

found traces of iron nails, a bronze pin, a soap-stone spindle whorl of the type used around A.D. 1000 in Iceland, among other even more obscure evidence of Vikings such as iron slag.

They didn't find Viking swords or carved mastheads or horned helmets but these little traces confirm for many leading archaeologists that this was in fact a Viking outpost. The local Indians and Eskimos simply didn't have those metal implements. Carbon dating then placed the artifacts within a window of A.D. 600 to 1200.

"Years of summer digging by competent archaeologists have (it seems to me beyond a reasonable doubt) proved this place to have indeed been Vinland, where Leif Ericson spent one winter, and where members of his family founded a short-lived colony," wrote Samuel Morison, one of the most respected historians on the discovery of America.

The Viking sagas, though of course unreliable to folks reared on videotape, tell a more fascinating story than iron slag. An Icelandic trader named Bjarni (Barney) Herjolfsson, around A.D. 985, returned home from Europe to find his father had traipsed to a new settlement on Greenland. Barney wanted to see Dad so he set sail west. Years later, he told anyone who would listen that he had been blown off course in the fog and had hit a new country with lots of trees and small hills. Everyone asked what else he found there, and Barney told them he didn't go ashore, which made Barney a bit of a laughing-stock among the Vikings.

EXPLORERS DON'T NEED A WELCOME MAT

FIRST EUROPEANS IN

NORTH AMERICA:

A GUY NAMED BARNEY?

It wasn't Columbus, but rather some flame-haired Scandinavian named Barney or Leif. We can say that with relative certainty because of some tiny bits of metal found on the northern coast of Newfoundland in Canada. Citing Viking sagas, Scandinavians had long claimed that Leif Ericson had sailed west from Greenland and founded a settlement called Vinland, but where was the physical proof? A couple centuries of hoaxes had led experts to doubt the authenticity of the sagas.

Then Dr. Helge Ingstad dedicated his life to finding physical evidence of Vikings in North America, and finally, after many dry holes, he found in the 1960s signs of a very old settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, off the coast of mainland Canada. While digging out the turf-walled houses, Ingstad and crew

Leif Ericson, the son of Eric the Red, who had founded the Greenland colony, bought Barney's boat and sailed in a southwesterly direction from Greenland. Now here it becomes murky exactly where he wound up; some experts claim he went as far south as Florida; others stake that he definitely moored at Cape Cod and others favor Newfoundland. Wherever he landed, he called it Vinland, which means "Land of Grapes" or "Land of Berries" or "Land of Meadows" depending on which scholar you believe. Afterward, other Vikings made the trip from Greenland to the tiny settlement until a war with the "skraelings" (i.e., Indians) forced them to abandon it.

Until Dr. Ingstad found those bits of metal, many scholars thought Vinland might be a tall tale like Valhalla.

A Norse penny from around A.D. 1070 was found at an Indian site in Maine. Keep posted for more signs of Vikings in North America. Can Leif Ericson day be far off? And what about Barney?

COLUMBUS'S SECRET AGENDA

Christopher Columbus had a secret agenda when he sailed west to find a new route to the Indies. He wanted to use the profits to finance another Crusade to regain the Holy Land. On December 26, 1492, Columbus wrote in his journal that he hopes to find gold "in so great quantity that the Sovereigns within three years would undertake and prepare to go and conquer the Holy Places." And in 1502 in

a letter to the pope, he proposes that he himself will lead a force of 110,000 men.

COLUMBUS ENSLAVES, THEN DEPOPULATES THE WEST INDIES

Columbus rightly deserves credit for many firsts, but one of his firsts has been routinely overlooked in American textbooks.

Christopher Columbus was the first slave trader in the New World. He returned from his first voyage with ten live Indians he had kidnapped, and these were paraded along with parrots through the streets and roads of Spain during his triumphant procession to Ferdinand and Isabella in Barcelona. (Four of the Indians were sick and Columbus left them in the care of his Italian backer, Gianetto Barardi in Seville. It so happens that a fellow by the name of Amerigo Vespucci was living at Barardi's at the time.)

