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AMERICANS PAST AND PRESENT



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Georgiana Gălățeanu-Fârnoagă

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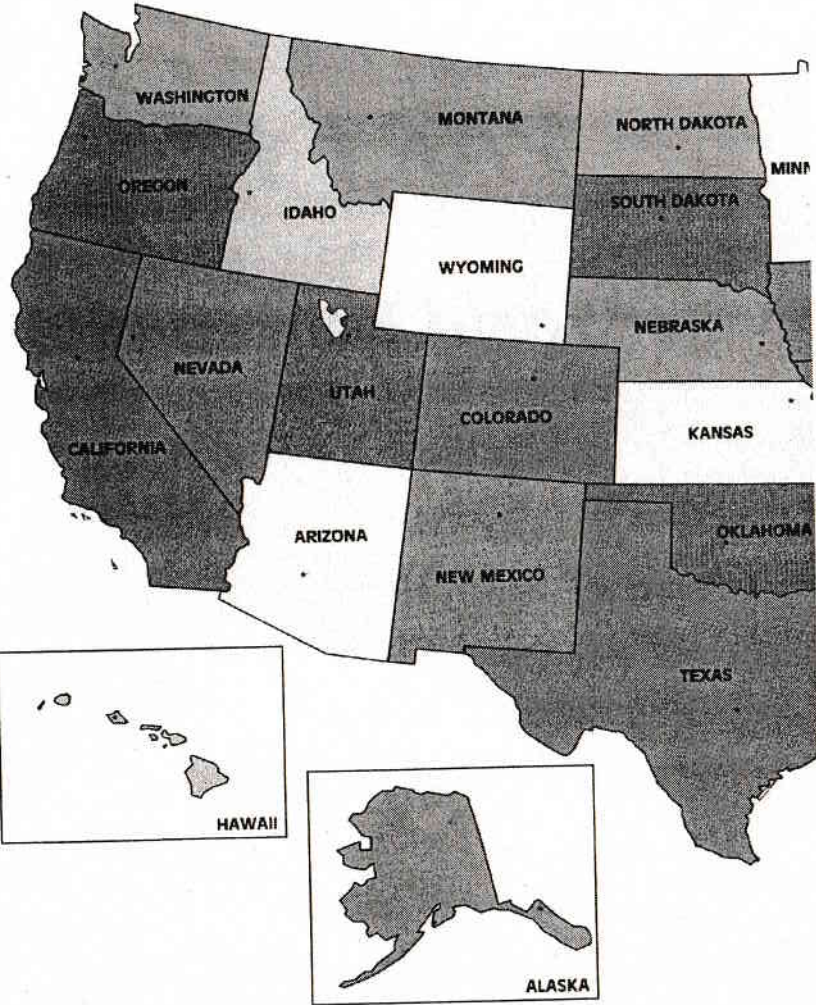
PART I

New World Beginnings

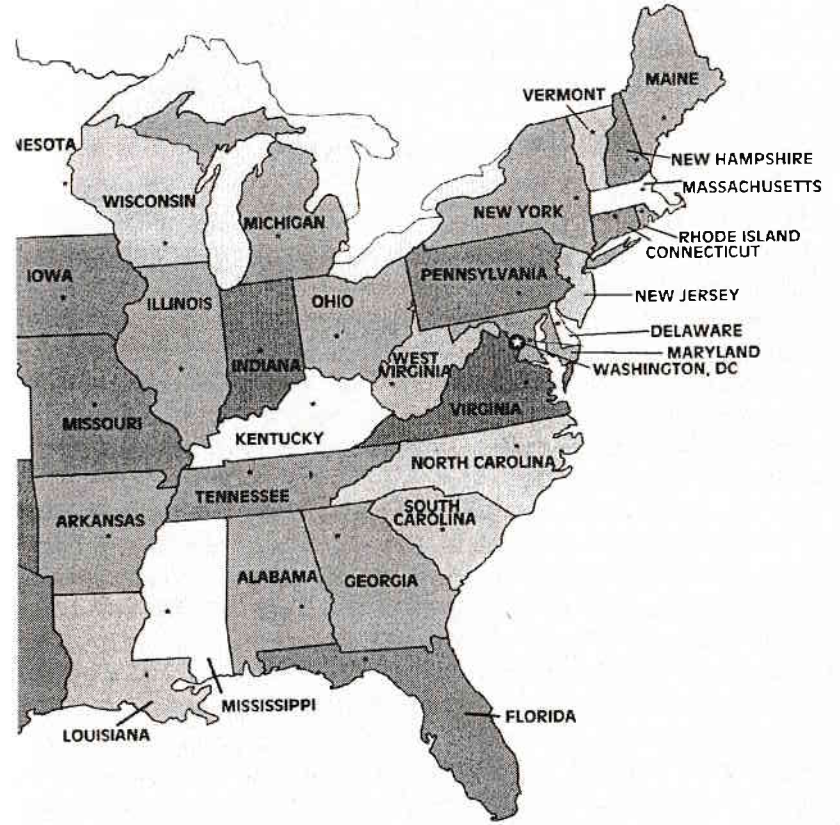
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UNITED STATES



