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Unforeseen Americas: The making of New World societies in anthropological perspective

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ABSTRACT **The European discovery and settlement of the Americas revealed unforeseen dimensions and gave rise to unpremeditated ways of coping with the resulting problems. This paper traces out the enduring social and cultural implications of this foundational encounter.**

I work, as an anthropologist, to examine the ways in which social and cultural processes generate forces that shape particular scenarios in time and space. One such scenario, pregnant with enduring effects, occurred on October 12, 1492, when a sailor on the *Pinta*, Cristobal Colon's fastest ship out of Palos in Portugal, first cried "land" upon sighting the Bahamas.* Colon, who came to be known as Columbus, and his two fellow captains thereupon went ashore in an armed boat and took possession of the new lands in the name of the queen of Castile and the king of Aragon. Sixteen days later Columbus reached Cuba, and 12 days after that Hispaniola, the later Santo Domingo, thinking all the time that he had sailed 90° westward from Palos instead of 70. He also called the Arawak-speaking natives "Indians," because he believed that he was dealing with the inhabitants of treasure-laden India. At first, he thought that he had landed in Japan, and later he thought that he was in China. And when he reached the mouth of the Orinoco River on his third voyage in 1498, he still thought that he might have found one of the biblical rivers supposed to flow from paradise. Thus, the European discovery of the Americas began with major misunderstandings. They were to be the first, but not the last. Still, in 1638, the French fur trader Jean Nicolet disembarked on the western shores of Lake Michigan, decked himself out in a Chinese robe, and expected to meet the Great Khan of China, only to hold converse with some local Chippewa and Winnebago.

How can we make sense of these events? Some have focused on Columbus, the man, and visualized him either as a hero or as a villain, a Christ-intoxicated mystic or an avaricious fool. His discovery has been interpreted variously as God's work among the heathen, as a phase in the onward march of human progress, as an enormous and dismal tragedy, or as a set of promises left unfulfilled. I shall take the position that one can write about history as a moral enterprise, but that little is gained thereby if your purpose is to explain. I want to focus on the forces that caught up and held men and women, and leave their hearts and souls to be assayed by others. I shall engage, first, the purposes and visions that engaged the Europeans to set sail for the New World; then, say something about how they hoped to reshape that world in terms of these intentions; and, finally, address the unforeseen, unexpected consequences that flowed from these projects. I have therefore called this presentation "Unforeseen Americas." Columbus's encounter with the Indians of the Caribbean was merely the first of these unexpected events. Let us put it into perspective.

Cristoforo, the Christ-bearer, as he signed himself, was, by all accounts, a good sailor; but it was also his good luck to arrive in the Iberian peninsula from his Italian home city of Genoa just when the oar-propelled Mediterranean galley was being replaced by the sailing ship, and when Portuguese seamen had learned much about the winds and currents of the Atlantic ocean. Both Spaniards and Portuguese began to explore the offshore islands of the Atlantic in the 14th and 15th centuries, and by the mid-15th century the Portuguese had sailed down the African coast to what is today modern Ghana. Contrary to what is now often said in history books, it was by then widely understood that the world was round and not flat, although Columbus thought that the distance across the western ocean was only 2400 miles instead of 10,000. It is also likely that sailors from Bristol in England had by then begun to explore the North Atlantic to fish in the banks off Newfoundland.

This expansion into Atlantic waters was also grounded in the 800-year-long conflict between Western Christendom and Islam. The European challenge to Muslim power reached a flash point in the same year of 1492, when the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon in Spain conquered the last Muslim stronghold in Iberia: the kingdom of Granada. With this victory, Spanish military technology—the use of infantry conjoined with cannon—put an end to Islamic rule on Spanish soil. This great success, however, merely intensified the confrontation between the Christian kingdoms and the rising Islamic power of the Ottoman Turks in the East. The Turks had seized Constantinople in 1453 and converted it into Istanbul. They blocked European access to the Eastern Mediterranean, and, with important consequences, as we shall see, throttled the supplies of slaves previously seized or bought from the regions around the Black Sea. The Spanish seizure of Granada in 1492 also coincided with the expulsion of the Jews, seen as enemies of Christianity, as well as a fifth-column acting for the Turks, and initiated the forcible conversions to Christianity of Hispanic Muslims, whose remnants were finally driven from the land in 1619. War and religious zeal combined to strengthen Spanish Catholic mysticism, and the Crown supported this rising tide of religious zeal in the hope that it would fuel the enthusiasm to build a new world order. That paroxysm of religion also affected Columbus, a mystic as much as a sailor or entrepreneur.

