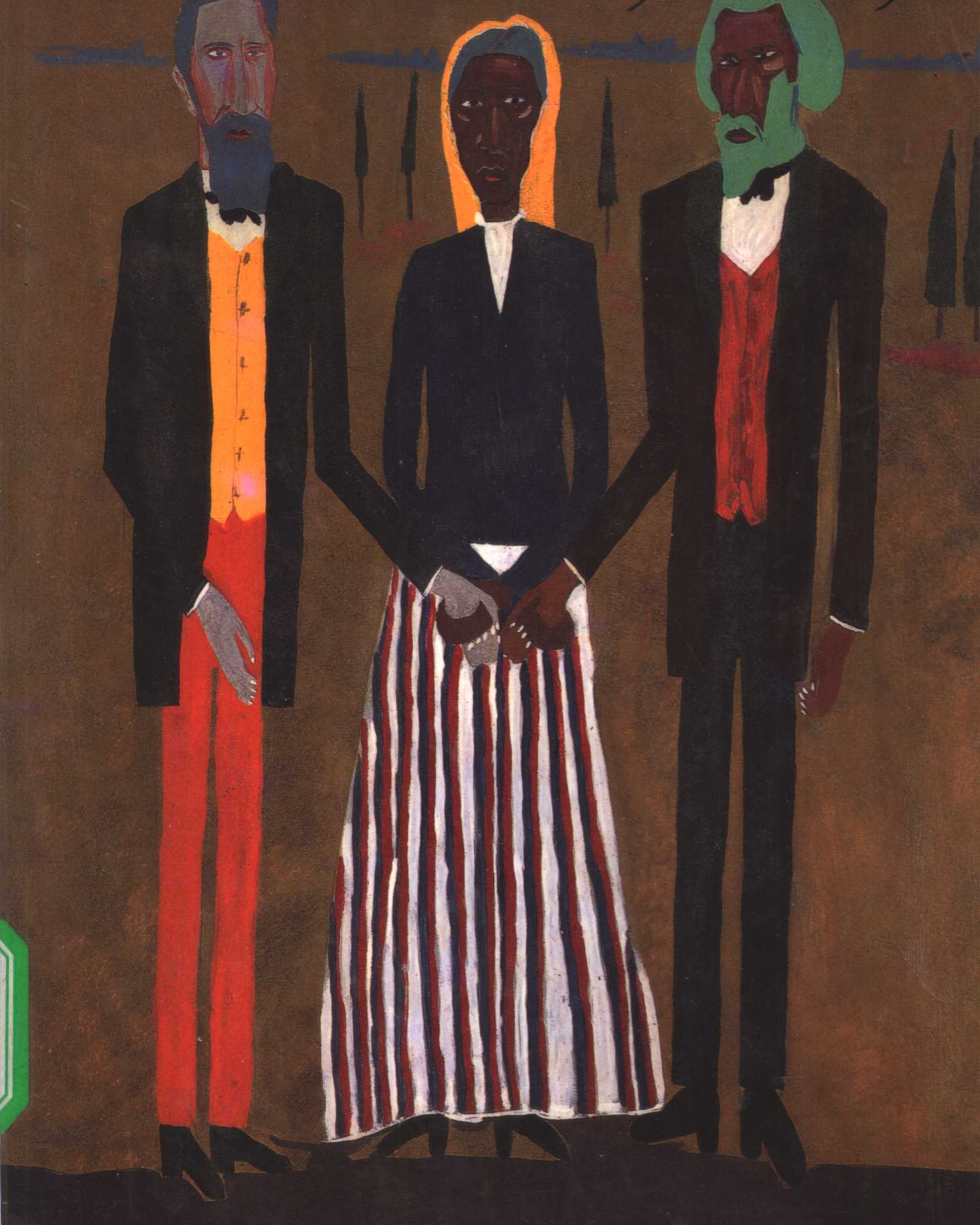
Nash/Graves

# From These Beginnings



a biographical approach to American History / volume 1

VOLUME 1

# From These Beginnings

## A Biographical Approach to American History

FIFTH EDITION

RODERICK NASH
*University of California, Santa Barbara*

GREGORY GRAVES
*California State University, Northridge*

HarperCollins*CollegePublishers*

Acquisitions Editor: Bruce D. Borland
Project Editor: Marina Vaynshteyn
Developmental Editor: John Matthews
Design Manager and Cover Design: Mary McDonnell
Photo Researcher: Nina Page
Desktop Administrator: LaToya Wigfall
Electronic Production Manager: Angel Gonzalez Jr.
Manufacturing Administrator: Alexandra Odulak
Cover Painting: *Three Great Freedom Fighters* (ca. 1945) by William H. Johnson. Hampton University Museum, Hampton, Virginia. The painting represents Frederick Douglas, abolitionist John Brown, and Underground Railroad "conductor" Harriet Tubman.
Electronic Page Makeup: RR Donnelley Barbados
Printer and Binder: RR Donnelley & Sons Company
Cover Printer: The Lehigh Press, Inc.

For permission to use copyrighted material, grateful acknowledgment is made to the copyright holders on p. 277, which is hereby made part of this copyright page.