Columbus's second voyage kept him away from Spain for two years and nine months and, as it became increasingly clear to him that he had yet to find gold and pearls in abundance, the Admiral started to dream of a brisk traffic in Indian slaves, according to *The Conquest of America* by Tzvetan Todorov. Columbus wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1496: "We can send from here, in the name of the Holy Trinity, all the slaves and brazil-wood which could be sold. If the information I have is correct, we can sell 4,000 slaves, who will be worth, at least, 20 millions,

and 4,000 hundred-weight of brazil-wood, which will be worth just as much. . . . I went recently to the Cape Verde Islands where the people have a large slave trade, and they are constantly sending ships to barter for slaves, and ships are always in the harbor. . . . Although they die now, they will not always die. The Negroes and the Canary Islanders died at first, and the Indians are even better than the Negroes."

Columbus apparently also saw the value of sex slaves; in a later letter he describes the action of the slave traders and what type of Indian sells best: "There are plenty of dealers who go looking about for girls; these from nine to ten are now in demand, and for all ages a good price must be paid."

Columbus's childhood friend, Michele da Cuneo, very matter-of-factly describes the enslavement of the Indians on Haiti before the return from Columbus's second voyage.

"When our caravels . . . were to leave for Spain, we gathered in one settlement one thousand six hundred males and female persons of these Indians, and of these we embarked in our caravels on February 17, 1495, five hundred fifty souls among the healthiest males and females. For those who remained, we let it be known in the vicinity that anyone who wanted to take some of them could do so, to the amount desired; which was done." (About two hundred died on the voyage and had to be thrown overboard.)

To be sure, selling slaves was standard practice then in the Old World. Five years

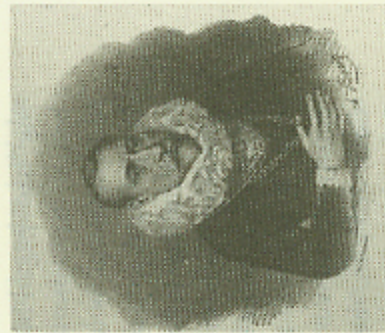
earlier, King Ferdinand had sent a gift to Pope Innocent VIII of one hundred Moorish slaves, which the pope had shared with cardinals and close friends.

But Columbus's slave sales hit a snag. Theologians argued that these Indians had not been taken in war and therefore couldn't be enslaved. Columbus, with a desperate need for fresh funds, argued bitterly that he should be allowed to sell slaves.

It's a bit ironic that Columbus pushed so hard for slavery because when he first arrived, he had been very impressed by the local Indians. On December 24, 1492, he wrote in his notebook: "A better race there cannot be, and both the people and the lands are in such quantity that I know not how to write it. . . . All here have a loving manner and gentle speech."

However, the whole idea of trafficking in Indian slaves back to the Old World soon became moot with the discovery of gold in the New World. Every able-bodied man and woman would be needed to work the mines. Spain alternated its policy between banning slavery of Indians to consigning them as serfs to local Spaniards to allowing the enslavement of only the "bad" Indians, i.e., the cannibal Carib tribe.

Since most Spaniards couldn't tell one Indian from another, a means of identify-



Columbus off the pedestal.

ing "bad" pagan Indians had to be devised: hence the notorious "*Requerimiento*" or "Requisition." It was decreed that a long complicated speech was to be read to captured Indians, tracing the root of Spanish authority back to Jesus Christ through Saint Peter to the pope to Catholic sovereigns of Spain. If an Indian agrees immediately to convert "to our Most Holy Catholic Faith," he or she will be awarded "many privileges and exemptions." If the Indian refuses, "we shall powerfully enter your country, and shall make war against you . . . and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of their Highnesses; we shall take you and your wives and shall make slaves of them . . . and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can."

In practice, this reading of the *Requerimiento* was often a formality before enslavement because often no interpreter was present to explain it to the Indians.

Columbus, when he was governor, was obsessed with finding gold. He instituted a kind of tribute system that was described by his son, Ferdinand. "In the Cibao, where the gold mines were, every person of fourteen years or older was to pay a large hawk's bell of gold dust; all others were each to pay twenty-five pounds of cotton. Whenever an Indian delivered his tribute, he was to receive a brass or copper token which he must wear about his neck as proof that he had made his payment. Any Indian found without such a token was to be punished." The punishment, which Columbus's son failed to

mention, was the cutting off of their hands, according to *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James Loewen.