There were also much more mundane consequences of the reorientation of Mediterranean traffic away from the Turkish roadblock. This involved especially the merchants of Genoa, whose economic opportunities in the Eastern Mediterranean had been curtailed since the 13th century, first by the Venetians and then by the Turks. Capital in hand, the Genoese

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families of the Spinola, Pinelli, Cattaneo, Grimaldo, and Centurione turned westward to Portugal and Spain in search of profits. It was these family networks that supported Columbus in his maritime aspirations (1). He had sailed for the Centurione to the Greek island of Chios in 1474–1475; worked for them in Lisbon in 1477; and bought sugar for them on his honeymoon in the Madeiras in 1478, where he had married the daughter of the former captain-general, also of Italian origins. Francesco Pinelli, hispanicized into Francisco Pinelo, together with the secretary to the king of Aragon financed Columbus' first and second voyages. Not surprisingly, Columbus in his last will and testament entreated his son Diego to set up a fund in the Bank of San Giorgio in Genoa "which gives interest of six per cent and is secure money" (ref. 1, p. 66).

Finally, reasons of state were at play in the decision to support the Columbian quest. The Castilian state needed to replenish its coffers, emptied by the campaign against Granada. Supporting Columbus could steal a march on the Portuguese and open up untapped sources of wealth. Furthermore, if Columbus was right and could reach Asia by sailing west, it might prove possible to take the Turks from the rear and to open up a new front against Islam (ref. 2, p. 59). Religion, economics, and political motives thus all played a part in the enterprise of the Indies, and Columbus—mystic, entrepreneur, and inveterate seeker after glory—was their willing instrument.

When Columbus's three ships discovered America, they did reveal a new world full of marvels for the Europeans; but what they accomplished in fact was to link two worlds, both old, both characterized by their own, long, on-going, historical evolution. The Indians did not have to be discovered; they were already there since their ancestors had crossed the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska at least 20,000 years before. What Columbus accomplished was to connect these two worlds into one system: the global system that we now all inhabit together. Columbus did not then know this; nor did Juan Ponce de Leon when he searched for the Fountain of Youth in Florida; or Sir Walter Raleigh, who sponsored the first English settlement north of Cape Hatteras in 1586. Raleigh still believed that the garden of Eden was located in North Carolina and that the capital of the imaginary kingdom of El Dorado would be found in the headwaters of the Orinoco.

The newcomers did not find the Fountain of Youth, nor the Garden of Eden, nor even El Dorado, but they did report things never seen before. Columbus wrote that "all the trees were as different from ours as day from night, and so the fruits, the herbage, the rocks, and all things." In the Great Plains, there were bisons, with horns and humps like camels, beards like goats, and tails held erect like scorpions. There were opossums, "the foremost part resembling a fox, the hinder a monkey, the feet were like a man's, with ears like an owl" (ref. 3, p. 40); and there were manatees or sea cows, large, docile, plant-eating, aquatic mammals that some sailors away too long at sea mistook for mermaids, but whom the Dutch and Portuguese in Brazil then slaughtered by the tens of thousands for ready food. There were new food plants—Indian corn (maize), manioc, and potatoes—previously unknown in the Old World, but, once introduced, quickly spread from their Iberian ports of entry to many parts of Eurasia and Africa, where they furnished food staples for large populations and rendered possible their prodigious increase. There was tobacco, castigated by some as the weed of the devil, and praised by others as a source of mellow contentment.