***From These Beginnings: A Biographical Approach to American History***
***Volume 1, Fifth Edition***



**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**
Nash, Roderick.
From these beginnings : a biographical approach to American history / Roderick Nash, Gregory Graves. -- 5th ed.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-673-99205-5 (v. 1)
1. United States- -History. 2. United States- -Biography.
I. Graves, Gregory. II. Title
E178.N18 1994 94-6453
973'. 099- -dc20 CIP

95 96 97 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

# PREFACE

*"There is properly no history; only biography."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The need for a fifth edition of *From These Beginnings: A Biographical Approach to American History* provides continuing evidence for the old adage that the proper study of people is people. Certainly the proper study of the historian is humanity—not laws, treaties, elections, or eras but people who loved, hated, achieved, failed, and shared with us a fascinating complexity of thought and feeling. Like its predecessors, this fifth edition is dedicated to the proposition that teaching and learning about history lose significance and fun when they are divorced from human beings.

The biographical approach is one way to enliven the study of history. The logic behind this choice is obvious: people are interested in people. History concerns, or should concern, people. Historical writing can be made as exciting as life itself if we think of it as a series of biographies. These assumptions underlie the novel structure of this book.

This is hardly a radical approach. Much of our best historical writing is in the form of biography or family history. In January 1977, record numbers of viewers watched *Roots*—and unknowingly and painlessly learned a great deal about the African-American experience. More recently, successful motion pictures have centered on Malcolm X and Jimmy Hoffa. Documentary-style biographies are regularly broadcast on television. The success of all these ventures serves as a challenge to professional historians. Why should history be as "dry as dust"? Why shouldn't history have all the drama of life itself, which, after all, is what it is? Yet, surprisingly, no textbook used a biographical form of organization before the first edition of *From These Beginnings* (1973).

It has been our experience in teaching undergraduate history at several universities that biography is an effective lecturing tool. Whether in short vignettes or hour-long lectures, telling the story of people who affected and were affected by their times remains a reliable way of maintaining student interest. The standard textbook method of dividing the past into periods, eras, or ages has been discarded in *From These Beginnings.* Eighteen often overlapping lives provide the organizational framework, and the larger story of the American experience is woven around these lives. In this way, broad concepts are tied to specific examples. The frontier, slavery, and industrialization, for instance, acquire a sharper focus when viewed from the perspective of a pioneer, a slave, and an industrialist. Conversely, the narrative of national events deepens one's understanding of the eighteen individuals.

One problem in using a biographical approach is finding a happy compromise between "straight" biography and "straight" American history. This is not difficult, of course, when an individual life impinges directly on the course of national events. Thomas Jefferson writing the Declaration of Independence, Henry Ford revolutionizing transportation, and Martin Luther King, Jr., leading the civil rights movement are good examples. But frequently even a famous person sinks back into the general citizenry; the life becomes typical rather than unusual. On such occasions we have used a life-and-times approach consisting of a description of the historical context surrounding the individual. The technique is justifiable, we believe, on the grounds that any life is in large part shaped by the stream of events in which it floats.

Choosing subjects remains the most difficult problem in writing and revising such a book. For many months we discussed who and why between ourselves and among our friends, colleagues, students, and families. After considering valid suggestions for writing on dozens of people, we came to decisions made, we hope, for reasons of balance and the optimum coverage of American history. The addition of one new biography of women's rights activist, writer, and editor Gloria Steinem should make this fifth edition more well rounded and up-to-date than the previous ones. Historical interpretation marches along with time, and we hope that significant revisions of several of the existing biographies reflect the new scholarship.

While none of these eighteen individuals is completely satisfactory as the subject for a chapter, there is some comfort in the realization that the choice is not all-important. A surprising amount of information about the course of national events can be tied to *any* American life. Try it, for example, with your own. *From These Beginnings* could feature any of the approximately half billion people who have called themselves Americans. As Americans they have all affected, and have been affected by, American history.

We would like to acknowledge the help of our reviewers and thank them for their efforts: Neil York, Brigham Young University; Robert McCool, Arkansas Technical University, Russelville; Clifford H. Scott, Indiana University; James Wilson, Southwest Texas State University; Hilliard Goldman, St. Louis Community College; Joseph Morton, Northeastern Illinois University; Richard Garner, Pennsylvania State University; Sally McMillen, Davidson College; Phillip Vaughan, Rose State College; Herbert Druks, Brooklyn College; and we would like to thank Diana James, Gloria Steinem's assistant.

