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# North American Hero? Christopher Columbus 1702–2002

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## I

Outside Union Station, in Washington D.C., attended by imperial lions and eagles, standing upon a decorative ship, whose figure-head represents both Faith and The Spirit of Discovery, and as if contemplating serenely the fruit of all his labours, a fifteen-foot-high statue of Columbus gazes down Delaware Avenue to the Capitol and the figure of Armed Freedom that surmounts it. On the back of the plinth against which it stands are incised the dates of his birth and death, or rather, since both are given inaccurately, what the sculptor conceived those dates to be.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I am, of course, only very incidentally concerned with, as it were, the reverse of this monument. It is not my aim here to correct or augment knowledge of the real Columbus and the real Discovery of America. My interest lies rather in that dramatic image to the front, in hero-worship, myth, its interaction with historiography, its rôle in civic patriotism.<sup>2</sup>

## II

On the evidence of the first North American chronicles, the early colonists showed little interest in Columbus. Typical among them is Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* of 1637, which found nothing of importance

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<sup>1</sup> "Born MCDXXXVI; Died MDIV." Before the discovery of the so-called "Assereto document" in 1904, 1436 was sometimes suggested as the date of birth. The substitution of 1504 for 1506 has arisen, perhaps, from a confused recall of the Roman numeral system. The "Washington Fountain" was erected largely through the lobbying of the Knights of Columbus who in 1909 persuaded Congress to allot \$100,000 to the project. At its unveiling, in 1912, twenty thousand of the Knights paraded through the capital: C. J. Kaufmann, *Faith and Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus 1882–1982* (New York, 1982), 162–63. The sculptor, Lorado Taft (1860–1936), executed many public commissions in his career: *Washington: The National Capital*, ed. H. P. Caemmerer (Washington, 1932), 673.

<sup>2</sup> See, for comparison, Thomas L. Connolly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and his Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge, 1977); Thomas Brown, *JFK: History of an Image* (Bloomington, 1988). Since delivering this paper for publication I have had the pleasure of reading Claudia L. Bushman's *America discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer became an American*

to comment on between the original settlement of the continent by the Trojans, ancestors of the Indian peoples, and the arrival of the English.<sup>3</sup> If they thought about the matter at all, they simply echoed the two—in fact mutually contradictory—views that were current back in England. The first was that America had originally been discovered and conquered by King Arthur in the fifth century. It had been colonised by the Welsh Prince Madoc in the twelfth. It had probably been visited by an English friar called Nicholas of Lynn in the fourteenth.<sup>4</sup> Columbus, it was true, had discovered some islands in the Caribbean in 1492. But the mainland had been reached in 1497, a year before Columbus first saw it, by either John, or John and Sebastian, or Sebastian, Cabot, in the service of King Henry VII.<sup>5</sup> These stories were first brought together by Queen Elizabeth's Welsh physician and astrologer Dr. John Dee. Their purpose was, of course, to register the claim that Britons had reached America before the Spaniards, and that, therefore, sovereignty over America pertained to the British crown.<sup>6</sup>

The second story came closer to the truth. This confessed that it was indeed Columbus who had first reached the New World and that Henry VII had been unwise to refuse Columbus's offer of service. This admission very frequently recurs in the seventeenth century among those Englishmen who were trying to gather support for their own expeditions to the Americas. The moral here is: "Columbus was rejected; don't be so foolish as to reject me." In, for instance, the writings of Captain John Smith, both these stories can be found. In 1624, in his *Generall Historie of Virginia*, Smith says that he won't insist on King Arthur or "The Fryer of Linn" or even on Prince Madoc, but that, certainly, John and Sebastian Cabot had discovered the continent before Columbus.<sup>7</sup> But, at other

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*Hero* (University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H. and London, 1992), an admirable and lengthy study which, however, reflects different interests and reaches different conclusions from those found here.

<sup>3</sup> Though Governor William Bradford owned a copy of Pietro Martire d'Anghiera's *Decades of the New World* (cf. S. E. Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* [New York, 1958], 134), the first work to describe *in extenso* Columbus's voyages, his *Of Plymouth Plantation* (ed. S. E. Morison [New York, 1952]), written around 1622, begins not with the Discovery, but with the sufferings of the Puritans in sixteenth-century England. So too, does Edward Johnson, *A History of New England From the English Planting in the Yeere 1628 untill the Yeere 1652* (London, 1654). William Hubbard's *The Present State of New England* (London, 1677) is prefaced by verses referring to "old Columbus Ghost," but its text opens with Sebastian Cabot, described as a Portuguese, and said to have discovered the land in 1497 (in this, following Nathaniel Morton's *New-England's Memorial* [Cambridge, Mass., 1669]). Gabriel Thomas's *An Historical and Geographical Account of the Province and County of Pensilvania and of West-New-Jersey in America* (London, 1698) skips over everything between the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel and the coming of the Dutch.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 1 (Glasgow, 1903): 301–3. On Nicholas of Lynn, E.G.R. Taylor, *Tudor Geography 1455–1583* (London, 1930), 133–34.

<sup>5</sup> For the source of these misapprehensions, J. A. Williamson, *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII* (Cambridge, Hakluyt, 1962), 152–53.

<sup>6</sup> See Gwyn A. Williams, *Madoc: the Legend of the Welsh Discovery of America* (Oxford, 1987), chap. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith (1580–1631)*, ed. Philip L. Barbour (London,

times in his writings, in fact, over and over again, Smith draws a comparison between himself, in his attempts to establish Virginia, and Columbus, possessed of the truth, yet rejected by all. "But if an angell should tell you that any place yet unknowne can afford such fortunes: you would not believe him, no more than Columbus was believed there was any such land as is the well knowne abounding America . . ."<sup>8</sup>

It was in the context of these traditions that the erudite product of the Boston Latin School, Cotton Mather, was, at the end of the seventeenth century, to produce the first North American account of Columbus. As a preface to his *Magnalia Christi Americana* or *Ecclesiastical History of New England*, published in 1702,<sup>9</sup> Mather considered the first peopling and then first discovery of "America (which as the learned Nicholas Fuller observes might more justly be called Colombina)."<sup>10</sup> In common with the more sophisticated historians of the seventeenth century, he did not see discovery purely in terms of the achievement of one man. He refers to the invention of the compass (which he believed had occurred "about an Hundred Years before").<sup>11</sup> It was perhaps the timing, as he saw it, of that invention which led him to remark that whatever truth there be in the story of colonisation before the Spaniards by "Britains or by Saxons from England" (he is referring, it may be presumed, to Prince Madoc and the Tudor myths in general), mankind generally agrees:

to give unto Christopher Columbus, a Genoese, the Honour of being the first European that opened a way unto these parts of the World. It was in the year 1492 that this famous Man, acted by a most vehement and wonderful *Impulse* was carried into the *Northern Regions* [sic] of this vast hemisphere, which might more justly therefore have received its *Name* from *Him*, than from Americus Vesputius, a Florentine, who in the year 1497 made a further Detection of the more *Southern*

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1988), 2: 47, 62, with prefatory "panegyrik verses" by Samuel Purchas, comparing "Colon" and "Vespuce" unfavourably with Cabot.