Yet, how was one to square the existence of these plants and animals with the narratives of the Bible? If there was no mention of armadillos and opossums on Noah's ark, perhaps God had made a new and separate creation of beasts (ref. 4, p. 367). But if the animals were a problem, the people were even more so. Were they children of Adam and Eve? Were they the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel? They were, perhaps, suggested Paracelsus in 1520, "from another Adam." Conceivably and even more heretically, argued Isaac de La Peyrere in 1655, they were pre-Adamites and Adam was the product of a second creation and father only to the Jews (ref. 5, p. 13). Were native Americans beats or humans? Was Dr. Chanca, who sailed on Columbus's second voyage, right when he said that "their bestiality is greater than that of any beast in the world" (ref. 2, p. 42)? Was it true that their skulls were particularly thick, as argued by Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, and their brains less intelligent, an argument used by the jurist Gines de Sepulveda in 1550–1551, to show that they were destined to be natural-born slaves? Or was it the case instead, as Bartolome de las Casas argued, that all humans "necessarily possess the faculty of reason and are capable of all things pertaining to man, and thus of being taught and improved" (ref. 3, p. 59)? These arguments hit at the foundation of what social and political order was to be built in the Indies. They also, in most dangerous fashion, called into question the orthodoxy of biblically founded beliefs.

The union of Castile and Aragon in one Spanish state and the fusion of that state with the multiple other domains of the Hapsburg dynasty, first in Europe, and then in the New Spains, New Granadas, New Vizacayas of the New World, produced the grandiose Spanish vision of one great universal empire in which "the sun never set." That empire was to be all-embracing, hierarchical, unified under one monarch who would dispense God-imbued justice, and thus energize "the social and political hierarchy. . .at every level and in every department" (ref. 6, p. 75). Other political visions, though no less hierarchical in concept, envisaged "leaner and meaner" states, less top-heavy with officials and ecclesiastics, more decentralized into local assemblies and trade associations, less expensive in their operation. That was the English model in the American colonies. Neither model was a government "of the people," though both claimed to be governments "for the people." They were quite unashamedly projects for domination by political, legal, military, and also ideological power. Transferred to the Americas, the native peoples were to be included in them as duly obedient subordinates.

The voyages of the discoveries had revealed the existence of an unforeseen continent, populated by unforeseen inhabitants. Descendants of Adam or not, inhabitants of the Garden of Eden or incomprehensible savages, these people became the predilect target of the dreams and hopes of both conquistadores and lowly criminals escaping a term on the imperial galleys, of friars looking for unshriven souls and country wenches sent across the sea with royal dowries to procreate on new continents, of landless laborers looking for land to cultivate and tax collectors with lists of dues payable to the Crown. All sought Indians to serve them, to work for them, to enrich them with gold and pearls, to abjure the devil and embrace the one true god, to put on clothes and bow to civilization, to acknowledge European sovereignty and swear loyalty to royal dynasties descended from Visigothic cutthroats or Alpine cattle barons. Thus, unknowingly to themselves, the inhabitants of the New World were seen by the new arrivals as actors in utopias not of their making, subject to surveillance by a divine providence hitherto unknown.

Some of the newcomers dreamed of instant wealth, and there were indeed whole mountains of silver in Bolivia and Mexico, gold mines in the Colombian Chocó, stands of tropical hardwoods, grasslands for vast herds of cattle, the prospects for large plantations of sugar cane, tobacco, or cacao. But such dreams of wealth could be converted into realities only by means of Indian labor, and thus the conquest of the Indies quickly turned into a conquest of Indians.

If some people came with visions of gold and silver, others were fired with the ambition to wrest souls from the forces of darkness and set them upon the paths to salvation. In Spain, the reconquest of Islamic Al-Andalus had gone hand in hand

with a religious revival; in America, this message was carried forward by friars who saw the conversion of the Indians as an opportunity to erect a new kingdom of God in an innocent and as yet uncorrupted world. From Portugal to Brazil came the Jesuits led by Manuel de Nobrega, who wrote to the king that the Indians were "a blank page on which one can write at will, provided one sustains them by example and continual converse." Four years later he was not so sure: "The worst thing of all with the Indians is that when they come to my tent, by giving them one fishhook I can convert them all, and with another I could unconvert them again, for they are inconstant" (ref. 7, p. 99, p. 103). To New England went the Separatist Pilgrims, dissenting from the Church of England, to "build a city upon a hill" where they might "live and be multiplied" (ref. 8, p. 47), but also where they could "wynn and incite the natives of [the] country, to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind" (ref. 9, p. 79).