*Roderick Nash*
*Gregory Graves*

# CONTENTS

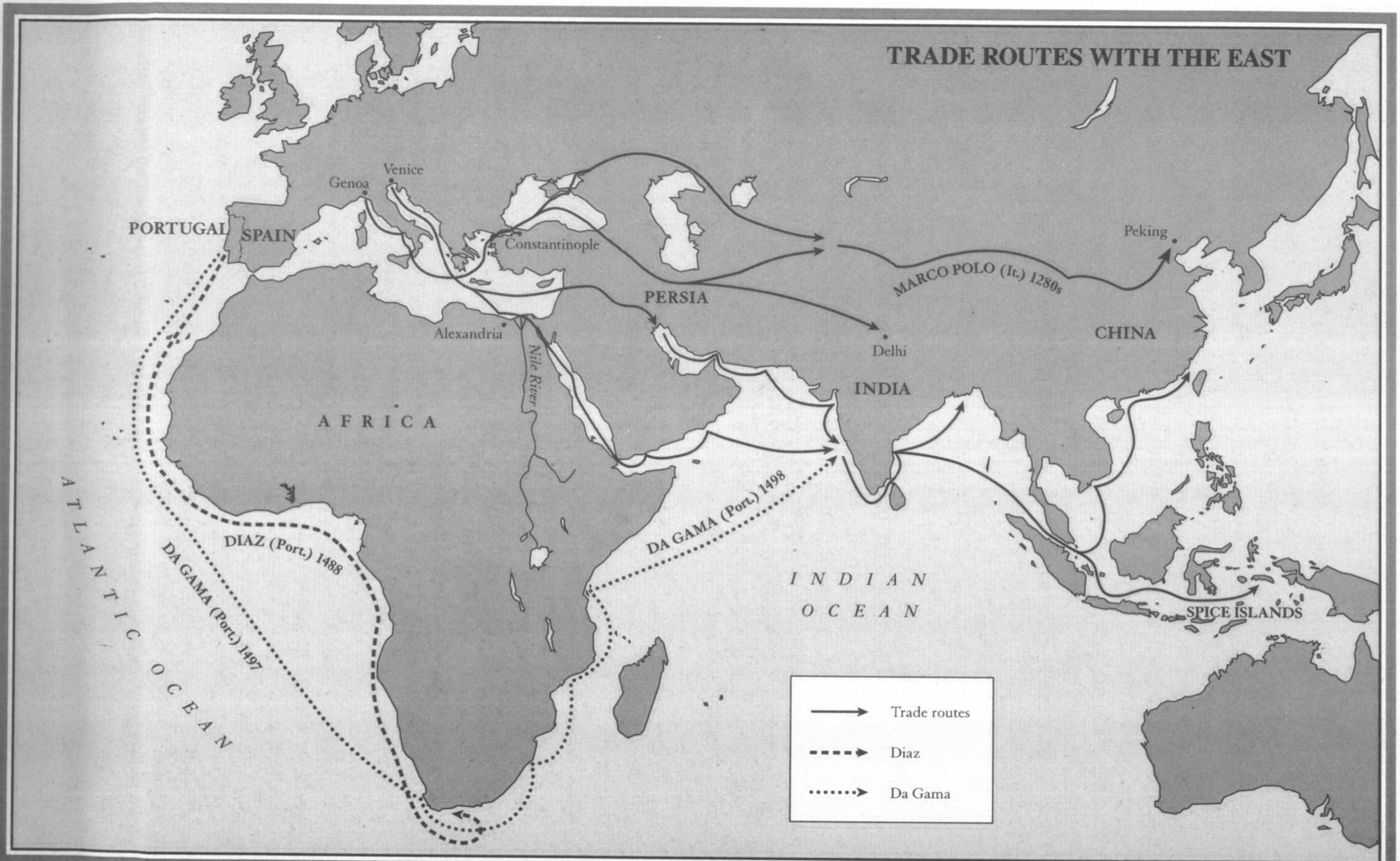
the reference to the palace of the king of Japan, "which is entirely roofed with fine gold, just as our churches are roofed with lead." Such tales of Asia whetted the appetite of Columbus's generation and lifted its eyes to far horizons.

European desire for the treasures of the East could be satisfied by traders. After goods from Asia arrived at eastern Mediterranean ports such as Constantinople and Alexandria, merchants from Genoa, along with those from Venice, Florence, and Pisa, distributed them throughout Europe. Prices, however, were exceedingly high. As a result, Europe was soon faced with an unfavorable balance of trade: money flowed east and goods west. Asia had no use for Europe's bulky agricultural products. The economic situation was bad, but, to make matters worse, in 1453 the Turks captured Constantinople and thus closed to the Christian Europeans the key link in the route to the East. Columbus's Europe desperately needed cheap and direct access to the Orient. The vast highway of the sea promised both.

The Renaissance also played an important role in readying Christopher Columbus and his society for the exploration and colonization of the Americas. The term *renaissance* suggests a rebirth. To be sure, the so-called Dark Ages were not all that dismal except by contrast to the accomplishments of Greece and Rome. Around the twelfth century Arab and Jewish scholars alerted their European counterparts to the cultural brilliance of the classical civilizations. A shiver of excitement spread north from Italy. A society long accustomed to the Christian emphasis on the afterlife, the next world, now glimpsed the potential of the present. The idea of improving the human condition on earth—the idea of progress—gained momentum. A passion for fame, for glory, for achievement, for mastery gained a foothold in the European mind. Individualism flourished. It spread from the arts and letters to politics and business, and fed the development of capitalism. Columbus and his contemporaries were restless, increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo. Understandably, this dissatisfaction created an urge for new lands and new beginnings.

Columbus had the restlessness, confidence, and ambition of a Renaissance man, and the sea offered a perfect outlet for his energies. It also provided an outlet for a man who was instilled with Christian mission and the fulfillment of prophecy. Although there are many ambiguities and mysteries surrounding his life and times, it is certain that Columbus met the sea in the harbor of his native Genoa and may well have transported woolen cloth along the Italian coast. In his twenties he made his first extensive voyages in the Mediterranean as a common seaman. In 1476 Columbus sailed in a large Genoese convoy bound for Portugal, England, and the North Sea ports. Just outside the Strait of Gibraltar, however, a war fleet from France and Portugal descended on the convoy. In the furious battle that followed, Columbus was wounded and his ship sunk. Grasping an oar for support, he struggled six miles to the southern coast of Portugal. As he crawled onto the beach of an unknown country, his chances of ever commanding an expedition to the New World seemed remote. But Columbus was an unusual man with a knack for persevering in the face of adversity.