The Spaniards' greed and cruelty grew worse over time. About a decade after Columbus's death, here is a day in the life of those Indians working in the mines, as described in a report by Dominican monks:

"Each of [the foremen] had made it a practice to sleep with the Indian women who were in his workforce, if they pleased him, whether they were married women or maidens. While the foreman remained in the hut or the cabin with the Indian woman, he sent the husband to dig gold out of the mines; and in the evening when the wretch returned, not only was he beaten or whipped because he had not brought up enough gold, but further, most often, he was bound hand and foot and flung under the bed like a dog, before the foreman lay down, directly over him, with his wife."

Life was also miserable for those Indians who were not enslaved but rather assigned to a Spaniard and, in theory, paid wages. "Since no one has the assurance that he will be able to keep his . . . Indians," wrote eyewitness Bernardino de Manzanedo in 1518, "he used them like borrowed goods, and thus many have perished and are perishing." Kind of like a "rental car" syndrome for humans.

Obviously, not all the exploitation of the Indians can be blamed on Columbus, but he was the first in charge and he set the tone.

Between overwork, underfeeding, and

especially disease, the local Caribbean Indians were wiped out. Wrote a contemporary Spanish historian: "All the Indians of these islands were allotted by the Admiral [Columbus] . . . to all the settlers who came to live in these parts; and in the opinion of many who saw what happened and speak of it as eyewitnesses, the Admiral, when he discovered these islands, passed sentence of death on a million or more Indians, men and women, of all ages, adults and children. Of this number and of those since born, it is believed that there do not survive today, in this year 1548, 500 Indians, adults and children, who are natives and who are offspring of the stock of those he found on arrival."

The pope banned enslaving of *Caribbean Indians* in 1537; the Spanish monarchs followed in 1542. This opened the door to the mass importing of African slaves, which would later almost fracture the United States. 

THE NAME "AMERICA"

It's time to stand up and defend "America"—the name, that is.

It has been fashionable since the 1550s and historian Bartolomeo de las Casas to call Amerigo Vespucci a liar and a cheat, a bombastic self-promoter who would have trouble navigating a large bathtub, let alone uncharted waters.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "Amerigo Vespucci, whose highest rank was boatswain's mate in an expedition that never sailed, managed in this lying world

to supplant Columbus and baptize half the earth with his own dishonest name."

Well, not so fast. Columbus thought he had discovered the Indies. It was Vespucci, in his enormously popular letters, who called the discovery a "New World."

Historian Gary Wills states that Vespucci—unlike Columbus who used speed and time to estimate distance—was a navigator who used the latest breakthroughs in astronomy to plot his course and reckon his location and create maps. He perceived that the giant land mass could not be part of Asia.

In 1507, German Martin Waldseemüller created a map using Vespucci's information. He credited astronomer Ptolemy with charting the Old World and Vespucci with identifying the New World and he dubbed the southern land mass (i.e., South America) "America." In the margin of the map was written: "It is fitting that this fourth part of the world, inasmuch as Americus discovered it, be called Amerige, or let us say, land of Americi, that is: AMERICA."

There is no record that Vespucci begged Waldseemüller and the scholars at the little monastery at Saint Die to name anything after him. Vespucci, who was in charge of the voyage that touched the mainland of South America in 1497, was an astute observer, was named Chief of Navigation by Spain (akin to being in charge of NASA now), and could write a thrilling letter.

Wrote Gary Wills of the two explorers: "Each played an indispensable role in

breaking out of the geographical confinement of the Western world. But when it comes to naming the new, one must know that it is new. Vespucci, however hazily, did."

If Columbus had had his way, we'd be living in the "United States of West Indies," or something like that, because the Admiral swore to his grave that he had discovered a part of Asia, never swerving from that belief. ☹

VESPUCCI'S SOFT-CORE BESTSELLER

Unlike Columbus, Vespucci rarely wrote of finding gold, but, rather, his accounts

are spiced with lewd details about the lives of the Indians. No wonder his letters became one of the world's first bestsellers in the fledgling industry of printed word publishing. Some scholars, such as Jack Hitt, contend that some of the more outrageous details were slipped in by printers trying to boost sales. Whatever, it definitely grabs your interest. The following was first printed in 1502, then republished dozens of times, in many languages throughout the 1500s. This English translation, by Gary Jacobson, appeared in *Letters from a New World* (Marsilio, 1992).

