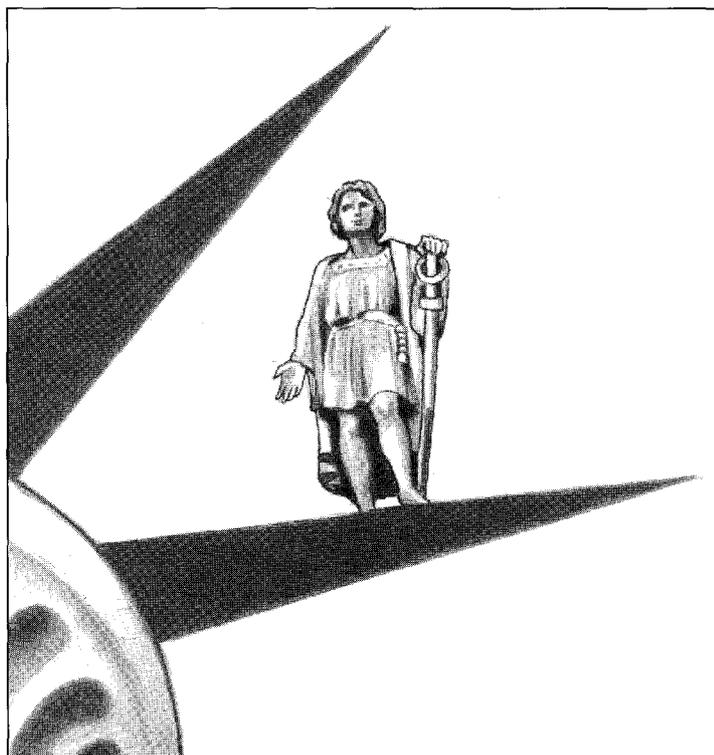


# Blaming Columbus

by Christie Davies



The news that politically correct groups in the United States are greeting the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America by denouncing the great explorer as an imperialist exploiter has been greeted with incredulity and derision in Europe. After all, had he not discovered America, there would be no tax-fed intelligentsia of progressive Americans to denounce him. They would not, as their own jargon has it, have been called into existence. At the very most the year 1992 of the Christian calendar of Europe might have seen mild protests in Oaxaca about the ritual cutting out of human hearts in the Aztec capital. More outrageously, a debating society in Cuzco might have had the temerity to suggest that the vigorous suppression of unnatural vice under the strict laws of the Inca Empire was an unjust repression of the indigenous traditions of its subject peoples. After all, if you can eat peyote . . . . It is even possible that the Cherokees, if untouched by the treacheries of Jacksonian democracy would have been boycotting Eskimo-carved walrus tusks as a protest against whale hunting by kayak. But enough, Columbus did discover America and it was settled by the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the Swedes and the Irish, the Ukrainians and the Ashkenazi Jews, all of whom would have starved at home had there been no New World for them to emigrate to.

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A movement of peoples on this kind of scale necessarily involves the displacement and disturbance of autochthonous aboriginal peoples, but the whole of human history consists of such movements. Why should we single out Columbus for calumny when we do not condemn the Arabs who erupted from their desert peninsula to occupy and dominate all the lands between Spain and Babylon, or the Chinese who have swamped their less numerous neighbors—the Mongols, Tibetans, Uighurs, and Tartars—by sheer weight of numbers, backed by force? The answer is, of course, that the politically correct liberals of America are racists, and Columbus was the wrong color. Accordingly he is to blame, even for the dire but accidental importation of Old World diseases such as small pox, which decimated the Amerindians who lacked any resistance to them. It was the equivalent of the Black Death in Medieval Europe that killed between a third and a half of the population, after the opening up of trade routes to China permitted the spread of plague. Blaming Columbus for this is like blaming the Africans for unleashing AIDS on the world.

The campaign against Columbus is but the latest manifestation of the long held anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish bigotry that lurks throughout American history. True, Columbus was from Genoa and may even have come from a Jewish family, but his expedition was sponsored and financed by the Catholic rulers of a newly united Spain, and his voyage led to the creation of a Spanish empire in the New World, which

the United States later helped to dismantle. The Monroe doctrine, the Spanish-American War and the American government's indifference to the persecution of religion in Spain and Mexico in the 1930's are all part of the same anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic pattern. Theodore Roosevelt galloped uphill and Franklin D. wheelchaired down, but the man with the big stick and the self-styled good neighbor shared the same prejudices.

It appears odd at first that those who denounce Spain as the cruel land of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Spanish Inquisition, bullfights and Franco, are also in favor of the increased use of Spanish in American schools and public life, even though it is the biggest barrier to the social and economic rise of the Hispanics. But all becomes clear if we look at the history and politics of America's southern neighbor, Mexico. In Mexico, anti-Americanism coupled with a rejection of the language of the Anglos and gringos coexists with an official ideology that is more fiercely anti-Spaniard and anticlerical than anything to be found in the United States. The Spanish lan-

guage is emphasized there both as the unifier of Mexico and as a means of undermining the United States, particularly those states that once belonged to Mexico. By contrast, the Spaniards and their religion are viewed negatively as the forces against which Mexico's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party defines itself. The brutal and oppressive Aztecs who culled their subject peoples for human sacrifices are honored and celebrated in lavish museums of anthropology, but the Conquistadors and the friars who accompanied them are slandered in modern Marxist murals. It was not by chance that Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico City. Both he and his murderers felt at home there. In Mexico every last ugly heathen ruin is a subject of government preservation and veneration, but the baroque churches that are the true artistic glory of the country are either sadly neglected or their restoration has been financed by foreigners. The dark idols to whom men were sacrificed have been set above the monuments that commemorate God's sacrifice for man. Do we really prefer this to Columbus? 

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## E i morti risorgeranno

by *Roberto Mussapi*

And the dead will rise again in brief splendor  
opened upon the eyes from the shutters flung wide,  
overcoming the sound of the usual awakening  
within time's secret, between clock-hands and hour  
their light will fall plumb on the eyes newborn.  
And the body, rolling there in the snowy white  
covered by the cold that kept it alive,  
will rise from the now loathsome pallet  
opening the window just one hand  
will clutch the handle like another hand  
unknown, from the cold  
in the circle of the dead seasons and the dim blood,  
the grace that came before the newborn footprints  
and gave back to dust the ancient breath  
plunged the eyes of the living into the abysmal well  
and in the waters oblivion and memory melted together.

Through the wire that goes on barb after barb  
pass the years and the images in the dark  
of any wire, wounds of light,  
and the hindsight in the early morning's last sleep  
gave birth to shorter dreams in bright sips  
when the eyes pushed back the initial awakening  
remaining shut on the winged images,  
souls in the shape of swallows or child  
from the roofs, keepers of the breathing rest  
that came down to visit the eyelid and the dream  
and got into the memory of the man who was asleep  
and was close to his death and was saved  
by the dead risen again in the eternal splendor.

(Translated by Angelo Canavesi)