The country Columbus reached in such unpromising circumstances was then the European leader in maritime discovery. Much of the credit for Portugal's


TRADE ROUTES WITH THE EAST
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Genoa
Venice
Constantinople
Alexandria
Nile River
PERSIA
MARCO POLO (It.) 1280s
Peking
Delhi
CHINA
INDIA
AFRICA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
DIAZ (Port.) 1488
DA GAMA (Port.) 1497
DA GAMA (Port.) 1498
INDIAN OCEAN
SPICE ISLANDS
Trade routes
Diaz
Da Gama

eminence goes to Dom Henrique, better known as Prince Henry the Navigator. This talented prince, who died in 1460, personified the spirit of the age of European expansion. From his headquarters on the Atlantic Ocean, he sent expeditions into the unknown. Some went north and developed a brisk trade with England and Iceland. Others pushed west, a thousand miles into the open ocean, to find the Azores. But Prince Henry reserved his keenest enthusiasm for those who sailed south to coast along the dark continent of Africa. At first, the Portuguese were satisfied to take part in the lucrative trade in gold, ivory, and slaves—the Guinea trade of West Africa. Soon, however, they began to believe that sailing down the west coast of Africa might provide a way to circumvent the Italian monopoly on trans-Mediterranean trade with Asia and India. Driven by a desire for trade and wealth, Prince Henry's captains had, at the time of his death in 1460, reached within ten degrees of the equator.

The Portuguese also achieved preeminence in developing the sciences of sailing and navigation. Not only exploration but the entire colonization movement depended on establishing safe and reliable sea transport. To this end, Prince Henry gathered around him the best navigational minds in the Western world. The charts, tables, and astronomical observations they compiled made possible long expeditions on the open ocean without the need to stay close to shore. The refinement of the astrolabe, for example, permitted a captain to determine his latitude on the basis of star sightings with considerable accuracy. Equally important were the institutions of early capitalism, the banks and joint-stock companies that enabled Portugal to finance far-flung exploration. A shipwreck, ironically, had left Columbus in the best place to pursue the life of an explorer.

Within six months of dragging himself onto the Portuguese beach, Columbus recovered his health and once again put to sea. This time Iceland was the goal and trading the purpose. During the next few years he mastered Latin and Spanish and married Dona Felipa Moniz, daughter of the hereditary governor of Porto Santo in the Madeira Islands west of Gibraltar. Marriage into this prominent Portuguese family meant that Columbus lived on Porto Santo for a year or more in the early 1480s. During that time, he made at least one voyage around the hump of West Africa to Guinea and the Gold Coast.

The African experience added greatly to his skill as a sea captain, but it also produced an unexpected dividend. Columbus noticed that south of the Canary Islands the prevailing winds always blew from the east. Further north, off England and Portugal, they came out of the west. Gradually it dawned on him that to sail west into the North Atlantic winds was foolish. A far better course would be to sail south to the trade winds and then west. To return, one had simply to set a northerly course, catch the west wind, and ride it back to Europe.

Driftwood that storms frequently cast on European shores provided exciting evidence supporting the theory that land lay to the west. When Columbus lived in the Madeiras, he could scarcely avoid noticing the huge tropical canes, seed pods, and tree trunks that we now know came from Central and South America. Carved wood had even been found, and, on one occasion, two flat-faced human bodies, of an appearance strange to Europeans, washed onto the beach. The significance of all this was not lost on Columbus.

Returning from Africa with knowledge about wind patterns, Columbus gave increasing attention to the possibility of sailing west to reach the Far East. The roots of this idea lay in his understanding that the world was round. Educated Europeans had taken a spherical earth for granted for two thousand years; Columbus simply attempted a feat discussed for centuries. The size of the earth, however, and the distribution of its land masses were still hotly debated among the foremost scholars of Columbus's time. "Knowledge" tended to be a blend of fact, myth, and wishful thinking.

In constructing his conception of world geography, Columbus drew on a variety of ancient and contemporary sources. He owned an early fifteenth-century translation of the work of the Greek mathematician Ptolemy, whose calculations fell short of the earth's actual size. Adding reinforcement to his concept was the standard geography of the late Middle Ages, Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, written in 1410 but not printed until 1480. Columbus pored over his copy, making marginal notations on almost every page. "The earth is round and spherical," he jotted at one point, ". . . between the end of Spain and the beginning of India lies a narrow sea that can be sailed in a few days." Further confirmation of this error came from the renowned Florentine physician and geographer Paul Toscanelli. Presumably through his wife's connections, Columbus obtained a 1474 letter in which Toscanelli stated confidently that an ocean voyage west to reach Asia "is not only possible to make, but sure and certain, and will bring inestimable gain and utmost recognition." Toscanelli had also drawn a map that Columbus used to calculate the distance from Portugal to Marco Polo's gold-roofed Japan as three thousand miles. This was only ninety-two hundred miles short!

Toscanelli also perpetuated another fallacy by postulating that only a small island group, Antilla, lay to the west between Portugal and Japan. Most fifteenth-century Europeans agreed that at least an island or a group of islands lay between these limits of geographical knowledge. No one, however, had conceived of a continent dividing the sea into the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Even if Columbus and his contemporaries knew of the Irish and Viking contacts with North America, dating possibly from the sixth century and certainly from the eleventh, they did not realize it was a continent. Yet ignorance, in this case, proved advantageous. Correctly informed, Columbus would more than likely never have ventured west.