Finally, there were visions of orderly governance. The centuries surrounding the date of Columbus's discovery throbbed with arguments about the nature of the state and the requisites of governing the nations. The states of Europe were becoming politically consolidated and centralized. People on all levels of society debated the nature of power, the rights and obligations of the governed, the fusion or separation of Church and State. But now, as government was fastened upon the natives of the Americas, the hemisphere revealed an unforeseen fact of the discovery. All the inhabitants of the new continents had been lumped together, erroneously, under one name: Indians. But trying to govern these Indians, turning them into subjects of encompassing states, revealed a new dimension: some were governable, others were not.

The incoming Spaniards discovered that there were regions, especially in densely populated and highly urbanized Mexico and Guatemala, and in the Andes—in what is now Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and northern Chile—where the native peoples themselves had historically developed the machineries of state. There, people owed obedience to hierarchies of officialdom, were subject to the orderly extraction of tribute, and approached the supernatural through complex rituals managed by religious specialists. These state-ordered Indians the conquerors called *indios de policia*, Indians with a *polis*, a polity, in the double sense of an organized collective and a system of law and order.

Elsewhere, however, on the margins of such political systems and across wide ranges of the American continents, there lived people who managed their lives through wide-ranging bonds of kinship, but who did not recognize any social distinction between payers of tribute as subjects and recipients of tribute deliveries as lords. They did not envisage a hierarchical ordering of the supernatural, either, but dealt with a multitude of vital forces. To the Europeans, such tribal peoples seemed wholly unpredictable and therefore uncontrollable.

To these mobile cultivator/hunters, in turn, the luxuriant wilderness and the untamed forest were familiar territory and home; to the European immigrants, they appeared dangerous and threatening, "a hideous and desolate wilderness full of wild beasts and wild men" (ref. 9, p. 83). Europeans were already familiar with the imagery of wild men and women roaming the great Central European forests, denizens of the *selva*, the forest, hence *salvaggi, salvajes, sauvages*—savages.

The newcomers associated civilized life with towns and settlements; to the dwellers in woods and bush these seemed cramped citadels of pollution, rising on their own offal, and overgrazing, overcultivating, overforaging the environment in search of fuel. The newcomers sought to expand the scope of their subsistence and stock their barns with wealth. To the natives they seemed "insatiable gluttons" (ref. 7, p. 16). In economic exchanges, the Indians resorted to gifts and countergifts to build up long-lasting ties to other persons or groups. Europeans sought to free transactions from social, political, and religious constraints, to reduce them to their purely economic common denominator, and to limit social relationships by counting out money; to the Indians a sure sign that they wanted not to be friends, but enemies. To the Indian cultivator/hunter, political leaders were mediators of conflicts, abundantly generous, experts in making war, great orators, persuasive managers of social intercourse. In contrast, the incoming Europeans were heirs to long-standing traditions of politics and rule as attributes of sovereign states. They had learned to yield up to Caesar what was Caesar's, to discipline themselves to respond to a ruler's will. They had come to see power as housed in armories and institutions, wielded through law and punishment, built upon the compliance of subjects. They were also heirs to religions that made salvation dependent upon submission to a divine plan of an almighty god. The Indians, however, were more likely to see all phenomena of the world as dramatically alive, and to interpret the relations among humans and nonhumans as ongoing exchanges and appropriations of vitality.

Hence, the encounters between the hierarchically state-governed Europeans and the Indians without territorial states produced a clash of cultural rationales that impeded mutual accommodation, whether these encounters took place in the Canadian woods, on the New England frontier, or in the forests and swamps of Amazonia. Thus, the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci wrote in 1502 (ref. 7, pp. 13–14) that the Indians of Brazil did not recognize the immortality of the soul, had no laws of faith, and lived according to nature. They had no private property and held everything in common; they recognized no boundaries of kingdoms and provinces, and had no king. Instead, they obeyed no one, each being a lord unto himself. They knew neither justice nor gratitude.