OF AMERICA



*A historian's view*¹

A Continent of Contrasts

North America is a continent of strong contrasts and true challenge, of vast resources and great opportunity. It was late in being settled by the Indians and in being discovered by the Europeans. The early civilizations of North America developed in geographical isolation, and so the continent did not, for many years, have a wide influence in the world as a whole. When the white man arrived in North America to colonize it, he found the continent comparatively undeveloped. But since he came with centuries of European know-how behind him, he was able to make a quick and effective use of the land.

The Spaniards were more concerned with Central and South America than with the north. Their base in Mexico was cut off from most of North America by desert. Because of this, they lost their hold on Texas and California. However, they did a great deal to transform Mexico into a Latin landscape, reminiscent of the Mediterranean countries.

The French spread themselves widely, but too thinly, and were not able to consolidate their holdings. These holdings were taken over by the British, who, however, very wisely left a French-Canadian way of life to develop, which adds distinction to Canadian life as a whole. Canada is an attempt at a bicultural and multiracial state which tries to preserve a balance between its different elements. Its main problems have been the

¹ Wreford Watson – “North America.” *Lands and Peoples: North America*. Grolier, 1973.

lack of a habitable north and the presence to the south of the powerful United States.

The Americans took over the 13 colonies on the Atlantic coast from the British. They forged a nation that expanded beyond the Appalachians, took over the rich heartland of the continent in the Great Lakes and Ohio-Mississippi plains, crossed the Rocky Mountains, and established itself firmly on the Pacific coast. Therefore, the vital interests of the United States extend today from Western Europe to Asia.

Together with Canada and Mexico, the U.S. has developed the resources of the continent and of the flanking oceans. This development has led to strong regional differences on the continent; it has also led to an overall high standard of living.

In all of these developments, geography has played an important part as people have come to challenge the handicaps of the land and make the most of the opportunities in North America. ■

*A geographer's view*²

North America: Landform Regions

The land of the United States, like its people, is very diverse. It is made up of many parts, or regions. One type of region is a landform region. The common feature in one landform region might be mountains. In another, it might be plains or plateaus.

If you look at the landform map of North America, you will see that most of the land near the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico is made up of plains. This is the Atlantic Coastal Plain Region. It is rocky in the north and sandy in the south. In some places, great swamps stretch for hundreds of miles. Away from the coast, the soil is rich and red.

West of the coastal plain is the Appalachian Highlands Region. It extends from the southern United States to southeastern Canada, and it has high hills, valleys, and rounded mountains.

Located in the middle of the continent is the region called the Interior Plains. It stretches from northern Canada to the center of Mexico, and it is

² Joan Schreiber *et al.* – *America Past and Present*. Scott, Foresman & Co., 1983.

made up of plains and gently rolling hills. This is a major crop-growing area in both Canada and the United States.

North of this region lies the Canadian Shield. This huge area covers almost half of Canada and parts of the north-central United States. Glaciers passed over the Canadian Shield thousands of years ago, carving mountains and plains.

West of the Interior Plains stand the Rocky Mountains, a series of mountain ranges that extend from Alaska down to New Mexico. These ranges have some of the roughest and highest peaks in the world.

To the west of the Rocky Mountains is the Intermountain Region. It is called that since it lies between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. This large region extends from northern Washington to Mexico and is made up of high plateaus. Some of these have been carved by wind and water into beautiful rock forms and canyons. The most famous feature in the area is the Grand Canyon.