Myth also played an important role in his motivation. In company with Europeans since the Greeks, Columbus believed in an earthly paradise. Life was good in paradise, really good. Ripe fruit hung heavy on every bough. The climate was delightful, flowers perfumed the air. Precious stones and quantities of gold could be picked up at will. In some paradise traditions, these sensual joys were subordinated to spiritual ones. Paradise became a place where sin was unknown and people lived in accord with God's Commandments. Those lucky enough to enter paradise, it was thought, left behind all worry, fear, and discomfort—even death was unknown.

According to the Christian tradition, people once occupied paradise, but somewhere along the way they had become separated from it. Adam and Eve, for instance, were driven from the Garden of Eden by an angry God. Later generations, however, remembered—or at least they dreamed. Almost every culture in

Western history has subscribed to the idea that paradise still existed: somewhere there was an island or a mountain or an enchanted valley. If they could only find it, the good life could be regained. The thought was irresistible, particularly so when parts of the earth were yet unknown. It was tempting and easy to believe that paradise lay around the next bend, over the known horizon.

The idea of going *west* to find the lost paradise had existed for centuries before Columbus's venture. The Jews, wandering in the desert after fleeing Egypt, traveled back in that direction to find Canaan: their promised land of milk and honey. The Greeks, Romans, and Phoenicians had had similar traditions of an earthly paradise to the west. These mythical places even appeared on maps, set in the middle of the Atlantic under the names of Antilla, Atlantis, the Islands of the Blest, Elysium, and the Isle of Fair Women. In the sixth century an Irish monk named St. Brendan supposedly sailed west in an attempt to reach the paradisiacal Fortunate Isles. According to the legend that grew up around this voyage, Brendan crossed the North Atlantic to Newfoundland, struck south to Bermuda, and then west to Florida. When he arrived, he found a settlement of Irish monks already enjoying the luxuriance of the tropics. True or not—and there is some evidence that Europeans of this time really did reach North America, if not paradise—the prospect of finding a Garden of Eden continually fired imaginations. In Columbus's time serious discussions of the location and characteristics of paradise were common in every European port. *Imago Mundi,* for example, declares that "the Earthly Paradise is an Elysian spot . . . far distant from our inhabited world both by land and sea." To be the discoverer of this place was reason enough to motivate a man like Columbus.

To implement his plans for a westward voyage to the East and perhaps to paradise, Columbus needed financial backing. He turned first to King John II of Portugal. In 1484 Columbus enthusiastically unfolded his plan to the king's advisory committee. This distinguished group of mathematicians and astronomers was not impressed. In particular, they doubted Columbus's calculation of the distance to Japan and China, contending, correctly, that it was closer to ten thousand than to three thousand miles. The commission favored a course around Africa. Portuguese mariners were continuing the explorations to the south begun under Prince Henry, and it seemed only a matter of time before they would round Africa and open a sea route to India. Therefore, the advisory committee dismissed Columbus's plan as unnecessary and based on imagination more than fact. About the same time Columbus received news that his wife had died in Porto Santo.

At this low point in his life, Columbus became the beneficiary of Europe's changing political structure. Before the fifteenth century an endless series of nobles, barons, earls, and dukes had vied for dominance within particular regions. The abundance of leaders had scattered wealth and power into small and relatively weak units. From this feudal chaos, however, kings and nations began slowly to emerge. By the late fifteenth century a few families had proved superior in the political struggle for existence. Forcing subservience on what became the lesser nobility, they created a series of hereditary monarchies. Extremely competitive and ambitious, these emerging national rulers aspired to the Roman example of world domination. Discovery and expansion appealed to them as avenues to glory.

The nation that could find an easy route to Asia and establish lucrative trading colonies would have an immense advantage over its rivals.

For Columbus, the emerging new order presented an opportunity. After his rejection by the Portuguese monarchy, Columbus traveled to Palos, Spain. Arriving in this seaport city in southern Spain in 1485, Columbus studied cosmology with a Franciscan friar whose knowledge and library restored the explorer's spirit. A year later, Columbus presented his ideas to the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, who were enmeshed in a struggle to unite Spain under their banner, and expel the Moors.

Primarily because of their preoccupation with this struggle, Ferdinand and Isabella paid Columbus little attention when he first approached them. But Columbus also made things difficult for himself by his attitude. Ambitious and conceited, he insisted, as a prerequisite for any voyage, on a guarantee of three fully equipped ships, one-tenth of all the treasures he might find, an appointment as governor and viceroy of the lands discovered, and a place in the Spanish nobility with the title Admiral of the Ocean Sea. Detractors raised the old question of distance; Columbus was again accused of unwarranted optimism. After months of deliberation, the Spanish court rejected his proposal.

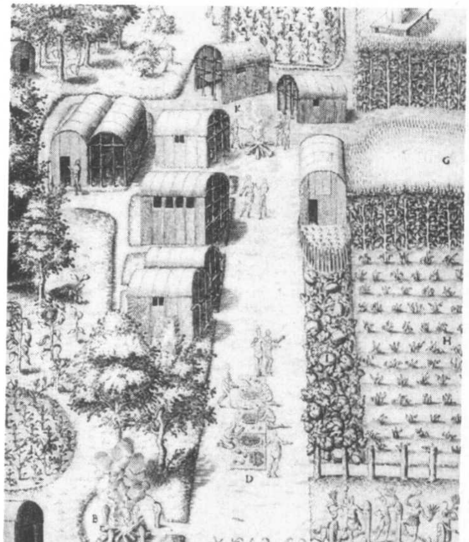
But this rejection, based on scientific doubt, was premature. Other voices in the Spanish court, impressed by his brash confidence and aware of the need to compete with Portugal, continued the debate on the idea. Skepticism vied with desire. At some point Columbus probably played his trump card: the pattern of the winds. He explained *how* to reach Asia by following the northeast winds in the South Atlantic. Even if the trip proved longer than anticipated, it would be easy to turn north and ride the west winds home.

