

FIRSTHAND AMERICA

A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

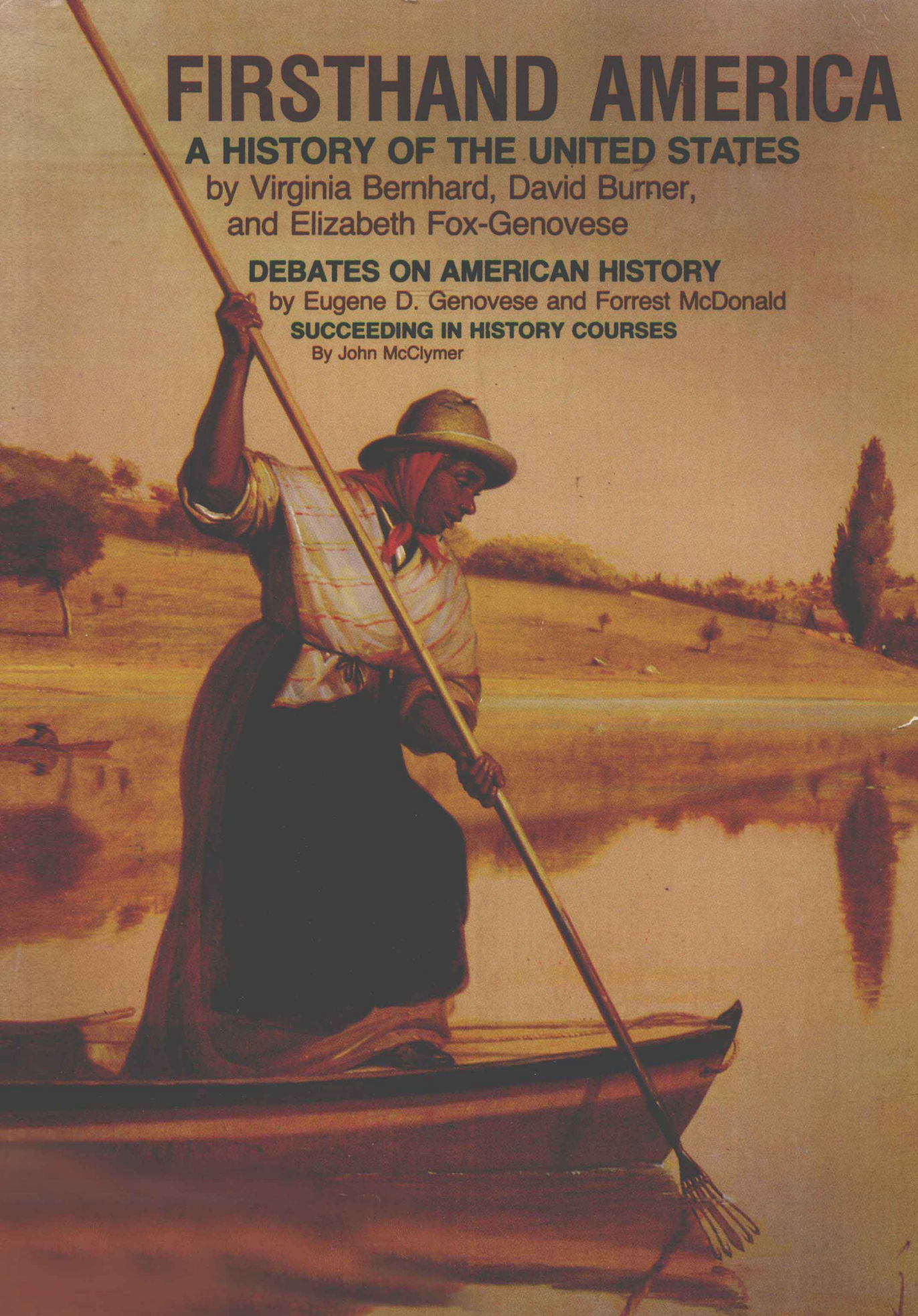
by Virginia Bernhard, David Burner,
and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