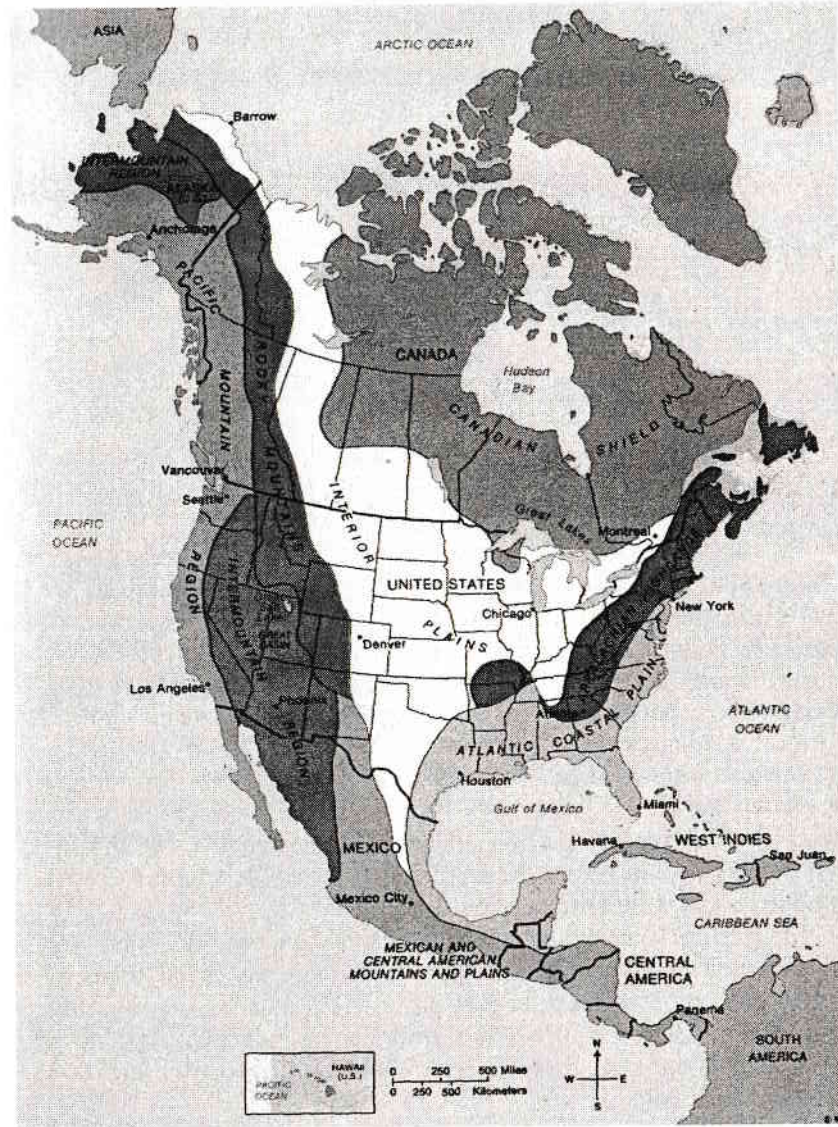
Also in this region lies the Great Basin, a huge bowl-like landform almost five hundred miles wide. Much of the water in this area drains toward the center and forms the Great Salt Lake.

Along the coast of the Pacific Ocean is the Pacific Mountain Region, with two major landforms. Next to the plateaus of the Intermountain Region is a line of mountain ranges: the Alaska Range, the Coast Mountains in Canada, the Cascades in Washington and Oregon, and the Sierra Nevada in California. These ranges contain many high peaks and active volcanoes. Further west is another, shorter, line of mountain ranges. Between these two groups of mountain ranges is the second major landform. Here lie the rich, green valleys of Oregon and California. Fruits and vegetables are grown in these valleys all year round.

Also part of this region is Hawaii. The islands of Hawaii are really the tips of giant mountains. Their bottoms are on the floor of the Pacific Ocean, more than six thousand feet below sea level. ■

“Optimism is a good characteristic, but if carried to an excess it becomes foolishness. We tend to speak of the resources of this country as inexhaustible; this is not so.”

Theodore Roosevelt, U.S. President (1901-1909) –
 “Seventh Annual Message to Congress,” 1907.