As the debate continued into the 1490s, events became Columbus's ally. Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Diaz, had rounded the southern tip of Africa in 1488, giving that nation a commanding lead in reaching Asia by sea. Ferdinand and Isabella's treasurer, Luis de Santángel, believed it was time to act. He pointed out that the recent surrender of Granada, the last stronghold of African Moors in Spain, on January 2, 1492, had freed the nation's resources for discovery. The voyage just might prove a bonanza in the wake of Spanish unity. Moreover, Columbus could be Spain's vehicle for spreading Christianity to heathen peoples. Considerations of gold, God, and glory, Santángel concluded, lent Columbus's proposal irresistible appeal.

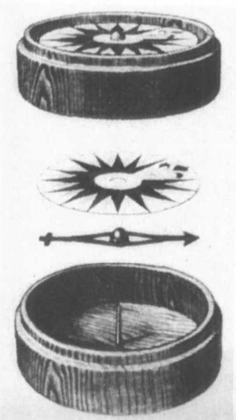
At last, the monarchs agreed. Columbus, on his way to France to make his proposal there, was recalled by royal messenger. Ferdinand and Isabella accepted his terms in a formal agreement of April 17, 1492; and with ample money and connections, Columbus, his energy pent up, exploded into action. Less than three months after arriving in the port of Palos, Columbus was ready to begin his quest.

Two of the three ships in his expedition, the *Pinta* and the *Niña,* were caravels. Light and narrow, these vessels of approximately seventy-five feet in length had been designed for extended voyages. They were swift and could sail almost directly into the wind. Columbus's flagship, the *Santa María,* was longer, bulkier, and slower. The shipowners of Palos perhaps were unwilling to risk a third caravel on so dubious a venture. Still, ninety men volunteered for the crew. Of course, as

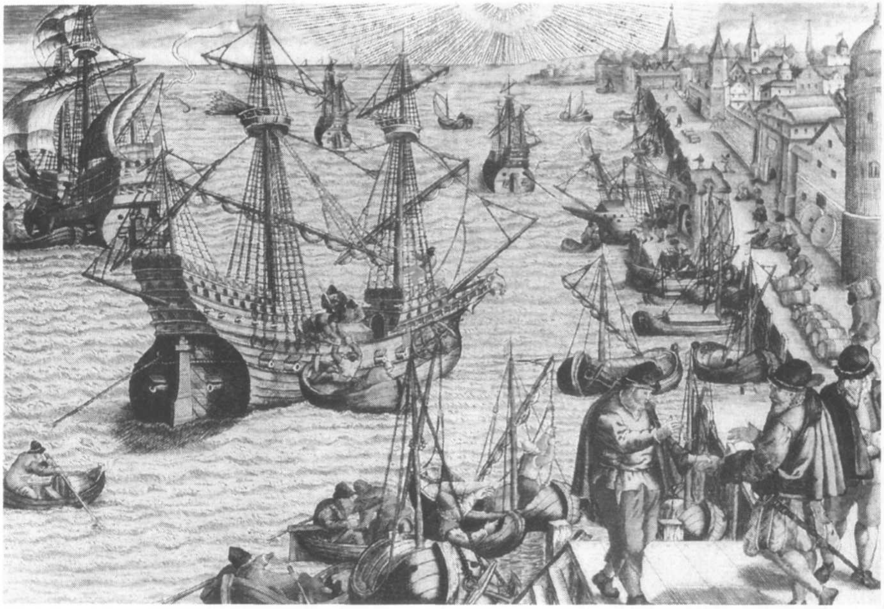
Many Europeans of Columbus's time believed that along with the economic, political, and scientific opportunities inherent in discovering new lands went a religious responsibility. Christianity had to be extended to the heathens. In this sketch from a 1500 map of the world, Columbus is shown wading ashore in the New World with an infant Christ on his shoulders. Appropriately, Columbus's first name was Christopher, literally "Christ bearer."



Only the blind or the extremely biased could have regarded the North American Indians encountered by the first Europeans as wild animals. Many did so, however, in spite of the sophistication of Indian villages such as this one in North Carolina.



The whole age of discovery and exploration depended upon a device as simple as a compass. This reconstruction of a later fifteenth-century model, similar to the one Columbus used, consists of a wooden bowl, an iron needle, and a thin directional "rose" made of wood or paper. The rose could be turned to compensate for magnetic variation.