DEBATES ON AMERICAN HISTORY

by Eugene D. Genovese and Forrest McDonald

SUCCEEDING IN HISTORY COURSES

By John McClymer



A History of the United States

FIRST EDITION ★ VOLUME 1

VIRGINIA BERNHARD

DAVID BURNER

ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE

EUGENE D. GENOVESE

JOHN McCLYMER

FORREST McDONALD

Text copyright © 1980, 1985, 1991 David Burner
Debates copyright © 1980, 1985, 1991 Eugene D. Genovese
and Forrest McDonald

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

Firsthand America

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. United States—History. I. Burner, David,
1937– . II. Burner, David, 1937– . American
people.

vol. 1, ISBN 0960372612, 560 pp., January 1991

vol. 2, ISBN 0960372613, 624 pp., January 1991

Combined edition, ISBN 0960372614, 1072 pp., February 1991

This book published in the
United States of America and in Canada—
Copyright under the Berne Convention

All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be reproduced in any form without the
permission of Brandywine Press.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

FIRSTHAND AMERICA

FIRSTHAND AMERICA

Brandywine Press · St. James, New York

About the Authors . . .

VIRGINIA BERNHARD has published a historical novel, *A Durable Fire*, set in seventeenth-century Virginia and Bermuda, as well as a biography of a Texas governor's daughter. Her scholarly articles have appeared in *New England Quarterly*, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, and *Journal of Southern History*. She has coedited the forthcoming *Southern Women: Histories and Identities* (University of Tennessee Press, 1991) and teaches at the University of St. Thomas in Houston.

DAVID BURNER has published several books on twentieth-century American politics, most recently *John F. Kennedy and a New Generation* (1988). His *Making Peace with the '60s* is scheduled for publication by Harvard University Press in 1992. He teaches at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE'S highly-praised recent book, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, was published by the University of North Carolina Press. Her forthcoming *Feminism Without Illusions* will be published in 1991. She is Eleanore Raoul Professor of Humanistic Studies and Director of the Institute for Women's Studies Department at Emory University.

EUGENE D. GENOVESE has written a number of books, principally on the Old South, including *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974). He and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese coauthored *The Fruits of Merchant Capital* (1983). Genovese's *The Slaveholder's Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* will be published in 1991.

JOHN McCLYMER has written *War and Welfare: Social Engineering in America* and has coedited *Images of Women in American Popular Culture* (1985). Professor McClymer, who teaches at Assumption College, has written extensively about pedagogy in *The History Teacher*, *Teaching History*, and the American Historical Association's newsletter *Perspectives*.

FORREST McDONALD is Distinguished Senior Fellow at the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Southern History and Culture. He has published several pre-eminent studies of the founding of the United States, most recently *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (1985) and, with Ellen S. McDonald, *Requiem: Variations on Eighteenth-Century Themes* (1988).

About the Firsthand Materials . . .

All comprehensive United States survey textbooks, including this one, give full coverage to standard political, economic, diplomatic, and legal events. But these elements of history are largely the story of elites. This textbook also provides social history captured in the recognizable lives of ordinary people. Presidents, congressmen, and corporate executives are quoted throughout the book. So are soldiers, slaves, indentured servants, cowboys, working girls and women, and civil rights activists. *Firsthand America*, using more than 2000 quotations, therefore gives due place both to the traditional leaders and to the myriad Americans never named in formal histories.

About the Debates . . .

Textbooks have led generations of students into the comfortable illusion that a single history book can summarize the nation's past. As historians know, it is impossible to resurrect the past exactly. In the reconstruction of events they rely on written records, along with some art objects and physical remains. Yet few occurrences are even recorded in writing. Many documents, moreover, are lost, and the historian can never be certain of having seen every manuscript; or the sources may be too voluminous to read exhaustively. A document carries the point of view, or bias, of the person who wrote it and the time in which it was written. To these documents the historian brings his or her own bias.