NORTH AMERICA: LANDFORM REGIONS

A historian's view¹

The First Americans

The first Americans came from Asia. Between 40,000 and 8,000 B.C. they crossed over the Bering Strait land bridge joining Siberia with Alaska (now the Bering Sea), then moved southward.

By 1492 there were millions of indigenous Indians in what is now the United States. They were members of some 600 tribes and spoke about 500 distinct languages. They also had differing economies. Some tribes consisted primarily of hunters and food gatherers while others cultivated maize, beans, squash, melons, and tobacco. The Indians of the Iroquois Confederacy, or Six Nations, were warlike; the Delaware, who called themselves Leni-Lenape ("real person"), were peaceful.

Indian dwellings ranged from tepees of skin-covered poles, the typical homes of the Plains Indians, to the impressive lodges made of beams covered with bark that the Iroquois and other eastern tribes built. Among the Hurons and many southeastern groups these structures were often grouped into towns surrounded by stockades.

Many tribes were skilled in handicrafts, making beautiful pottery, light and swift birchbark canoes, and implements of copper. Some tribes wove a kind of cloth from the inner bark of trees. Yet others lived very simply, with few artifacts. The tribes of California, for example, made do with simple clothing and crude houses. Only their beautiful basketwork revealed their skills.

¹ Irwin Unger – *These United States: The Questions of Our Past*. Prentice Hall, 1986.



PRIMARY EAST COAST INDIAN TRIBES IN THE 1600s

The first Indians the English encountered in North America were the tribes of the Atlantic coast and the Mississippi Valley. Politically, these varied greatly. The Iroquois Confederacy, originally comprised of five tribes, was a powerful league, the terror of its Indian neighbors and later the scourge of the European communities. The Chippewas, on the other hand, lived in small bands that had little in common besides language.

Among the tribes, government varied considerably. The Natchez of the lower Mississippi River Valley were ruled by an absolute despot called the Great Sun, who was chosen by the Female Suns when his predecessor died. The Iroquois had a kind of representative system. Female clan heads elected both the male delegates to the Confederacy Council and the chiefs who governed the Six Nations.

The Indians were pantheists, believing that spiritual forces resided in natural things, both alive and inanimate. They also held attitudes toward nature, property, and land that were very different from those of the Europeans. Most whites saw nature as an obstacle to be overcome, a force to be subdued. They also found it natural to seek exclusive, individual possession of land and other natural resources, and to measure wealth and power by how much a person possessed of these resources. In contrast, the Indians were natural conservationists and ecologists. They believed themselves to be a part of nature; they wished only to use it and preserve it so that it would yield its benefits for all time. They also did not understand the European concept of land ownership. In Indian cultures one used the land for hunting and farming, but did not have the right to exclude others from using resources that one did not use oneself. Moreover, the community, not the individual, was the significant unit of Indian society. Insofar as the Indians recognized ownership, property was owned collectively by the tribe, not by individuals. Nor did Indians prize the accumulation of riches enough to be willing to sacrifice present joys for remote future ones. These differing attitudes would have far-reaching consequences for Indian-European relations. ■

“We were entertained with all love, and kindness, and with as much generosity—after their manner—as they could possibly devise. We found the Indians most gentle, loving, and faithful, and living after the manner of the golden age. The earth brings forth all things in abundance, as in the first creation, without toil or labor.”

Arthur Barlowe, English explorer – *On North America*, 1584.

An English traveler's view²

From *The Indians of North Carolina*,
early 1700s

The English traveler John Lawson arrived in the Southern colonies in 1700. After a thousand-mile journey among Native Americans, he wrote *The History of Carolina*, in which he gave an accurate and vivid description of the people, products, and climate of this colony. Unfortunately, the Indians he celebrated in his work seized him and put him to death in 1711.



▲ A North Carolina Indian. Painting by John White, a member of Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition of 1585.

The Indians of North Carolina are of different statures, as are the Europeans, yet chiefly inclined to be tall. They are a very straight people, and never bend forward or stoop in the shoulders unless much overpowered by old age. Their limbs are long and well shaped. Their eyes are black or dark hazel, and their skin is tawny.