<sup>8</sup> *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith*, 1: 135, 345–46, 382, 405–46, 441; 2: 422–23, 426. For others in this vein, George Abbot, *A Brief Description of the Whole Worlde* (London, 1605), O recto (and several other editions); and Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London, 1609), Bi (v). So too, Robert Johnson, *Nova Britannia* (Amsterdam, 1609); David Price, *Saul's Prohibition Stayed* (London, 1609); and William Strachey, *Virginia Britannica* (London, 1617), for whom see H. C. Porter, *The Inconstant Savage: England and the North American Indian 1500–1600* (London, 1979), 214–15.

<sup>9</sup> *Magnalia Christi Americana* or *The Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting in the Year 1620 unto the Year of our Lord 1698* (London, 1702).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Nicholas Fuller in his *Miscellaneorum theologicorum quibus non modo Scripturae Divinae sed et aliorum classicorum auctorum plurima monumenta explicantur atque illustrantur Libri Tres* (London, 1617 [first edition Heidelberg, 1612]), Lib. 2, cap. 4 ("De tribus Filiis Noachi"), 182, in arguing Amerindian origins from Japhet, had written of "America seu verius Colombina."

<sup>11</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, 2–3. The 64-point compass was found on ships in the Mediterranean by the thirteenth century (see E. G. R. Taylor, *The Haven-Finding Art* [London, 1956], chap. 5). The first to pinpoint the importance of the compass in the discovery was F. López de Gómara in his *Historia General de Las Indias*, ed. J. Gurria Lacroix (Caracas, n.d.; first edition, 1552), 19 (ch. 9).

*Regions* in this continent. So a *World* which has been one great Article among the *Res deperditae* of Pancirollus<sup>12</sup> is now found, and the Affairs of the *Whole World* have been affected by the finding of it.<sup>13</sup>

Mather goes on to mention—what was for a long time the favoured Spanish explanation of the discovery—the possibility that Columbus had originally learnt of the existence of the New World from a Spanish pilot who had been blown by storm across the Atlantic to the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> America, Mather is forced to conclude, may well not have been discovered first by the English; nonetheless: “in those regards that are all of the *greatest*, it seems to be found out more *for* them than any other.” He continues by noting the story that the Cabots discovered the continent in 1497, but that Columbus reached it only in 1498. He ends by referring to one principal source for all that he has so far written: “the exacter Narrative whereof I had rather my Reader should *purchase* at the expense of consulting *Purchas’ Pilgrims*,<sup>15</sup> than endure any *stop* in our hastening Voyage unto the HISTORY OF A NEW-ENGLISH ISRAEL.”<sup>16</sup>

### III

It was not until the first pronounced tensions between the colonists and the Crown, during the 1760s, that anything was published in America that went beyond this skimpy, imprecise, and, in some ways, depreciative view of Columbus.<sup>17</sup> It is from that time—a time, one might add, when Europeans were coming to show a new interest in the man<sup>18</sup>—that Columbus first appears as an American hero. One can see the cult

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<sup>12</sup> Guido Pancirolli (1523–1599) was the author of *Rerum memorabilium jam olim deperitarum: et contra recens atque ingeniose inventarum libri duo* (Hamburg, 1599), which, in its English version was entitled *The History of many Memorable Things lost which were in use among the Ancients and an account of many things found, now in use among the Moderns* (London, 1715 and 1722).

<sup>13</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> The ultimate source for Mather’s variant of the story of the Unknown Pilot is Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Comentarios Reales del Perú* (Lisbon, 1609), Pt. 1, ch. 3, perhaps in the translation by Paul Rycart (London, 1688).

<sup>15</sup> I.e., *Hakluytus posthumus: or Purchas his Pilgrimes. Contayning a history of the world in sea voyages and lande travels by Englishmen and others*, in five books (London, 1625).

<sup>16</sup> Mather, *Magnalia*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> There is a brief discussion in Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New England in the form of Annals* (Boston, 1736), 78, which seems to be based upon the accounts of Herrera and Galvanus. In a footnote (to p. 80) Prince notices, without resolving, the conflict of authorities on the Cabots.

<sup>18</sup> An important landmark here is Book 1 of William Robertson’s *History of America* (London, 1777), published, that is, in the opening stages of what Robertson calls the “civil war” between the American Colonies and Great Britain, and providing the first scholarly account of Columbus, one which enjoyed great success. In its wake came imaginative works like Nepomucène Mercier’s “Shakesperian drama,” *Christophe Colomb*, first performed at Paris in 1809 (see D. G. Martini, *Cristoforo Colombo tra Ragione e Fantasia* [2d ed., Genoa, 1986], 44, 599–600), and Samuel Rogers, *The Voyage of Columbus: A Poem* (London, 1810). For other examples from this period, G. Spina, *Cristoforo Colombo e la Poesia* (Genoa, 1988), 34–53. American enthusiasm, that is, was, in part, the fruit of a general revival of interest in the man. Many works, of course, such as Thomas Morton’s *Columbus or A World*

developing in the writings of "the father of American poetry," Philip Freneau. As early as 1769 Freneau wrote his verses, "Columbus to Ferdinand." Two years later in his "Rising Glory of America," he asks the Muse to renew:

The period famed when first Columbus touched  
These shores so long unknown—through various toils  
Famine and death, the hero forced his way . . .<sup>19</sup>

In prose Freneau was among the first to write on the problem, still debated today, of where Columbus was buried.<sup>20</sup> In verse again he published his "Pictures of Columbus." Here the admiral looks into the mirror of the future—this was to provide a continuous theme for American authors right up to the mid-twentieth century—to see the end of his exploits, to view that time:

When empires rise where lonely forests grew  
Where Freedom shall her generous plan renew.<sup>21</sup>

It was not, as has been suggested, Freneau who invented the word "Columbia." But, certainly, he gave it wide currency. From his time it was frequently suggested that the Thirteen States should give themselves that title. This was not to be, but, at least, the seat of government was, from 1791, to be known as "the territory of Columbia" and from 1800 "the District of Columbia."<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the theme had been taken up by Joel Barlow, whose long work in heroic couplets, called the *Vision of Columbus*, published in 1787, represents the first attempt to produce the Great American Epic. Subsequently Barlow revised and lengthened it, re-issuing it in 1807 as *The Colombiad*.<sup>23</sup> It opens with Columbus who, with poetic licence, is repre-

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*Discovered: An Historical Play*, "As it is performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden," passed easily between the hemispheres (London, 1792; Dublin, 1793; Philadelphia, 1794; London, 1799; Washington, 1823; also, as *Columbus or the Discovery of America*, Boston and Philadelphia, 1794). The war itself stimulated interest in America, and so, too, in Columbus, as is suggested by an anonymous English political pamphlet, attacking the North Ministry: *The Discovery of America by Columbus to which is added an Impartial Enquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Contest in America* (London: Printed for all the Booksellers in Town and Country, 1776), 1–25 (Columbus); 27–48 ("the Contest").

<sup>19</sup> *Poems of Freneau*, ed. H. H. Clark (New York, 1929), 3; L. Leary, *That Rascal Freneau: A study in Literary Failure* (New York, 1964), 27, 34–5, 373 n. 43.

<sup>20</sup> P. M. Marsh, "Freneau and the bones of Columbus," *Modern Language Notes*, 60 (1945): 121–24.

<sup>21</sup> *Poems*, 259.