First, then, the people . . . a gentle tractable people. Everyone of both sexes goes about

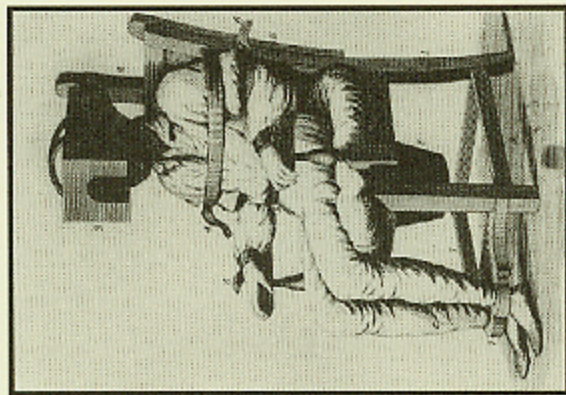


This 16th-century allegory shows Amerigo Vespucci with an Indian maiden representing America. Her nudity helped spur immigration; her hammock spawned knockoffs worldwide.

AMERICAN HISTORY

- Vikings: Connell, Evan, "Vinland, Vinland," in *The White Lantern* (New York, 1979); Horwood, Joan, *Viking Discovery: L'Anse aux Meadows* (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1985).
- Columbus: Loewen, James, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York, 1995); Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Conquest of America* (New York, 1982); Williams, Eric, *Documents of West Indian History, Vol. 1, 1492-1655* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, 1963).
- America: Arciniegas, German, *America and the New World: The Life of Columbus* (New York, 1978 reprint); Vespucci, Amerigo, *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci's Discovery of America*, edited by Luciano Formisano, wonderful translation by David Jacobson (New York, 1992).
- Cannibalism: Arens, W., *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropology* (New York, 1979); Tannahill, Reay, *Flesh and Blood: The History of the Cannibal Complex* (London, 1975).
- Thanksgiving: Loewen, James, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York, 1995); Shenkman, Richard, *Legends, Lies and Cherished Myths of American History* (New York, 1988).
- Christmas: Shenkman, Richard & Reiger, Kurt, *One-Night Stands with American History* (New York, 1980).
- Witchcraft: Calef, Robert, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (London, 1701); Mencken, August, *Hang by the Neck* (New York, 1942); Nevins, Winfield, *Witchcraft in Salem Village in 1692* (Salem, 1892); Robbins, Rossell, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (New York, 1959); Rosenthal, Bernard, *Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge, 1995).
- Harvard, Yale: Boas, Ralph and Louise, *Cotton Mather: Keeper of the Puritan Conscience* (New York, 1928); Silverman, Kenneth, *The Life and Times of Cotton Mather* (New York, 1984); Wendell, Barrett, *Cotton Mather: The Puritan Priest* (New York, 1963).
- Indiana: Loewen, James, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York, 1995).
- Scalping: Axtell, James & Sturtevant, William, "The Unkindest Cut, or Who Invented Scalping?" *William and Mary Quarterly* (July, 1980, pp. 451-472); Caverly, Robert, *Herosm of Hannab Dutton* (Boston, 1875); Eckstorm, Fannie, *New England Quarterly* (IX, pp. 381-382); Shipton, Clifford, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates* (Boston, 1945); Oliver, Peter, *Peter Oliver's Origin of Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tary View*, eds. Douglas Adair and John Schutz (San Marino, California, 1961).
- Pirates: Kaufman, Richard, *The War Profiteers* (New York, 1970); MacLay, Edgar, *The History of American Privateers* (New York, 1899); *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (July, 1864, pp. 596-607).
- First President: Wallechinsky, David & Wallace, Irving, *The People Almanac* (New York, 1975).
- Alcatraz: Wallechinsky, David & Wallace, Irving, *The People Almanac #2* (New York, 1978).
- Sex scandals, Washington: Shenkman, Richard, *Legends, Lies and Cherished Myths of American History* (New York, 1988).
- Jefferson: Dabney, Virginius, *The Jefferson Scandal: A Rebuttal* (New York, 1981).
- Cleveland: Sullivan, Michael, *Presidential Passions: The Love Affairs of America's Presidents — from Washington and Jefferson to Kennedy and Johnson* (New York, 1991); Wallace, Irving, and others, *The Intimate Sex Lives of Famous People* (New York, 1981).

RICHARD ZACKS



DOUBLEDAY

New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland

THE UNAUTHORIZED AND OUTRAGEOUS SUPPLEMENT
TO EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW ABOUT
ART, SEX, BUSINESS, CRIME, SCIENCE, MEDICINE,
AND OTHER FIELDS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

**AN UNFUND
UNDERCATION
ED**