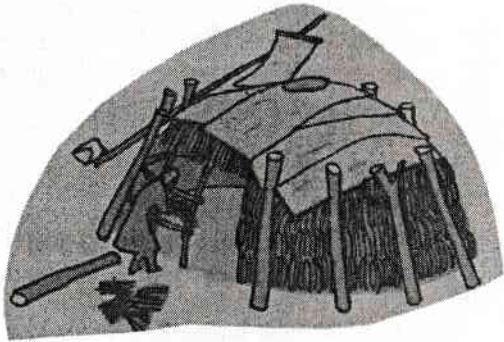
They are not so robust and strong as to lift great burdens and endure labor as the Europeans are; yet Indian slaves prove very good and hard-working. In traveling and hunting they are indefatigable because these activities carry a pleasure along with the profit.

² John Lawson – *The History of Carolina*. Raleigh, North Carolina, 1860.

As for running and leaping, they are extraordinary fellows, and they will dance for several nights with the greatest briskness imaginable, their strength never failing them.

Their dances are of different kinds, and for every sort of dance they have a special tune. All these songs are made new for every feast; nor is one and the same song sung at two festivals. A member of the nation is appointed by the king and war captains to make these songs.

These savages live in wigwams or cabins built of bark, which are made round like an oven to prevent any damage by strong winds. They light a fire in the middle of the house, and have a hole at the top of the roof right above the fire to let out the smoke. These dwellings, where the Indians sleep and sweat all night, are as hot as stoves. The floors are never paved or swept; they always have loose earth on them.



◀ *Used by the forest tribes, the wigwam was a frame of bent poles covered by bark and mats made of rushes. A piece of bark kept rain out of the smoke hole.*

The Indians make their cabins from the bark of cypress, or red or white cedar; and sometimes, when they are far away from any of these woods, they use pine bark. They have cabins without windows for their granaries, skins, and merchandises; and cabins that are covered overhead, the rest being left open for air. The latter have reed tables, to lie and sit on in summer, and serve for pleasant banquets in the hot season of the year. The cabins they dwell in have benches all around, except where the door stands; on the benches they lay beasts' skins on which they sleep and loll. Several families, all related to one another, usually live in one of these cabins. ♦

“Many, if not most, of our Indian wars have had their origin in broken promises and acts of injustice on our part.”

Rutherford Hayes, U.S. President (1877-1881) – “Message to Congress,” 1877.

3. THE FIRST EUROPEANS

A historian's view¹

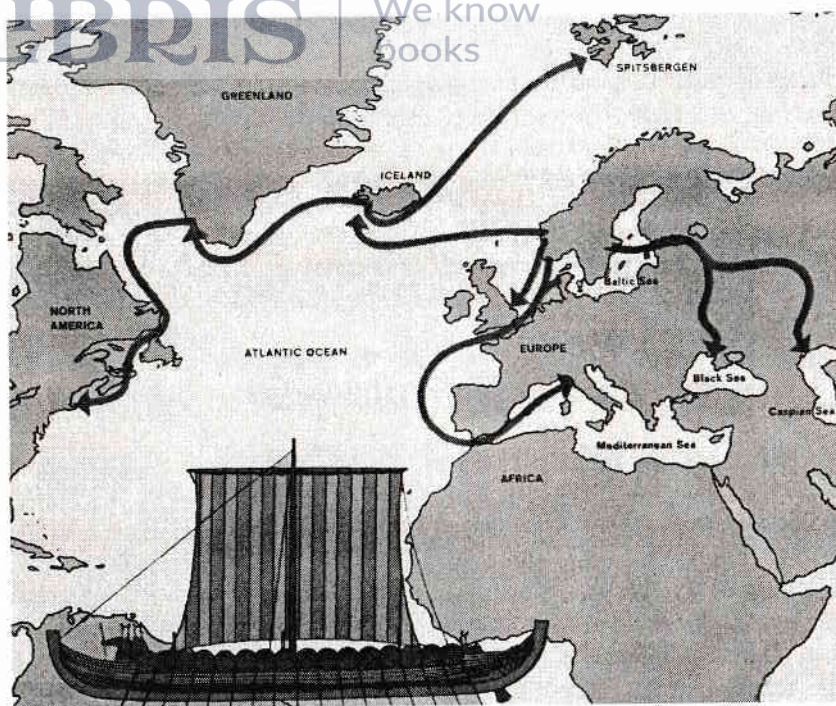
Early Explorers

Who was the first European to “discover” the New World? No, it wasn't Christopher Columbus, Leif Eriksson, or Erik the Red. According to the *Book of Flatey*, a collection of Icelandic stories compiled in the 1300s, it was a Norse trader named Bjarni Herjulfsson. Apparently, Herjulfsson was blown off course in A.D. 986 on his way from Iceland to Greenland. He sighted what is now believed to be Cape Cod. As he was behind schedule and also not very curious, he did not land there. Instead, he traveled northeast toward Greenland, possibly sighting the future Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland along the way.