<sup>22</sup> A. H. Hoyt, "The name 'Columbia,'" *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 40 (1886): 310–13. G. R. Stewart, *Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (New York, 1945), 171–72, 199. The very proliferation in the use of the word, as in Timothy Dwight's "Columbia, Columbia, to glory arise" or, in the adjectival form, as in *The Columbian Centinel* (1784); *The Columbian Magazine* (1786); *The Columbian Muse* (1794); *The Columbian Almanac* (1795); and so on, may well have obscured the association with the man and simply transmitted a synonym for "America."

<sup>23</sup> *The Vision* was published at Hartford, 1787; Paris, 1793; London, 1794; Baltimore, 1814 and 1816; Hagerstown, 1820; and Centerville, 1824. As the *Colombiad* it appeared at Philadelphia and Baltimore, 1807; Philadelphia, again, 1808; London, 1809; Paris, 1813; and Washington, 1825. The *Edinburgh Review* of the day remarked that the day of epics was past,

sented as being at the end of his life, in prison, in misery and despair. At this point there appears before him Hesper, Guardian Genius of the Western World, who seeks to restore his spirits by leading him to the Mount of Vision. Here the future is revealed to him in scenes illustrating what will come about as the result of his heroism. These culminate in the revolutionary struggle, the republican constitution, and then, in the last scene, a general congress of all nations, brought together under the auspices of the Republic, to inaugurate an age of perpetual peace.

At a more prosaic level the cult was enhanced by the establishment at New York in 1789 of a political club called the Society of St. Tammany or Columbian Order. It took as its patrons Tammany, the legendary Indian chief of the Delaware tribe, and Columbus himself, these two figures being thought of as archetypically American.<sup>24</sup> In October 1792 John Pintard, then "Sagamore" of the society, organised celebrations of the Tercentennial of the Discovery in New York. A friend of Pintard and the founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Dr. Jeremy Belknap, led the commemoration in Boston.<sup>25</sup> After Belknap had delivered himself of "A Discourse intended to commemorate the Discovery of America," there followed the singing of his "Ode for the 23rd of October 1792."<sup>26</sup> (Belknap adjusted 12 October of the Julian Calendar to its modern equivalent.) Other celebrations were held on the twenty-second at New Jersey, and the twenty-third at Philadelphia.<sup>27</sup>

Admidst all this enthusiasm Belknap was dedicating himself to the production of a two-volume *American Biography or An Historical Account of those persons who have been distinguished in America*. This was—one sees here its official, patriotic purpose—"published according to Act of Congress" at Boston in 1794 and 1798. The first volume makes the reader aware of how few American heroes there had been before the Revolution and so serves, in part, to explain how Columbus became one. Belknap looks at "Biron the Norman" (that is to say Bjorn Herjolfson, the Norseman, the first European to see Newfoundland); at Madoc, Prince of Wales (whose supposed deeds he doubts); and at the Venetian Zeni brothers (whose pretensions to have discovered America in the fourteenth century he discounts). He goes on to consider the no less conten-

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that polished literature was no more to be expected from America than from Manchester or Birmingham, but that compared to any British poet of the day, Barlow was a giant. (See C. B. Todd, *Life and Letters of Joel Barlow LL.D. Poet, Statesman and Philosopher* [New York and London, 1886], 221.) Since Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Byron were living at that time, this might seem high praise. But the *Edinburgh Review*, of course, thought very little of them.

<sup>24</sup> M. R. Werner, *Tammany Hall* (New York, 1928), 1–15. E. P. Kilroe, *Saint Tammany and the Origin of the Society of Tammany or Columbian Order in the City of New York* (New York, 1913), 132–37. Tammany's interest in Columbus cannot spring directly from Freneau who became a member only after May 1797: J. Axelrod, *Philip Freneau: Champion of Democracy* (London, 1987), 396 n. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Edward F. de Lancey, "Columbian Celebrations of 1792: The First in the United States," *Magazine of American History*, 29 (January 1893): 1–18; Kilroe, *Saint Tammany*, 184–86, 215.

<sup>26</sup> The *Discourse* and *Ode* were published at Boston in 1792.

<sup>27</sup> Charles T. Thompson, "Columbus Day One Hundred Years Ago," *The Chautauquan*, 16 (October 1892–March 1893): 188–193.

tious Martin Behaim, a Nuremberger, whose claim to have been the true first discoverer had recently been canvassed in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*.<sup>28</sup> After this range of dubious characters Columbus inevitably loomed much larger.

At the same time it's fair to say that in this period few Americans knew much about the real man.<sup>29</sup> Tammany's Columbus was as mythical as Saint Tammany himself. For most patriots, I would imagine, two things sufficed. The first was that he wasn't English. The second was that, as it was believed, he had been treated with ingratitude by an Old World monarchy. Among the toasts drunk at the Tammany celebration of the Tercentennial – toasts played a large part in these early commemorations – was one that asked: "May the deliverers of America never experience that ingratitude from their country which Columbus experienced from his king."<sup>30</sup> Columbus, as an historical personage, rather than as a symbol, entered the consciousness of educated Americans only with the biography of him published by Washington Irving in 1827.

#### IV

The circumstances in which it came to be written are well documented. At Madrid, in twenty-one months of 1826 and 1827, Irving did the research for, and wrote, the first version of the book. He was fortunate in being able to use a collection of documents, recently published by Martín Fernández de Navarrete and in having access to a valuable library of early Americana that had been collected by Obadiah Rich, the American consul, in whose house he lodged.<sup>31</sup> After the first edition

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<sup>28</sup> Behaim's claims were advanced in a letter of M. Otto to Dr. Franklin published in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia*, 2 (1786): 163–284. On Belknap and his contemporaries, D. D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past* (Chicago, 1960), chap. 7: "Biography: The creation of National Heroes 1776–1849." Belknap knew of the claims for the Norsemen etc. from Robertson's *History*, though even before the publication of that work Scandinavians had brought stories of their ancestors' voyages to the attention of some Americans. See the letter of 1773 to Samuel Mather in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. W. B. Willcox, 20 (London, 1976): 287.

<sup>29</sup> In his introduction to *The Vision of Columbus* (I use here the edition of Baltimore, 1814), 3, Barlow writes: "it is presumed from the present state of literature in the United States, that many persons who might be entertained with an American production of this kind, are but slightly acquainted with the life and character of that great man whose extraordinary genius led him to the discovery of the continent, and whose singular sufferings ought to excite the indignation of the world." He therefore gave an account of the life, based upon Book 1 of Robertson's *History*. Until Irving's *Columbus*, Robertson remained the leading authority; see F. S. Stimson, "William Robertson's influence on early American literature," *The Americas*, 14 (1957): 37–43. He features strongly in the account of Columbus which prefates Abiel Holmes, *American Annals or a chronological History of America* (vol. 1, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1808; 2d ed. Cambridge, Mass., 1829).

<sup>30</sup> De Lancey, "Columbian Celebrations," 6.

<sup>31</sup> See the excellent introduction to W. Irving, *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. J. H. McElroy (Boston, 1981); and McElroy, "The integrity of Irving's *Columbus*," *American Literature*, 50 (1978): 1–16. For Navarrete, see "Vida y obra de M. Fernández de Navarrete" in his *Obras*, ed. D. C. Secco Serrano, 1 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1954), vii–1xv. Cf. also Rich *Collection*. *New York Public Library Catalogue*, ed. E. Blake (New York, 1978).