Since history, then, is an art of interpretation, two eminent historians, the radical Eugene D. Genovese and the conservative Forrest McDonald, here debate in question and answer form great issues of the American past. Their differences go beyond ideology, and in setting forth distinctive viewpoints these two men may help to crystallize your own thinking. This series of debates will provide material for class discussion or written reports and will demonstrate that there is no fixed truth about the past, which makes it all the more rewarding as an intellectual study. Students in any classroom deserve a challenge; and instructors can employ these verbal interchanges in any way they deem suitable.

The debates will provide theoretical content. But narrative itself is an analytical act. The introductory courses in the other social sciences, so popular and often so simple, fall into easy manipulation of abstract definitions, axioms, dicta, isolated from the facts that might clarify or test them. As fine historians have repeatedly demonstrated, a complex readable story is far more sophisticated for its embracing concrete and sometimes contradictory detail. This textbook, in this sense, offers three different interpretations of the American past: Genovese's, McDonald's and that of its other authors. There are important areas of agreement as well as of argument in the accounts. There is but one past; there are many ways to illuminate that past. We hope this volume will introduce you to the genuine excitement historians have found in casting their own light on the history of the United States.

Acknowledgements

We are eager to receive comments on this textbook from both teachers and students. We welcome corrections, suggestions for fresh firsthand sources, news of omissions, and general criticisms. Please send them to Professor David Burner, History Department, SUNY, Stony Brook, NY 11794.

For various kinds of help and encouragement thanks are gratefully extended to Robert Marcus, Alan January, Jim Moore, Jim Bernhard, Sandy Burner, Robert Burner, David Ellis, Winfrey Purington, Hugh Cleland, Pete Seeger, Robert London, Terry Cooney, Rose Dunne, Terry Bose, Gus Seligmann, Deok-Ho Kim, Mark Buckley, Mark Sullivan, Eric Burner, Mark Hessler, Wilbur Miller, Michael Barnhart, Bonnie Schrack, Jerry Sternstein, Ingrid Scobie, Janet Schmelzer, James Mooney, Steven Boyd, Nick Ucci, and Ron Lee. Special thanks in the preparation of the manuscript are extended to Charlie Peach, who is one, of Baldwin Printing in Waterbury, Connecticut, and his assistants Rosemary Henault and Renzo Melaragno. Enormous help in the preparation of the book came from Thomas R. West of The Catholic University of America; his undergraduate students there are the recipients of courses that are an intellectual awakening.

John McClymer wrote the first appendix, "Succeeding in History Courses," as well as most of the Points To Think About that follow each chapter.

The Authors

Dedication

For Sandy, Diane, Eric and Bob

American Letter for Gerald Murphy

*It is a strange thing—to be an American
Neither an old house it is with the air
Tasting of hung herbs and the sun returning
Year after year to the same door and the churn
Making the same sound in the cool of the kitchen
Mother to son's wife, and the place to sit
Marked in the dusk by the worn stone at the wellhead—
That—nor the eyes like each other's eyes and the skull
Shaped to the same fault and the hands' sameness.
Neither a place it is nor a blood name.
America is West and the wind blowing.
America is a great word and the snow,
A way, a white bird, the rain falling,
A shining thing in the mind and the gulls' call.
America is neither a land nor a people,
A word's shape it is, a wind's sweep—
America is alone: many together,
Many of one mouth, of one breath,
Dressed as one—and none brothers among them:
Only the taught speech and the aped tongue.
America is alone and the gulls calling.*

*It is a strange thing to be an American.
It is strange to live on the high world in the stare
Of the naked sun and the stars as our bones live.
Men in the old lands housed by their rivers.
They built their towns in the vales in the earth's shelter.
We first inhabit the world. We dwell
On the half earth, on the open curve of a continent.
Sea is divided from sea by the day-fall. The dawn
Rides the low east with us many hours;
First are the capes, then are the shorelands, now
The blue Appalachians faint at the day rise;
The willows shudder with light on the long Ohio:
The lakes scatter the low sun: the prairies
Slide out of dark: in the eddy of clean air
The smoke goes up from the high plains of Wyoming:
The steep Sierras arise: the struck foam
Flames at the wind's heel on the far Pacific.
Already the noon leans to the eastern cliff:
The elms darken the door and the dust-heavy lilacs. . . .*