It wasn't until fourteen years later, in A.D. 1000, that Viking Leif Eriksson landed in Newfoundland. Leif was the son of Erik Thorvaldson, also known as Erik the Red. Erik's father had been exiled from Norway to Iceland when Erik was ten years old. After his father died, Erik became involved in several murders and was expelled from Iceland for three years, in approximately A.D. 985.

With nowhere else to go, Erik and a group of supporters sailed west to find a land rumored to have been sighted by another Norwegian, Gunnbjorn Ulfsson, around A.D. 900. They landed on an ice-covered island and settled on one of the few grassy areas along the coast. Erik then tried to persuade the Icelanders to settle in the new land, which he misleadingly called Greenland.

¹ Doon Voorhees – *The Book of Totally Useless Information*. Citadel Press, 1993.



VIKING EXPLORATIONS

In the year A.D. 1000, having heard of Bjarni Herjulfsson's sightings, Erik's son Leif sailed west once again, this time landing in Newfoundland. He then sailed south to land first in Nova Scotia, and then in Cape Cod, where he and his men spent the winter. Upon his return home Leif encouraged other Vikings to colonize this New World. Legend has it that the Vikings explored the entire East Coast of the United States.

The Vikings established a short-lived colony on Newfoundland, and for about fifteen years people from Greenland sailed to the new colony. Native Indians are believed to have attacked and killed several of the Norse settlers, including Eriksson's brother Thorwald. It is probably because of this that the settlers returned to Greenland, never to visit the New World again. One wonders, how much better could things have been in Greenland? ■

An explorer's view²

From *Journal of Columbus, 1492*

Like other people of his time, Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) believed that by sailing west he could reach the East. With ninety men, his three small vessels left Palos, Spain, on August 3, 1492. As the voyage dragged on the temper of the sailors grew dangerous, and it was fortunate for Columbus that in October they sighted land.

Wednesday, 10th of October — The course was west-south-west, and they went at the rate of ten miles an hour, occasionally twelve miles, and sometimes seven. During the day and night they covered fifty-nine leagues. The people kept complaining about the length of the voyage. The Admiral cheered them up in the best way he could, telling them of the advantages they might gain from it. He added that, however much they might complain, he had to go to the Indies, and that he would go on until he found them, with the help of our Lord.

Thursday, 11th of October — The course was west-south-west, and they saw birds and a green reed near the ship. Those of the caravel *Pinta* saw a cane and a pole, a land plant, and a small board. The crew of the caravel *Nina* also saw signs of land, and a small branch covered with berries. Everyone rejoiced at these signs. By sunset they had traveled twenty-six leagues.

After sunset the Admiral returned to his original westward course, and they went along at the rate of twelve miles an hour. Because the caravel *Pinta* was faster, she went ahead of the Admiral. Two hours after midnight she found the land, and made the signals ordered by the Admiral.

Friday, 12th of October — The vessels lay by, waiting for daylight; and on Friday they arrived at a small island called Guanahani in the language of the Indians [Watling Island, named San Salvador by Columbus]. Presently they saw naked people. The Admiral went on shore in a boat, together with two of the ship captains. The Admiral took the royal flag, and the captains went with two banners of the green cross. Upon landing, they saw green trees and various kinds of

² *Journal of Christopher Columbus*, translated for the Hakluyt Society. London, 1893.

fruit. The Admiral called to the two captains and to the others who leaped on shore and said they should bear testimony that he, Christopher Columbus, in presence of all, was taking possession of the island for his lords, the King and Queen.

Before long, many inhabitants of the island assembled. What follows is in the actual words of the Admiral in his book of the first voyage and discovery of the Indies. "I," he says, "in order to form a great friendship—for I knew that they were a people who could be more easily converted to our holy faith by love than by force—gave them red caps, glass beads to put round their necks, and many other things of little value. This gave them great pleasure and made them our friends so quickly that it was a marvel to see. Later they came swimming to our boats and brought us parrots, cotton, and many other things; which we exchanged with glass beads and small bells.