Irving made further researches, and obtained royal permission to examine manuscripts in the Biblioteca Colombina at Seville. In 1831 he published a third edition, together with a companion volume, the *Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus*. A fourth edition of 1848 saw further revisions and the incorporation of new material.<sup>32</sup> Thus the work took another twenty years to complete its evolution from the time of its first publication.

At the end there was a main text of almost 350,000 words, together with essays given over to analysis of subsidiary material. It is worth saying at this point—since it has been, and at times still is, treated with extraordinary condescension, particularly by some literary historians—that, as history, it is very good. Most of the criticisms levelled against it are ill-judged. Early on came the claim—preposterous for anyone who knows both works—that it plagiarised Navarrete. Again some, ignorant of the mystical fantasies of the historical Columbus, imagined that Irving himself smuggled these into his story.<sup>33</sup> Or they have criticised him for neglecting economic and social considerations,<sup>34</sup> at a time when very few historians were likely to concern themselves with them. In fact Irving digested all the leading authorities in Rich's library. These included, in particular the still-unpublished manuscript of the *Historia de las Indias* of the sixteenth-century missionary, Las Casas, and some writings from the hand of a Spanish scholar of the previous generation, Juan Battista Muñoz.<sup>35</sup> On these materials Irving imposed—what was, for most people of the time, the point of history—the charm of narrative order.

Of course there are infelicities here and errors of interpretation or fact. The worst of these, for it has had a lasting effect upon popular belief, is the suggestion—and in the book it is no more than a passing suggestion—that in an (in fact, imaginary) debate between Columbus and his opponents at Salamanca, it was urged against him that the earth was flat. As Irving well knew, and as he clearly states in other parts of the work, it was "the cosmography of Ptolemy to which all scholars yielded implicit

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<sup>32</sup> As, for instance, from F.H.A. von Humboldt's *Examen critique de l'histoire de la géographie du nouveau continent* (5 vols., Paris, 1836–39); and the letter of T. S. Heneken from Hispaniola. The most authoritative version of *The Companions of Columbus* is edited by J. W. Tuttleton (Boston, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g. J. Rubin-Dorsky, *Adrift in the Old World. The Psychological Pilgrimage of Washington Irving* (Chicago, 1988), 222: "Indeed in *Irving's version* [my italics] of the third voyage, for example, Columbus actually believes that he has reached the outskirts of [the terrestrial paradise]."

<sup>34</sup> So, William L. Hedges, "Irving's Columbus: The Problem of Romantic Biography," *The Americas*, 13 (1956), 139: "Irving makes little attempt to go into the subject"; 131, "accepts in general what most people, learned as well as credulous had thought about Columbus for at least two centuries." The same views in his *Washington Irving: An American Study* (Baltimore, 1965). For similar lofty dismissals, S. T. Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving* (London, 1935), ch. 13; T. Martin, "Columbus in American Literature," *The Christopher Columbus Encyclopedia*, ed. S. F. Bedini (Basingstoke, 1992), 2: 434.

<sup>35</sup> On Muñoz, see A. Ballesteros Beretta, *Revista de Indias* (1941), 55–95, and the introduction to *Santo Domingo en los Manuscritos de Juan Battista Muñoz*, ed. R. Marte (Santo Domingo, 1981).

faith,"<sup>36</sup> and for centuries no learned man in Europe had believed anything else but that the world was round. This egregious error came perhaps to Irving's pen from a sudden American, egalitarian, and anti-elite impulse, from an overkeen desire to contrast "the narrow bigotry of bookish lore" with "wisdom, even when uttered by unlearned lips," from a republican wish to set the "sages and philosophers of court" against "the seafaring men of Palos."<sup>37</sup>

Those things aside, the work has many virtues. Most literary authors who venture to portray Columbus—like Whitman in his "Prayer of Columbus"<sup>38</sup>—simply, no doubt unconsciously, draw themselves. Irving most noticeably avoids this trap. He had so far absorbed the chronicle of Las Casas as to bring out, what eighteenth-century authors had ignored, the passionate Catholicism of Columbus, the visionary spirituality that interfused with starkly materialistic elements in his character. Again, Irving did not flinch from taking seriously those beliefs in such things as the physical existence of the Earthly Paradise, which Columbus absorbed from his contemporaries but which historians, still today, often discourse on with a certain amused contempt.<sup>39</sup>

As to Columbus's character, Irving—perhaps anachronistically—found Columbus most guilty in his plans to enslave the Carib Indians,<sup>40</sup> yet in the end allots him heroic status. He is "the mariner who by his hardy genius, his inflexible constancy, and his heroic courage, brought the ends of the earth into communication with each other."<sup>41</sup> And Irving's work ends with reflections on how happy Columbus would have been at the end of his days had he known what was to come about as the result of his life: "the beautiful land he had discovered, the nations and tongues and languages which were to fill its lands with his renown and revere and bless his name to the latest posterity!"<sup>42</sup>

## V

Irving's biography, in either its complete or abbreviated version, was to pass through at least 175 editions and to serve as a principal source for school text-books and other derivative lives.<sup>43</sup> In its wake followed a

<sup>36</sup> Ed. McElroy, 52. And cf. too 343–44, where, on the Third Voyage, Columbus's speculations doubt "the received theory with respect to the form of the earth": i.e., that it was round.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, 52–53, 60; and see now J. B. Russel, *Inventing the Flat Earth* (London, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> This poem, from *Leaves of Grass*, was written in 1874, the year following his paralysis: F. Schyberg, *Walt Whitman* (New York, 1951), pp. 231–32.

<sup>39</sup> Ed. McElroy, 345–46 (bk. 10, chap. 4); and appendix 25 to *The Companions of Columbus*, 333–38; "Columbus was not indulging in any fanciful and presumptuous chimeras. . . ." Compare the scorn, at this point, of, e.g., Filson Young, in his *Christopher Columbus and the New World of His Discovery* (3d ed., Philadelphia, 1906), ii, 73: ". . . if he had not been so bemused by his dream and theories he might have had some inkling of the real wonder and significance of his discovery. But no; in his profoundly unscientific mind there was little of that patience which holds men back from theorising and keeps them ready to receive the truth."

<sup>40</sup> Ed. McElroy, 211. Cf. 589–90.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, 569.