But then, if they had no property and fixed boundaries to their lands, one also did not have to bother about titles; land was there for the taking. Yet, if the natives retaliated and war ensued, the picture of the gentle savages living according to nature could change quickly to counterimages of ferocious beasts, "wild like wolves instead of wild like deer" (ref. 10, p. 74). Then, one could either read them a declaration of Just War that legitimized taking up arms against infidels and enslaving them; or simply "conquer, occupy, and possess" the lands of "heathen or infidels" in order to win "the domination, title, and jurisdiction of the same" (ref. 10, p. 5). Wherever tribally organized Indians resisted, they were classified as *bravos*, wild, *salvajes*, savage, or—in the old Spanish term—*xivaros*, wild and uncontrollable beasts or men. Consequently, the American world came to be polarized into good and obedient Indians, *de policia*, in the intensively cultivated, urbanized zones, and into savages. The obedient Indians, though not reasonable and rational themselves, could be placed under the tutelage of men of reason, *gente de razon*, still today a name used by urbanized, literate people in highland Latin America to draw a line between themselves and Indians. The tribal Indians, however, seen as devoid of reason and irrational, were to be killed or enslaved.

Yet, at this point, the fates dealt the discoverers and new settlers another wild card from the deck of unforeseen possibilities. The Spanish Crown fully intended to set up special protective institutions for the Indians with states, consisting of Indian communities that would run their own affairs under their own officials, with a legal system of courts and tribunals of their own. Spaniards were to deal with these communities only through officers of the king himself. Yet, having emplaced this system of rules and regulations, they suddenly discovered that their Indians began to die in alarming numbers. The main factor in this catastrophe were epidemics that attacked populations not yet immune to the diseases of the Old World. Populations in Eurasia and Africa had exchanged disease-bearing organisms for millenia, and developed appropriate immunological reactions to them. Until 1492, the great Atlan-

tic Ocean had acted as a barrier to transmission of diseases. Now measles and whooping cough, pneumonias and influenzas began to kill large multitudes, people undoubtedly weakened further by the disorganization of their ecological systems after the conquest, by the collapse of their traditional cultural motivations, and by the heavy demands for tribute and labor imposed upon the native peoples by the new rulers. The Europeans long acted as if there would always be another Indian to replace the one that had just collapsed; but there was not. Disease, moreover, affected Indians with states and without states alike, reducing populations in many parts of the New World down to 1/10th of their former size. Only in the middle of the 17th century did the Indian population of America begin to grow once more from these much reduced remnants.

Parenthetically, we need to remind ourselves that not all Europeans who came to the New World ended up as opulent aristocrats. Soon after the Spanish conquest there were large numbers of impoverished Spaniards in Mexico and Lima, complaining loudly about their lack of reward, petitioning the king for pensions, and making a public nuisance of themselves by disorderly and disrespectful conduct. Others roamed the countryside, harassing Indians and trying to shake down Indian communities. In the English colonies, 1 of every 10 indentured servants brought to work on contract from England, Ireland, or Germany might succeed in becoming a farmer after his term was up, another an artisan; but the other eight either died while still under contract, or ended up as day laborers or as dependents of the local almshouse.

To replace the dying Indians, the new European lords of the lands turned to outside sources of labor, mobilized through the slave trade. Thus the unforeseen Great Dying of the native peoples of the New World was compounded by the similarly unpremeditated creation of Africas in the Americas. Slavery itself was not a new invention; it had a long history in the Old World. In the early Middle Ages, it was Northern and Eastern Europe that had exported slaves to the Islamic Near East. In the later Middle Ages the current reversed, and Europe increasingly imported slaves from the Russian–Turkish borderlands surrounding the Black Sea. This source of supply, however, was shut off by the Ottoman Turks after 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople; soon after the Turkish advance across North Africa also barred European access to slaves from the Mediterranean littoral under Muslim control. Slavery there was, but it also differed from what came later by being color blind. The color shades of slaves might be noted, but they were still collectively identified as Turks or Slavs, that is slaves, and only occasionally as African. Color-blind slavery endured for another hundred years and the Spaniards, for instance, enslaved Guanches, the "white" inhabitants of the Canary Islands, and put them to work on sugar plantations in the Atlantic islands, alongside Africans from both north and south of the Sahara (11–13).