*This, this is our land, this is our people,
This that is neither a land nor a race. We must reap
The wind here in the grass for our soul's harvest:
Here we must eat our salt or our bones starve.
Here we must live or live only as shadows.
This is our race, we that have none, that have had
Neither the old walls nor the voices around us,
This is our land, this is our ancient ground—
The raw earth, the mixed bloods and the strangers,
The different eyes, the wind, and the heart's change,
These we will not leave though the old call us.
This is our country-earth, our blood, our kind.
Here we will live our years till the earth blind us—*

—ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

Reprinted by permission.

Mr. Dooley's Advice (1906)

“I know histhry isn’t thtrue, Hinnessy, because it ain’t like what I see ivry day in Halsted Sthreet. If any wan comes along with a histhry iv Greece or Rome that’ll show me th’ people fightin’, gettin’ dhrunk, makin’ love, gettin’ married, owin’ th’ grocery man an’ bein’ without hard-coal, I’ll believe they was a Greece or Rome, but not befure. Historyans is like doctors. They . . . tells ye what a counthry died iv. But I’d like to know what it lived iv.”

FIRSTHAND AMERICA



Columbus—the messenger of the “new heaven and new earth” of the Biblical Apocalypse—planting the cross and giving trinkets to the natives of the New World. (Courtesy, *The Hispanic Society of America, New York*)