<sup>43</sup> McElroy, "The Integrity," 1. By 1829 Irving had produced a one-volume abridgment

quasi-official cult of Columbus. The first statue to him in North America was erected on the facade of the Capitol in 1844.<sup>44</sup> Thenceforth painters and sculptors and a rich variety of poets and poetasters took him as their theme.<sup>45</sup> Yet in this period he was, for the generality of Americans, compared with the men of the Revolution, very much a second-rank hero, a hero, perhaps, for the learned and cosmopolitan.<sup>46</sup> In its eager pursuit of the wampum, Tammany soon lost not simply all interest in, but all memory of, its erstwhile second patron.<sup>47</sup> One thinks again of the first monument to Columbus in the United States, the obelisk raised by Le Paulmier d'Annemours, French consul at Baltimore, on the grounds of his estate in 1792, which soon came to be thought of by the locals as "a commemoration of his horse by one Zenos Barnum."<sup>48</sup> Or one turns to the place-name evidence. There are some twenty places in the United States called "Columbus" or "Columbia." In some instances, it's clear the naming was done with conscious thought of the man. In 1812 the Ohio General Assembly established Whig immigrants from Canada on a site they called "Columbus," because "to him are we primarily indebted in being able to offer the refugees a resting place." Yet when, in 1817, Possum Town, Mississippi changed its name to "Columbus," one may suspect

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for the U.S. market. In Europe it appeared from 1830, "Abridged for the use of schools," and in both Italy and Germany was used as an English-language text-book, with notes and vocabularies. Early derivative works are *Tales from American History: containing the principal facts in the life of Christopher Columbus. For the use of young persons and schools. By the author of American Popular Lessons* [i.e., Eliza Robbins] (New York, 1830 and 1840); *The Lives of Christopher Columbus, the Discoverer of America, and Americus Vesputius* (New York, 1847); and George Cubitt, *Columbus; or, The Discovery of America* (London, 1848; revised by Daniel P. Kidder and published "for the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church," New York, 1854; London, n.d. but 1878; Boston, 1881; London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1893?).

<sup>44</sup> N. Ponce de Leon, *The Columbus Gallery* (New York, 1893), 115; C. W. Bump, "Public Monuments to Columbus," in H. B. Adams and H. Wood, *Columbus and his discovery of America* (Baltimore, 1892), 55-56. In 1842-44, John Vanderlyn painted "The Landing of Columbus" within the Capitol Rotunda, which was then engraved on the back of \$5 bank-notes, and in 1864, Randolph Rogers, working at Rome, prepared the panels illustrating the life of the admiral for the bronze doors, now at the east entrance to the Capitol (Bump, 55-57). "They are said to compare favourably with the Ghiberti doors in Florence," *Washington D.C. A Guide to the Nation's Capital* (New York, 1942), 137.

<sup>45</sup> James Russell Lowell, *Poems*, 1 (London, 1890): 148-57, first published 1844; Jedediah V. Huntington, *America Discovered. A Poem* (New York, 1852). There were other verses in this period by Emma C. Embury ("The Lament of Columbus"); M. Luby, *New American Epic Poem on the Discovery of America* (St. Paul, Minn., 1868); Sidney Lanier ("The Triumph"); John Townsend Trowbridge, *The Story of Columbus* (Boston, 1870; Cincinnati, 1884); M.D.C. (i.e., the Unitarian minister, Moncure D. Conway), *Chronicles of Christopher Columbus: A Poem in Twelve Cantos* (London, 1882); and Lydia Huntley Sigourney. For an early novel on the theme, James Fenimore Cooper, *Mercedes of Castille* (Philadelphia, 1848) (in Spanish translation [1852], as *Cristóbol Colón*).

<sup>46</sup> Jefferson kept his picture (together with that of Magellan and Vespucci), in his study at Monticello; *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. C. T. Cullen (Princeton, 1950-1983), 12: 245, 557; 14: 440, 467-68; 15: xxxv-vi.

<sup>47</sup> Toasts to Columbus seem to disappear in the 1830s, Kilroe, *Saint Tammany* 163-64.

<sup>48</sup> H. B. Adams and H. Wood, *Columbus and his Discovery of America* (Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 10th s., x-xi, Baltimore, 1892), 30-33.

that other factors beside reverence for the admiral played a part.<sup>49</sup> Again, one can put the popularity of the man in perspective by remembering that there are, today, 121 post-offices called Washington and that there are 19 Franklins in that state of Ohio whose capital is Columbus.<sup>50</sup> Indicative, again, was that moment in 1853 when the settlers of the northern part of the territory of Oregon asked Congress that their lands should be known as "the territory of Columbia." To which, came back the reply: "Why not, rather, Washington?" Unanswerable; henceforth the United States was to pair Washington State and Washington D.C.<sup>51</sup>

In the second half of the century, however, Columbus took on a much stronger rôle, not universally, but among two particular sectors in American society. First, among Roman Catholics. Between 1830 and 1860 immigration raised the Catholic population from some three hundred thousand to over three million.<sup>52</sup> Subject often to strong native hostility, members of the Church came increasingly to promote Columbus as a symbolic justification of the Catholic in America. They were encouraged in this by a movement, initiated in the Europe of the 1840s, by the French count, Antoine Roselly de Lorgues. With some encouragement from Pope Pius IX, de Lorgues sought the canonisation of Columbus as a saint. Despite the difficulties this presented, very many within the Church—by the 1890s seventeen cardinals and almost eight hundred other higher clergy—had given formal approval to the initiative.<sup>53</sup> Even among Catholics who believed that proposal to be imprudent, it became normal to write of Columbus as a man whose discovery was impelled by spiritual motives alone, as one who, indifferent to wealth or fortune, had set out on his voyages with the sole aim of carrying the blessings of Christianity to those who lay in darkness. It is this characterisation that is found among the principal American Catholic historians and controversialists writing between the 1850s and 1890s.<sup>54</sup>

Within this culture it is not surprising that a Catholic fraternity, estab-

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<sup>49</sup> *The Encyclopedia Americana* (New York, 1950) under "Columbus, Ohio" and "Columbus, Mississippi."

<sup>50</sup> D. J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (London, 1986), 197.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart, *Names on the Land*, 286–88.

<sup>52</sup> *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. S. Thernstrom (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), 34–38.

<sup>53</sup> For succinct accounts: H. Vignaud, "L'ancienne et la nouvelle campagne pour la canonisation de Christophe Colomb," *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 7 (1909): 5–32; G. Odoardi, "Il processo de beatificazione de Cristoforo Colombo," in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale de Studi Colombiani* (Genoa, 1952), 3: 261–72.

<sup>54</sup> As, for instance, Thomas D'Arcy McGee in *The Catholic History of North America* (Boston, 1855); John O'Kane Murray in *A Popular History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (which went through nine editions between 1878 and 1888), his *Catholic Heroes and Heroines of America* (at least seven editions between 1879 and 1896), which predictably starts off with Columbus, and *The Catholic Pioneers of America* (New York, 1882, 1885). On their popularity in Catholic circles, T. E. Wangler, "Catholic Religious Life in Boston in the era of Cardinal O'Connell," in *Catholic Boston: Studies in Religion and Community 1870–1970*, ed. R. E. Sullivan and J. M. O'Toole (Boston, 1985), 266. Meanwhile an English version of Roselly de Lorgues's own hagiographical biography of the admiral was published by the Catholic Publication Society at New York and Boston in 1869 and 1870.

lished in 1882, should take the title of "Knights of Columbus." Originally the name seems to have been chosen at random and without any particular significance being assigned to Columbus himself. (In fact, the first name proposed was "The Connecticut Order of Foresters.") But once the title had been taken, it became a matter of pride to the Knights, of whom there were well over half-a-million on the eve of the First World War, to exalt the name of their patron. A sub-order, known as "the Fourth Degree," whose emblem was a dove carrying the Cross to the New World, devoted itself, with very great success, to promoting the celebration of 12 October as "Columbus Day." Between 1907 and 1919 the Knights secured recognition of this as a legal holiday in over thirty states in the Union.<sup>55</sup> Again, in the first decade of the twentieth century, a period in which the European attempt to canonise Columbus had lost most of its impetus, the Knights, in alliance with the archbishop of Philadelphia, tried to revive the process.<sup>56</sup>