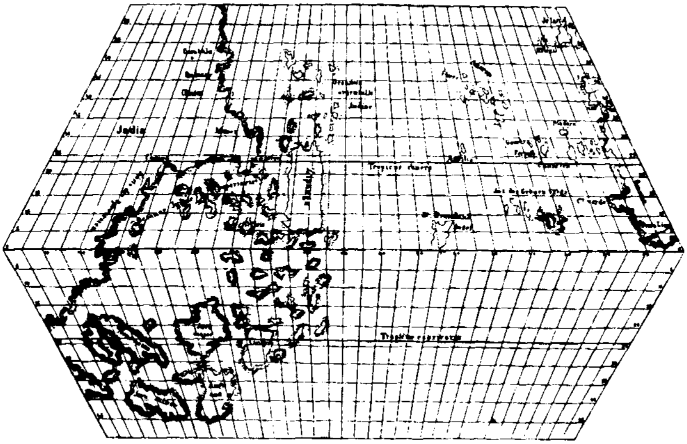


Lisbon, Portugal, was one of the most exciting places in fifteenth-century Europe. It was a jumping-off place—a Cape Canaveral of its time. This 1590 engraving shows Columbus's fleet returning from its first voyage to the New World. The ships are caravels, about seventy-five feet long.

a foreigner in Spain, Columbus needed the assistance of local residents who were also interested in the voyage. The most important among these were members of one of the leading shipping families of Palos: the Pinzóns. In addition to helping Columbus select an able crew, one Pinzón, Martin, commanded the *Pinta* and chose as his first mate a younger brother, Francisco. Still another Pinzón brother, Vicente, was captain of the *Niña.* The Pinzóns provided the expert seamanship and strong moral support that Columbus badly needed. On August 3, 1492, they left Palos bound for the unknown.

Just as he had proposed, Columbus led his expedition on a southwest slant to the Canary Islands, then due west along the twenty-eighth parallel of latitude. The winds proved favorable, as predicted, and the ships made good time. Of course, there were misgivings. Columbus continually had to restrain the crew from altering course to search for islands that seemed just out of sight. As the days stretched into weeks and no land appeared, whispers and then open complaints spread among the men. The sailors did not fear a sudden drop off a flat earth or sea monsters; they were simply a long way from home on an open ocean.

Responding to these challenges, Columbus offered reminders of the riches that lay ahead in Asia. He may have deliberately falsified his log to make the distance back to Spain seem shorter. But ultimately it was a question of will. Columbus was committed. Only death or mutiny could have forced him to turn around in midpassage. His spirit, and the continued support of the Pinzón brothers, sustained the crew. It was Martin Pinzón who, aided by a flock of migratory birds

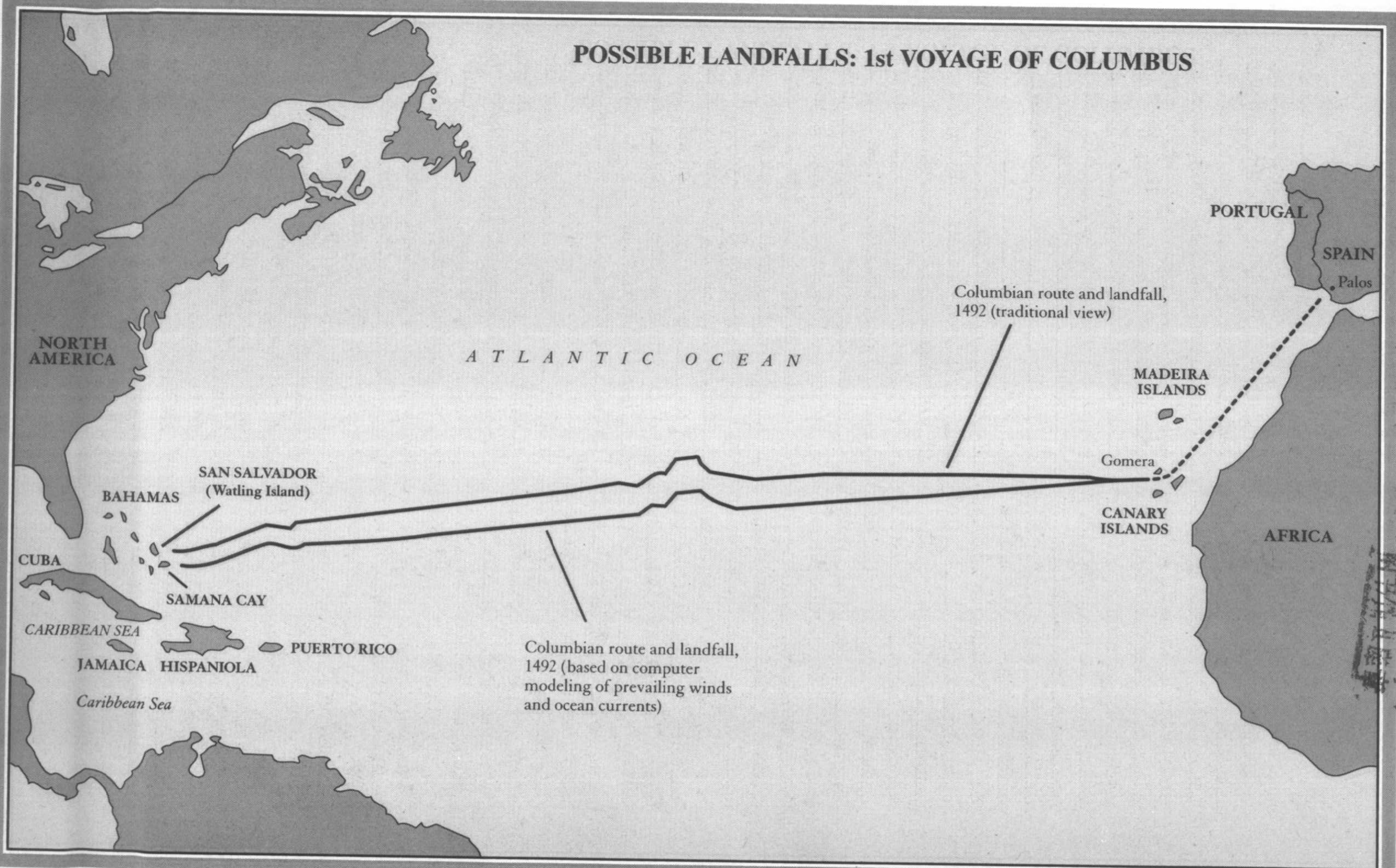


Columbus received this map from the geographer Paul Toscanelli and used it as evidence of the feasibility of sailing west to reach the Far East. The map accurately portrays this possibility, but it contains two glaring errors. According to the grid-shaped pattern of measurement, "Zipangu" (Japan), the other Spice Islands, and the Asian mainland are actually located over nine thousand miles closer to Europe. The second error is the complete omission of North and South America. The large island in the center of the map existed only in European legend.