CHAPTER 1

Europe and America

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

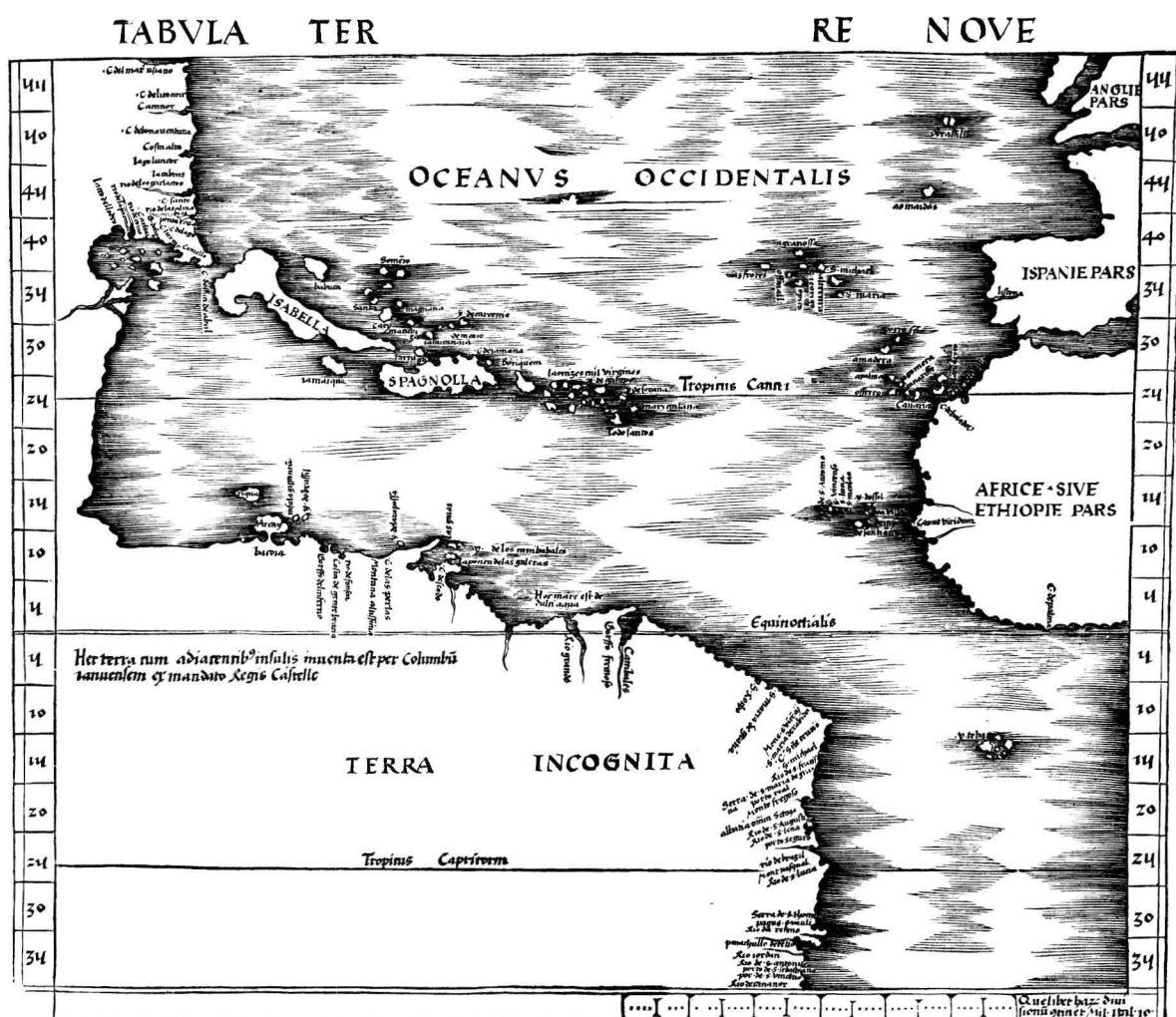
Son of a Genoese weaver, Columbus was an extraordinary weaver of dreams. In the culture of his Mediterranean, the belief in riches and perfection beyond the sunset was strong, for the only sea route leading outward—going everywhere and nowhere—was west through the Straits of Gibraltar and beyond the Canary Islands. America, where that sea route finally led, was an idea in the mind of Europe, and the writings of Columbus reveal the vividness and extravagance of the idea. It represented wealth, freedom, and happiness, the noble savage and the beckoning mystery of the wild frontier—elements that would later go into the American dream. The new Western hemisphere was also primitive and frightening—full of cannibals by Columbus’s testimony. On this fresh, uncharted land Europe could stamp its own shifting character and conflicting desires.

Columbus was a great mariner but an atrocious geographer. Both the strength and the defect helped him to sell his enterprise to the monarchs of Spain. He sharply underestimated the circumference of the globe, placing Asia about 2400 miles from the Canaries of the eastern Atlantic: the actual distance is more than 10,000 miles, most of it vast oceans. Possessed of the intellectual certainty of the self-taught (he had first learned to read as a young man), convinced of the mystical significance of his name (after St. Christopher, who had carried the Infant Jesus across the waters), persuaded that the Bible supported his geographical notions and made likely his discovery of lost Christians, Columbus was an effective salesman for his grandiose project. Besieging King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabel of Castile for more years than they besieged the Alhambra, he finally got his ships, his crews, his promises of riches, and his striking title “Admiral of the Ocean Sea.” And so he set out on what would be an earth-changing voyage, a story endlessly told, rich with symbols of a world’s transformation.

He weighed anchor on August 2, 1492, the very day upon which the last Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism had to leave Spain—most of them bound for the more tolerant countries of Islam. “After having turned out all the Jews from all your kingdoms,” Columbus records in his first diary entry, “your

highness gave orders to me that with a sufficient fleet I should go." The idea of a new world as a haven for persecuted people would have astonished Columbus; the great explorer even gave assurances that he would exclude Jews from any land he discovered. He envisioned himself the messenger of the "new heaven and new earth" of the Biblical Apocalypse—in which Jerusalem is recaptured and the Jews converted—but never realized he had discovered a new world. He made landfall at the island of San Salvador on October 12, 1492. After three more voyages Columbus died convinced that he had found the Eastern Indies, the Orient of India, China, and Japan.