The second group that looked to Columbus was Italian Americans.<sup>57</sup> They too were, of course, Catholics, but I distinguish them from the general body of American Catholicism in that they claimed a still closer relation to the man. Up to the 1880s there were comparatively few Italian immigrants, most of whom came from Northern Italy. Naturally enough these men and women were quick to point to the *italianità* of Columbus as something that reflected credit upon their own nationality. As early as 1869 the Italians of San Francisco are found mounting their own celebration of Columbus Day. At other times in this period one finds Italian-Americans raising funds for statues in his honour.<sup>58</sup>

These first immigrants were followed, from 1880 to 1924, by a mass emigration of some four million people, mainly from Southern Italy. In their homeland their loyalties had been purely local: to their village or town, certainly not to the newly created Italian state. You could say that it was only on that long wait on Ellis Island that they were identified as, and so became, Italians.<sup>59</sup> As such, these men of the South—and there is a certain incongruity in this—came to look to Columbus—Columbus, the Genoese, the North Italian, the offspring of a society very different, in

<sup>55</sup> Kauffman, *Faith and Fraternity*, 78–81, 138–40, 164; M. F. Egan and J. B. Kennedy, *The Knights of Columbus in Peace and War* (London, 1920); on "the Fourth Degree," i, 83 and chap. 13; and (from a hostile viewpoint) G. Langlois, *L'ordre des Knights of Columbus* (Quebec, 1952). See A. K. Allan, "Forgotten Founder of Columbus Day," *Columbia: The Largest Catholic Magazine in the World* (October 1966), 28–30, for the early lobbying for the holiday by Angelo Noce.

<sup>56</sup> Vignaud, "L'ancienne et la nouvelle campagne," 2.

<sup>57</sup> On Italian-Americans and Columbus, some information in J. W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities 1890–1930* (New Haven, 1978), 125–26; H. S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago 1880–1930: A Study in Elite Mobility* (New York, 1970), 179; *The Italian in America: The Progressive View 1891–1914*, ed. L. F. Tomas (New York, 1978), 109.

<sup>58</sup> D. P. Gumina, *The Italians of San Francisco 1850–1930* (New York, 1978), 47–49; Bump, "Public Monuments," 57–58.

<sup>59</sup> On Italian emigration, in general, H. S. Nelli, in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 545–66; E. Amfitheatrof, *The Children of Columbus* (New York, 1973).

the nineteenth as in the fifteenth century, from that in which they had originated—as a symbol of group solidarity and a representative of the civilisation from which they had sprung.

Official and particularist exaltation of the hero came together in the Italian, Spanish, and Pan-American outburst of enthusiasm that characterised the quatercentennial celebrations of 1892.<sup>60</sup> The occasion was marked by poems,<sup>61</sup> parades, unveiling of statues, crossing of the Atlantic by replicas of his ships, speeches, and stamps,<sup>62</sup> and, in 1893, by the Chicago World Columbian Exposition, where there were on display more statues, a re-creation of the monastery of La Rábida, the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria (together with, for the sake of ethnic harmony, a Viking vessel), the Duke of Veragua (heir of Columbus) and his duchess, and no less than seventy-one portraits (all apocryphal) of the hero. In New York there were five days of intense celebrations with marches, regattas, operas, and the opening of the Columbus Circle.<sup>63</sup> Was there to be no end to it all? In some fields, at least, yes there was. African-American newspapers, in some ways anticipating ethnic hostility to the celebrations of 1992, urged a boycott of the Exposition.<sup>64</sup> Again with seeming enterprise the Federal Government had minted half-dollar coins

<sup>60</sup> See S. Bernabeu Albert, "El IV Centenario de Descubrimiento de América en la coyuntura fineseccular (1880–1893)," *Revista de Indias*, 44, 174 (1984): 345–66.

<sup>61</sup> Poetic tributes included four epics: M. Dixon, *Chronicles of Christopher Columbus in twelve cantos* ("a new edition revised by the authoress for the fourth centenary," New York, 1892); Samuel Jefferson F.R.A.S., *Columbus: An epic poem giving an accurate history of the great discovery in rhymed verse* (Chicago, 1892); the Rev. Henry Iliowizi, *The Quest of Columbus. A memorial poem in twelve books* (Chicago and Philadelphia, 1892); the Rev. Horace Stillman, A. M., *The Poetic Story of the Hero of the Ocean, or Christopher Columbus from his birth to life's crowning achievement—the discovery of America* (New York, 1893). Henry Beebe Carington (author of *Beacon Lights of Patriotism or Historical Incentives to Virtue and Good Citizenship* [many editions, 1894–1901]) produced *Kristopherus. The Christbearer. A Columbian Ode* (Boston, 1892) and compiled *Columbian selections. American Patriotism. For Home and School* (tributes to Columbus from past and present worthies, Philadelphia, 1892 and 1896). Other poems were produced by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, Edna Dean Proctor, George Edward Woodbery, and ("The Columbian Ode" for the opening of the World Fair) Harriet Monroe. It is to be presumed that it was at this time that Joaquin Miller wrote that "Columbus" which so many American school-children have had to commit to memory. Sara Agnes Ryan's *Christopher Columbus in Poetry, History, and Art* (Chicago, 1917), offers an extensive anthology of very bad American and European verse on the theme, most of it from this era. Other cultural offerings included Mrs. Alice E. Lord's *A Vision's Quest. A drama in five acts, representing the hopes and ambitions, the love, marriage, pleadings, discouragements and achievements of Christopher Columbus, discoverer of America* (Baltimore, 1899); Hezekiah Butterworth and George F. Root, *Columbus, the hero of faith. An Historical Cantata* (Cincinnati, 1892); and *The Life of Christopher Columbus* (Chicago, 1891), written by Edward Everett Hale (author, some forty-five years before, of *How to conquer Texas, before Texas conquers us* [Boston, 1845]).

<sup>62</sup> J. M. Martínez Moreno, *El Descubrimiento de América en la Filatelia mundial* (Madrid, 1985), Tabla 3.