obviously bound for land, persuaded Columbus to turn southwest and, miraculously, in the direction of the shortest distance to land. When San Salvador (as they named the landmass) loomed in sight on the morning of October 12, 1492, the captains Pinzón and their proclaimed admiral Columbus prepared to disembark on what they were convinced was a remote corner of the Asian continent.

Although recent scholarship suggests that the actual landfall site was not Watling Island but Caicos or Samana Cay, there is still no conclusive proof about where Columbus and his men first set foot on land. Whether they landed on one of these islands, or Crooked Island, Rum Cay, Grand Turk, Mayaguana, Plana Cay, or Cat Island (all of these have been identified as the true landfall at one time or another), Columbus did sight one of the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles. And he and his crew disembarked, came ashore, and explored.

It was surely one of history's dramatic moments when a native of the island, walking the beach at dawn, glanced up to see three ships approaching from the east. By the time the ships anchored, many natives had gathered. Columbus's journal notes their nakedness and describes them as "very well built, with handsome bodies and fine faces." These people had occupied the islands of the Caribbean for only a century. Their ancestors had come to the area from mainland South America, conquering a more primitive race of islanders in the process. Ultimately, their roots went back to the Mongoloid hunters who had crossed the Bering Strait to Alaska at least ten thousand and perhaps forty thousand years before Columbus appeared. Fanning out over a continent newly released from the


POSSIBLE LANDFALLS: 1st VOYAGE OF COLUMBUS
NORTH AMERICA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Palos
Columbian route and landfall, 1492 (traditional view)
MADEIRA ISLANDS
Gomera
CANARY ISLANDS
AFRICA
SAN SALVADOR (Watling Island)
BAHAMAS
CUBA
SAMANA CAY
CARIBBEAN SEA
JAMAICA
HISPANIOLA
PUERTO RICO
Caribbean Sea
Columbian route and landfall, 1492 (based on computer modeling of prevailing winds and ocean currents)

grip of the glaciers (see Chapter 6, pages 152–153), their descendants were on hand to challenge the Vikings when they landed in the eleventh century. European contact with the New World before then is probable, if not fully substantiated. Like Columbus, early mariners could have sailed the trade winds from the Canary Islands to the West Indies. Rock inscriptions from New England and inland sites as distant as the Mississippi Valley date from 1000 B.C. and are written in scripts known only to the Celts, Basques, Libyans, and Egyptians. If these people did establish permanent settlements in the New World, what happened to them? Where were the members of this first wave of European pioneers when Columbus touched on San Salvador? The answer among scholars who hold to the early-contact theory is that they were still present, having been absorbed into the tribes of the still earlier immigrants from Asia.

When Columbus termed the San Salvador people "Indians," he was, unknowingly, partly right. Their most distant ancestors had come from India (a term loosely applied in the fifteenth century to Asia generally). But Columbus's conscious use of the term was strictly a product of wishful thinking and erroneous geography. As a twentieth-century Sioux put it, commenting on the history of the subjugation of the native American, "Even the name Indian is not ours. It was given to us by some dumb honky who got lost and thought he'd landed in India."

European arrogance toward the so-called Indians began with Columbus. From the start he regarded them as inferior even as he noted their good looks and idyllic environment. Nonchalantly he took possession of a land they occupied. And while gathering specimen flowers, fruits, and birds to take back to Europe, he also collected seven natives. In his mind they were just another type of animal, and his journal contains frank speculations on the ease with which they could be enslaved. "These people," he noted on October 14, "are very unskilled in arms, . . . with fifty men they could all be subjected and made to do all that one wished." The statement proved to be a grim prophecy.

The first island disappointed Columbus. There were no treasures of the Orient. But he saw what he wished to see, what must, he felt, be there. The Indians wore small gold ornaments. By signs, they gave the strangers to believe that much more could be found elsewhere. Columbus assumed that Japan was close at hand. On the afternoon of October 14 he left San Salvador, intending to island-hop to Asia. The Spaniards cruised among several smaller islands and then, following natives' directions, pushed on to Cuba. When its high blue mountains appeared to the south, their goal once more seemed on the brink of realization. But again disappointment followed exaggerated expectation. No Grand Khan, wallowing in gold, could be located. Parties sent on inland explorations of Cuba returned with the same depressing story of poor natives and forbidding jungle.

The island of Hispaniola, to which the explorers sailed next, proved to be more promising. The Indians had considerable gold and told Columbus of rich mines in the interior. But just when success seemed imminent, the *Santa María* ran aground on a reef and was abandoned on Christmas Day in 1492. Columbus made a quick decision. He would plant a colony, called Navidad, and leave forty men on Hispaniola to find the gold and ascertain the location of Asia. On January 16, 1493, the *Pinta* and the *Niña* began the voyage home.