On one voyage, it is written, a tremendous waterspout threatened Columbus's ship. And he calmed the waters by reading aloud the account in the Gospel According to St. John of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, tracing a cross in the sky and a circle around the fleet with his sword. On the same journey, marooned and starving in Jamaica, he terrified the local Indians into supplying his crew with food by threatening the divine gesture of removing the light from the moon—his up-to-date almanac correctly predicted a total eclipse



Tabula Terre Nove, Map of the New World, 1507–1513. (N. Phelps Stokes Collection. Prints Division. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

of the moon. Such were the methods of this man who was at once a modern scientist, a medieval sailor, and a mystic.

The new world that Columbus never knew he had discovered contained wealth beyond his dreams of the riches of the Indies, and offered an opportunity for the expansion of Christianity far greater than his mystical vision. America's nearly twenty million square miles of land and the wealth that lay beneath it would fuel the economy of Europe and offer a haven for millions whose lives his discovery disrupted. Columbus brought back Indian captives, initiating the Atlantic slave trade that would shift to Africa and forcibly disrupt the lives of further millions. It has been suggested that these first transAtlantic slaves brought with them their own revenge, carrying in their bloodstreams the bacillus of syphilis—previously unknown to Europe. It was Columbus, too, who began the colonization of the New World, introducing on the island of Hispaniola an imperialist regime and its murderous course. Among American Indians Columbus Day is not considered a holiday.

The World Stage

At the time of Columbus's discovery of America, Europe was in a state of unending warfare. Europeans fought Europeans as well as Africans and Asians, contending for control of one square mile and another of their subcontinent. Emperors, kings, princes, and dukes laid claims to empires, kingdoms, principalities, and fiefs. Wars in defense of rival claims never ceased. Whatever unity held within European Christendom rested upon the hostility and contempt with which Europeans viewed all other racial, religious, and cultural groups.

The hostility was justified but the contempt was not, for Europe, being one of the least unified, was also one of the most primitive and least potent of the world's great cultures. For some centuries its home territory had been shrinking.

In the twelfth century, the great cultures had arrived at a temporary stalemate. Islam, the most dynamic and aggressive culture on the planet for four centuries, had temporarily spent its force after subduing the Iberian peninsula in Europe, all of North Africa, and Asia Minor as far as northern India. The Moslems retained a commanding superiority over the Europeans in science, technology, warfare, and general learning. It was the Moslems, in fact, who preserved the works of the Roman astronomer Ptolemy, whose estimates of the earth's size guided Columbus. To the east, the Hindu culture continued to dominate the Indian subcontinent, as it had for a thousand years; but the culture had long since passed its zenith and it was torn by rev-

olution and by warfare among scores of provinces, great and small. In the Orient, where printing, paper money, and gunpowder had already been invented, the Sung dynasty dominated a vast area and Chinese culture basked in its golden age; but in the 1120s the Sungs lost half their territory through war and rebellion, and before the end of the twelfth century central Asia had spawned a new Mongol Empire that would rule for a hundred years.

The thirteenth century belonged to the Mongol hordes. In the space of forty years, under the leadership of their ruler, Genghis Khan, these fierce warriors swept over three continents, totally subjugating China and pressing the other three major civilizations into portions of their home regions. They overran all of Russia, subdued and ravaged Slavic eastern Europe, and thrust into the Germanic lands. There the onslaught against Europe stopped, for the interior mountains were not suitable to the Mongol style of mounted warfare. Then the hordes swung south to devastate Islamic territory. Western India fell, and then the Near East, and westward the Mongols swept until 1260, when Islamic forces stopped them just short of Egypt. Thenceforth, the Mongols expanded no more; they held on for a century and then, as abruptly as they had risen, they retreated and declined into impotence.

The Mongol occupation quickened Europe's economy and in ways that would have vast consequences. When the Mongols seized land to the east, the wealthiest and