<sup>63</sup> *A History of the World's Colombian Exposition*, ed. R. Johnson (New York, 1897); R. Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World's Colombian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago, 1979), 43–46; J. R. Herbert, "Celebrations" in *The Christopher Columbus Encyclopedia*, 112–14. For a sophisticated account of supposed portraits, R. Pavoni, *Colombo: Immagini di un volto sconosciuto* (Genoa, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> R. W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions 1876–1916* (Chicago, 1984), 52–55.

bearing the Discoverer's image, which it then tried to sell at one dollar apiece. But the shrewd and thrifty citizenry refused to buy, whereupon the coins were reissued at face-value.<sup>65</sup> In a way that incident might be thought to have symbolic significance in that there was, among some Americans, a distinct cooling of affection for the hero in the forty years that followed. One reason for this was the rise of academic, positivist historical scholarship. In itself historical research, when undertaken by the individual historian, however sharp and revealing a light it throws upon its subjects, is not, necessarily, inimical to heroes. Yet the modern historiographical process as a whole stresses the importance of coolness of judgement and, at the same time, is so concerned to criticise and revalue orthodoxies, that inevitably it makes the hero himself a subject of contention. So, of the three leading American Columbian scholars of the 1890s, Henry Harrisse was interested in the man only insofar as he provided a series of intellectual problems; Henry Vignaud believed he was not the true discoverer of the continent; while Justin Winsor, "first among the giants" of early American historians, wrote in bitter terms of his "unwholesome deceit"; "overwhelming selfishness"; described him as "a rabid seeker for gold" and "the despoiler of the New World."<sup>66</sup>

That apart, the acclamation accorded Columbus by one tribe and by one faith made him in a sense less national and exposed to attacks by other tribes and faiths. From the 1870s Scandinavian Americans had drawn increasing attention to the Norsemen as rival icons with a claim to priority in time.<sup>67</sup> Then again there were many who feared and disliked both Roman Catholics and non-Anglo-Saxons, and their numbers

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<sup>65</sup> R. S. Yeoman, *A Guide-Book of United States Coins* (4th ed., Racine, 1991), 223. Does this reaction support the theory of William M. Johnston, *Celebrations: The Cult of Anniversaries in Europe and the United States Today* (New Brunswick and London, 1991), 57 ff., that "Americans commemorate events rather than creators"? Against this stands the assertion of D. Wexler, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero Worship* (Michigan, 1963; originally, New York, 1941), 1, that "hero-worship answers an urgent American need." A fund-raising special coin-issue was planned for 1992: see *A Report to the Congress by the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission* (Washington, D.C., 12 September 1987), 3.

<sup>66</sup> See R. G. Adams, *Three Americanists* (Philadelphia, 1939), 1-25 (for Harrisse); H. Vignaud, *Le vrai Christophe Colomb et la légende* (Paris, 1921); J. Winsor, *Christopher Columbus and How he Received and Imported the Spirit of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass., 1890), 58, 102. (It is S. E. Morison, *The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages A.D. 500-1600* [New York, 1971], 9, who places Winsor among "the giants.")

<sup>67</sup> See Rasmus Bjorn Andersen (who served, for some time, as U.S. minister at the court of Copenhagen), *America not discovered by Columbus. A historical sketch of the discovery of America by the Norsemen . . . with an appendix on the . . . value of the Scandinavian languages* (Chicago, 1874, 1877, 1883). As a result of the enthusiasms of Scandinavian-Americans a replica of a Viking vessel crossed the Atlantic in 1892. At the same time the U.S. government offered to send a battleship to convey the manuscript of the *Flateyjarbók* (which tells of Leif Ericson's voyage) from Denmark to the Columbian Exposition. But the Danes were unwilling to hazard its loss (see J. Greenfield, *The Return of Cultural Treasures* [Cambridge, 1988], 11-12). Again, for the discovery of America by many before him (and the vileness of his character), Aaron Goodrich, *History of the Character and Achievements of the so-called Christopher Columbus* (New York, 1874). For a facetious life (which may well betoken a certain weariness with the theme), W. Z. Alden, *Christopher Columbus (1440-1506). The First American Citizen (By Adoption)* (New York, 1881).

were to grow in the climate of that "Scientific Racism" that flourished in the 1920s. For them the alternatives were to stress the claims of Leif Ericson or, like one very distinguished scientist of the age, to argue that Columbus had come from non-Mediterranean stock: "Columbus, from his portraits, authentic or not [!], was clearly of Nordic ancestry."<sup>68</sup> Some states, at least, preferred, for whatever reason, to call 12 October by another name: in Alabama, "Fraternal Day"; in Indiana and North Dakota "Discovery Day"; in Wisconsin "Landing Day"; in Arkansas "Memorial Day." In the Kentucky legislature Columbus Day was attacked as "to all intents and purposes a Roman Catholic holiday . . . There are hundreds of thousands of citizens of Kentucky who believe that the blessings which we enjoy in the commonwealth are more directly due to the labors of men like Martin Luther and John Calvin than to Christopher Columbus."<sup>69</sup>

One must not exaggerate. The admiral gained a certain status with the rise of the Pan-Hispanic and Pan-American movements, and the association that encouraged between the celebration of 12 October, both as "Columbus Day" and as "El día de la Raza."<sup>70</sup> Again, the continuing vitality of the image in the thirties is revealed by attempts at take-over by other American ethnic groups, by claims, for instance, that, Columbus had been a Greek.<sup>71</sup> Yet he was excluded both from Dixon Wecter's *The Hero in America* of 1941, and a work on American heroes called *There were Giants in the Land*, which was commissioned in 1942 by the Treasury Department, presumably as a contribution to the morale of the war-effort.<sup>72</sup> In the postwar period his fortunes revived. In part this was due to the appearance of a new biography, Samuel E. Morison's *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, which was, for a long time, to stand as the definitive life. Published in 1942, written, that is, as Morison says in his preface, "in a day of tribulation both for Europe and America," the work presented a hero for the times, one less complex than Irving's, an almost Hemingwayesque man-of-action. ("My interest is in what Columbus did

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<sup>68</sup> J. Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1955), 277. F. W. Coker, *Recent Political Thought* (New York, 1934), 322 cites H. F. Osborne.

<sup>69</sup> Egan and Kennedy, *The Knights of Columbus*, 1: 184.

<sup>70</sup> I know of no study detailing the history of the *Día de la Raza*, though there is some, slight, information in R. Beltrán y Rózpide, "Cristóbal Colón y La Fiesta de la Raza," *Boletín de la Academia de la Historia*, 73 (1918): 200-203, and J. M. González, *El día de Colón y de la paz* (Madrid, 1930). This is, of course, distinct from "Pan-American Day" (14 April), established in 1930.

<sup>71</sup> See Spyros Ceras, *Christopher Columbus was a Greek and his Real Name was Nikolaos* (Manchester, N.H., 1937). I have not been able to consult S. G. Canoutas, *Christopher Columbus A Greek Nobleman* (New York, 1943). K. Sale (see n. 76 below), 426, cites more recent examples of the genre: Brother Nectario Maria, *Juan Colon . . . Was a Spanish Jew* (New York, 1971); W. R. Anderson, *Viking Explorers and the Columbus Fraud* (Chicago, 1984?); and Manuel Luciano de Silva, *Columbus was 100% Portuguese* (Providence, R.I., 1988). Again, in the thirties, Columbus could still feature in projects for children; see Nina B. Lamkin, *Great Patriots' Days* (New York/Los Angeles, 1935).

<sup>72</sup> *There were Giants in the land: twenty-eight historic Americans as seen by twenty-eight contemporary Americans* (New York/Toronto, 1942). Of course, in 1942 Columbus could have been considered, in a sense, as an enemy alien.

rather than what he proposed to do.") Surrounded by shipmates whose imaginary conversations Morison scripted in salty New England speech, the Admiral seems often a New Englander himself, a Massachusetts Yankee at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella. All this, of course, made him immensely accessible, as did Morison's conclusion where, like Freneau, Barlow, and Irving before him, he expressed what then seemed a perennial American regret that the admiral had not been afforded "that sense of fulfillment that would have come from foreseeing all that flowed from his discoveries," something "which would have turned all the sorrows of his last years to joy."<sup>73</sup>

A further stimulus to the ascent of Columbus was the increased openness of American postwar society. The apex of his posthumous career came in June 1968 when President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the second Monday in October as a federal holiday in his honour, the nearest one can come in the United States to establishing a national holiday.<sup>74</sup> The President explained that thirty-four of the states already had a Columbus-day, went on to speak of "the spirit of discovery" and then observed—and the apparent intrusiveness of the remark underlines, I would think, how much this was the central theme—that the holiday would reveal "our ability to live and work together, men and women of all national origins, as one united and progressive nation."<sup>75</sup> In other words in the wake of the first presidency of a Roman Catholic of Irish origins, a non-Protestant, non-Anglo-Saxon was being admitted to the pantheon. Columbus, you would say, was at that moment the symbol of the underdog in America, made good.