By the mid-15th century, however, the Portuguese had expanded their reach for slaves down the west African coast to Ghana, and from then on Africa south of the Sahara increasingly became the main target of the trade. Thereafter, slavery in the Americas would be decreasingly Indian and increasingly African. This, then, produced the paradox that shook the French enlightenment scholar Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal when in 1781 he posed the question of whether the discovery of America had benefited or harmed the world. How could one square the promise of America with the reality of human suffering? "Without this labor, these lands, acquired at such high cost, would remain uncultivated." And he answered: "Well, then let them lie fallow, if it means that to make these lands productive, man must be reduced to brutishness, whether he be the man who buys or he who sells, or he who is sold" (ref. 14, p. 16).

We can surely second Raynal's moral outrage at this system of mobilizing human labor, but, if we are to explain why slavery appealed to its planners and beneficiaries, we must identify its material causation. There did not exist at that time labor markets large and dependable enough to recruit sufficient numbers of steady workers for work in places where their labor was desired. Today, it is possible to move Filipinos to Malaysia, Senegalese to France, and Mexicans to Michigan, because working for wages and hiring people to do wage work have become universalized and universally understood. This was not the case in most parts of the world until the 19th century. Thus, labor was everywhere recruited through coercion: by kidnapping people, by putting prisoners to work at home or sending them to the colonies, by tributary services, by enforcing temporary labor contracts or indentures. Of these ways of allocating people to resources, slavery was surely the most extreme, as well as the most charged with unforeseen consequences. With the hindsight of five centuries since the first Europeans reached the Americas, we can specify one of these unforeseen consequences that is very much with us still: the modern problematic penchant for sorting people by skin color and the texture of their hair. This is not to say that people did not take note of color before 1492 and that social and cultural discrimination did not enter these judgments. But in the centuries preceding, in both European Christendom and Near Eastern Islam, the key issue in drawing distinctions among different kinds of human beings lay in sorting the believers and faithful from heathen, heretics, infidels, and their descendants. Judgment of skin coloration as indices of descent could affect these categorizations, but they were never primary. I have already noted the color-blind approach to recruits into slavery that characterized the premodern Mediterranean; ultimately, anyone with sufficient brawn or skill was an asset for the trade, no matter what his or her color.

But the new societies of the Americas generated by the Columbian voyages made issues of color salient and predominant to an unusual degree and intensity. These new societies came to encompass not merely various kinds of Indians, Africans, and Europeans, but also the remarkable and novel combinations of Eur-Indians, Eur-Africans, Afro-Indians, and Afro-Europeans, combinations that the Mexican statesman Jose Vasconcelos so poetically called *la raza cosmica*, the Cosmic Race. The rise of the Cosmic Race was also unforeseen. The Spanish state wanted to keep Indians separate from Spaniards. When this proved laughably impossible, the royal officials tried to sort the many new variants of Americans into a complex roster of socioracial categories or *castas*. Yet, such an ordered hierarchy of categories also proved unstable and unmanageable since the very process of social, cultural and genetic shuffling that gave rise to these categories would also undo them in each succeeding generation.

In the new American societies, however, the issue of who was to have precedence over whom, who might be looked up to, and who could be looked down upon came to be intimately involved with color. Although outward appearance is never a sure guide to genetic inheritance, color came to be treated as a symbol of social position—an index of ancestry and descent; types of marriage and rights of inheritance; prerogatives in joining political bodies, councils, guilds, trading associations, and religious sodalities. Everywhere, the social scenes were dominated by a "pigmentocracy," an autocracy of people of supposed, putative European descent. They were then as now called "whites," although among the English, at least, the term came into common parlance only after 1680, to replace the terms "English," "Christian," or "free" (ref. 15, pp. 95–96).