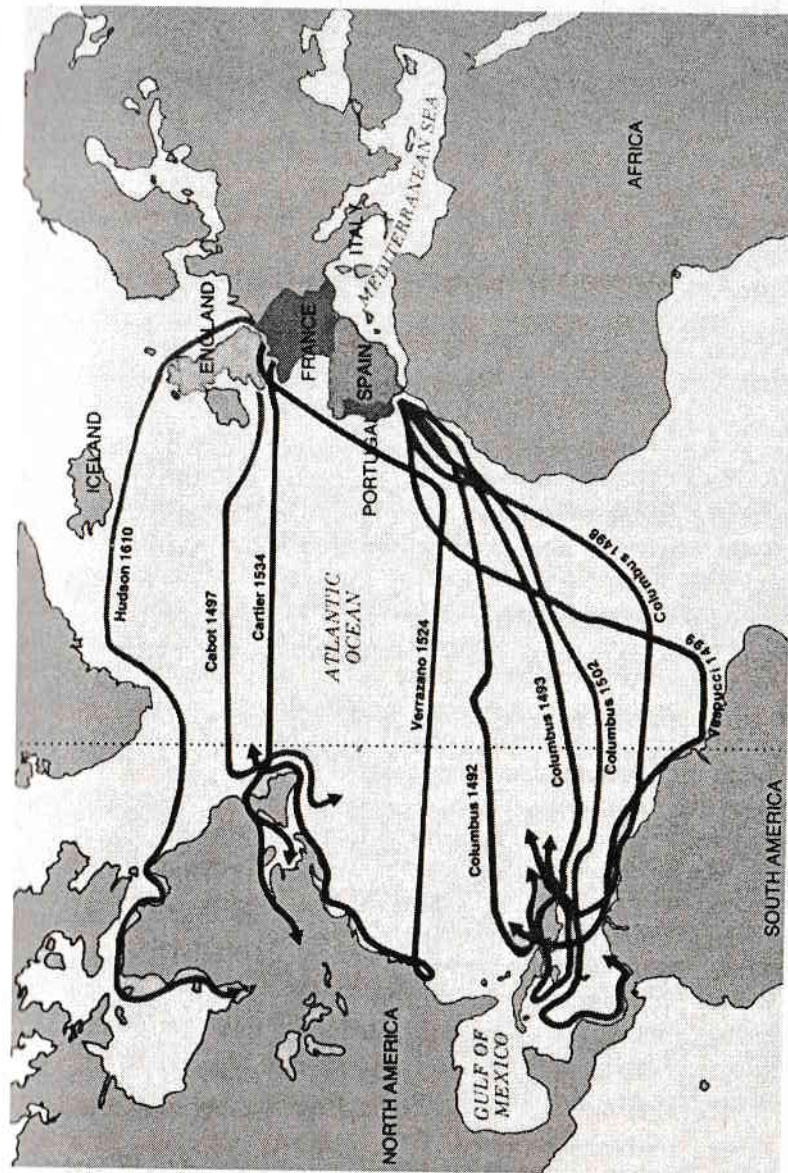
They seemed to be very poor. They walk around as naked as the day their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one young girl. All I saw were youths, not more than thirty years of age. They are very well made, with handsome bodies, and short and coarse hair, almost like the hairs of a horse's tail. They wear their hair down to the eyebrows, with a few locks behind, which they wear long and never trim.

In color, they are neither black nor white. Some paint themselves white, others red, and some others whatever color they find. Some paint their faces, others the whole body, some only round the eyes, others only on the nose. They neither carry nor know anything of arms, for I showed them swords, and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They are all of fair stature and size, with good faces.

I saw some with marks of wounds on their bodies. I made signs to ask what it was, and they led me to understand that people from neighboring islands came with the intention of seizing them, and that they had to defend themselves. I believe that they come here from the mainland to take them prisoners.

They should make good and intelligent servants, for I observed that they quickly took in what was said to them. I also believe that they would easily be made Christians, as it appeared to me that they had no religion. I, to please our Lord, will bring six natives to your Highnesses, so that they may learn to speak. I saw no beasts of any kind, except parrots, on this island."

The section above is in the words of the Admiral. ♦



VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY, 1492-1610