In which circumstances it is ironic that in the late eighties and the nineties he should have changed into a figure of oppression, responsible for all those evils that have been found in the Americas since the fifteenth century.<sup>76</sup> In which case in this iconoclastic republic of today, will

<sup>73</sup> The work was published, in the same year, in both single and two-volume versions. I cite the text of the single volume, (Oxford, 1942), 671. On its composition, see now, Gregory M. Pfitzer, *Samuel Eliot Morison's Historical World* (Boston, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> Boorstin, *The Americans*, 375–76.

<sup>75</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States Lyndon B. Johnson: 1968–69*, 1 (Washington, 1970): 754.

<sup>76</sup> As examples of particularly emphatic hostility, see H. Koning, *Columbus: His Enterprise* (1976; 2d ed., London: Latin American Bureau, 1991); K. Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (London, 1991). On the other hand, Michael Bradley's *Dawn Voyage: The Black African Discovery of America* (Toronto, 1987) has a Columbus who learns from black slaves in Spain of the discovery of America by the Emperor Musa of Mali and his predecessor in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. (The stories of the navigations of the rulers of Mali, found in fourteenth-century Arabic chronicles, were first expounded by J. de Guignes, "Perles des Merveilles," *Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres: Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque du Roi*, 2 [Paris, 1789].) In some ways an "official" hero will remain such among "establishment" figures. The *Alitalia* inflight-magazine, *Ulysse 2000*, for Oct./Nov. 1986 contains a number of messages (composed by, doubtless, their secretaries) in praise of Columbus from President Reagan; Mario Cuomo, governor of New York State; and Jimmy Carter. There are others from Pope John Paul II ("It is to this Genoese who wore the habit of a Franciscan tertiary in the last years of his life and died in it that one owes the opening of a new world to civilisation and the faith."), the astronaut, John Glenn ("I have always felt a special affinity for the man who set off

Columbus—who, after all, never so much as saw any future mainland territory of the United States—retain in 2002 any credibility as a hero? To answer this, one has to ask how hero-status is gained and retained in America. The only general answer I have found is that offered by Dixon Wecter, in his book on the American hero to which I have already referred. According to Wecter, one needs first of all the season or mission requiring the hero. Together with that the personality and deeds of the hero have to be consonant with certain virtues timelessly admired by United States citizens. They had to be, Wecter suggests, of good will, personally modest, peace-loving, and so on. From time to time a seeming hero, like Woodrow Wilson or Lindbergh, could be unmasked, revealed as deficient in the right qualities, and so be condemned to a Luciferan fall. But what was always at issue in this was essentially the perception of his moral being.

If one went along with this, one might speculate about whether such things as the space-shuttle *Columbia* and the *Columbus* manned space station could point to the possibility that an enduring respect for Columbus as Explorer and Enlarger of Human Consciousness could triumph over his new fame as slaver and imperialist. I myself, however, would suggest a different theory for the creation and survival of heroes, not just in America, but generally. Reading the evidence presented to the committee of the House of Representatives that in 1963 recommended Columbus Day as a federal holiday—uncontested claims, for example, that Columbus had learnt of the sphericity of the earth through study of the speculations of Galileo Galilei<sup>77</sup>—one could lean to the opinion that heroic status has very little to do with historical reality, almost, at times, that there is an inverse ratio between knowledge of the man and enthusiasm for his character. As a next step one might draw a distinction between two types of hero. In the first place there are those whose status derives spontaneously from the population at large: film-stars, sports-celebrities, often criminals (free spirits in Sherwood Forest). The second type comprises those commended to us from above, by clergymen, schoolmasters, or politicians. These latter, official, heroes can retain the vitality of popular heroes only through a constant process of reinforcement or indoctrination. This means that they need interest groups to sustain them, people who can see advantages in promoting them. In this regard, looking at the parties who have principally sustained our hero in the past, one thinks, first of all, of the Catholic Church. With the

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to explore unknown seas in the fifteenth century.”), and the wealthy manager, Lee Iacocca (without Columbus, his father would not have reached the United States). Yet a recent poll has revealed that a quarter of American university students have no idea when Columbus first reached America (*The Times* [London] 2 November 1989, 6).

<sup>77</sup> *Columbus Day: Hearing before Subcommittee No. 4 of the Committee on the Judiciary: House of Representatives, December 18 1963* (Washington, 1964), 6. The true meaning of such claims was well expressed by a representative from Pennsylvania (p. 25): “It is now time that Columbus Day be made a Federal, legal, public holiday by action of the Congress in order that Americans of Italian descent and the ‘First American’ may receive their just due.”

coming of the quincentennial, its episcopal hierarchy hasn't, by any means, like the Protestant "National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A." condemned Columbus as an "invader" of the continent.<sup>78</sup> Catholic Americans have taken 1992 as an occasion for commemorating the beginnings of its evangelisation. Yet, reading the hierarchy's magazine, *Aurora*, designed to celebrate this issue, I have been struck by how little Columbus—now seen as an embarrassment?—features in its pages. But it may perhaps be believed that Catholicism is now too heterogeneous to be subsumed under one generalisation. On the one hand there will be the Knights of Columbus: on the other, it could be, the Jesuits of "Liberation" Theology.

More significantly, I would think, we have Americans who acknowledge Italian ancestry, "the sons of Columbus," who are said today to represent a tenth of the population. In that context I think of another American hero, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who, on Columbus Day 1962, in New Jersey, told his audience that the Fitzgeralds were of Italian descent. It was later clarified that they were related to the Italian Bishop Alessandro Geraldini, a supporter of Columbus at the court of Queen Isabella, a claim which led to the memorable United-Press-International headline: DID AN ANCESTOR OF KENNEDY HELP COLUMBUS SHOVE OFF ROME?<sup>79</sup> Reflecting on those words, my own conclusion is that as long as there are ingenious politicians, anxious to establish links with a substantial proportion of ethnic voters, so long will Columbus "sail on, oh sail on!" a finally invincible Italian and North American hero.

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<sup>78</sup> "A faithful response to the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus—(As Adopted by the Governing Board, May 17, 1990)," *A Resolution of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* (New York, 1990).

<sup>79</sup> M. A. Musmanno, *The Story of the Italians in America* (New York, 1965), 257–58. For recent Italian-American vindications, A. Paolucci, "Columbus: A paradoxical legacy renewed" and R. Gambino, "Revisions of the Christopher Columbus Myth: Is he an historical hero?" in *Columbus*, ed. A. and H. Paolucci (New York, 1990), 5–16; 17–27.