Yet, these distinctions and discriminations by color were also played out quite differently in the diverse regions of America. This needs emphasis because if we come to understand what brought about these differences in pigmentocracy, we may also, as heirs to this American heritage, be in a better condition to undo it. The Spaniards were more punctilious and formalistic in their discriminatory categories and long insisted

on keeping Indians residentially and organizationally separate from others; the Portuguese in Brazil were more flexible and inattentive. Both, however, left open a great deal of social space of maneuver up and down the social scale by people of mixed descent, though ready always to use prejudice in scoring points in social interaction. The Latin American situation differed, however, early on from the Anglo North, where the line between so-called whites and people of color came to be drawn tightly, requiring "Americans to believe that anyone that is known to have a Negro ancestor is a Negro" (ref. 16, p. 56). This, as Harris pointed out, has given rise to Alice-in-Wonderland Negroes about whom white people say that "he certainly doesn't look like a Negro," and, one might add, also to Alice-in-Wonderland Whites who deny or forget a colored ancestor. It is estimated that this last group made up about 20% of the so-called white population of the United States in 1960 (17).

We need to know more about why these differences between countries and regions obtain. Harris has argued persuasively for the importance of demographic factors (16). He points out that Brazil acquired a majority of blacks to whites on the ratio of 3:1 by the year 1715 and that society soon needed to recruit people of color into the service trades and professions by freeing them from slavery and allowing them to move up in social status. In contrast, white immigration into what was to become the United States was much more massive, with whites outnumbering blacks 3 to 1 as early as 1715. Whites, thus, came to see blacks more often as competitors in the quest for mobility and frequently foreclosed black competition over a wide range of endeavors and during prolonged periods of time.

Demographic generalizations need to be supplemented by more finely grained analyses of politics, of just who entered into social and political alliances with whom, and against whom, and at what junctures of the historical process. In some areas, as in Brazil, pigmentocracies allied themselves with their colored offsprings against social threats emanating from below. Elsewhere, as in Cuba, they rejected their colored offspring, thus driving them into alliance with the laboring classes (18). Similar forces were at work in English North America. Edmund S. Morgan (19) has illuminated the outcome for Virginia. He points out how important the ideal of the free, independent, property-holding yeoman farmer as the chief guarantor of liberty and freedom was in England and then in America. During the English civil wars between royalists and adherents of parliament, this idea of the yeoman was further combined with the notion that the English parliamentary liberties were the work of the supposed Anglo-Saxon forebears of the English, while rule by the aristocracy constituted part of the "Norman Yoke," said to have been imposed on freedom-loving Englishmen by William the Conqueror and his band of proto-French foreigners (20, 21). In the Virginian context, this praise of the landed yeomanry served to legitimize the landed elite, and strengthened it in its conflicts with the impoverished and propertyless people of European descent. It further provided an argument in promoting the cultivation of tobacco, a step that meant putting landed property on a more secure financial basis. Simultaneously, it justified the import of African slaves to work the Virginian plantations along lines already proven in Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis. In addition, the insistence that landed property was connected with a love for freedom sustained the efforts of the planter elite to push the unruly poor out of the lowlands into the mountains and across the Indian frontier, where land was supposedly available for the taking. These new homesteaders and the planter elite could then become allies. Such an alliance would allow both parties to celebrate their common identity as sons of liberty and protagonists of freedom and unite them both against the rising number of blacks at home and the hardpressed Indians beyond the Appalachians. Where in the first part of the 17th century many Africans in Virginia were either free or had been set free, from the second half of the century on, "the rights of Englishmen were preserved by destroying the rights of Africans" (22).

Half a millenium has passed since first contact between Europeans and Native Americans unleashed effects that were unpremeditated in their time, but whose implications affect us still. I have argued that many of the visions and hopes that propelled the Europeans to these shores proved incommensurate with unforeseen realities, but the means devised to meet these circumstances then compounded the discrepancies. Since so many of the founding events and their consequences have been cast into the shape of myths, it is often difficult to discern what transpired and why. Yet, there is a great need, our need in this day, to lay bare the complex connections and contradictions at work in the shaping of our numerous, diverse, and multicultural Americas. This paper has argued that we have inherited the predicaments of the past and that this past is very much with us.

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