

A Global History of the Developing World

CHRISTOPHER M. WHITE



ROUTLEDGE

A Global History of the Developing World

“Christopher White has written a stimulating book that will take the reader on a tour of three continents – Latin America, Asia and Africa. The book provides a comprehensive history of the developing world based on the author’s profound knowledge of economic and social history over the last six centuries. The reader is not only provided with a new roadmap of World History but also with an alternative way of understanding key contemporary issues, such as global poverty or inequality. This book is highly recommended for students and their teachers in both social science and history.”

Katsushi Imai, *University of Manchester, UK*

A Global History of the Developing World takes a sweeping look at the historical foundations of the problems of developing world society. Encompassing Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the book centralizes the struggle for self-determination in an attempt to understand how the current nation-states have been formed and what their future may hold. Although concentrating on the modern era, the book’s scope is broad: It covers geography, ancient and modern history, economics, politics, and recent events.

The book features twelve chapters, organized into four thematic parts, each containing one chapter on each of the three continents. These parts cover different commonly experienced phenomena among the peoples of the developing world: imperialism, nationalism, globalization, and development. The first three are chronological, whereas the last surveys and analyzes the scholarly debates over the causes of development and underdevelopment. Through these chapters, Christopher M. White presents a wide-ranging study of the major themes in studies of the developing world, including slavery, imperialism, religion, free and fair trade, democratization, and economic development.

Including detailed profiles of key figures as well as maps and illustrations, *A Global History of the Developing World* vividly illustrates the culture, personalities, and histories of a key subject area. It is a perfect introduction for all students interested in the developing world in a historical context.

Christopher M. White is Associate Professor of history at Marshall University, Huntington, USA. His research interests include Latin American history, revolutionary movements, and US foreign policy. He is the author of *Creating a Third World: Mexico, Cuba, and the United States during the Castro Era* and *The History of El Salvador* (2007).

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To Owen Moul, who loved his family, friends, and history.

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Introduction: Overview of Latin America, Asia, and Africa

Reality and imagination

To begin our discussion of the developing world, it must be made clear that any description is a leap of imagination between the actual and the imagined worlds. That is to say that “reality” itself is elusive because it can be interpreted only by human beings observing their surroundings, with all of their known and unknown filters of perception. The use of language to depict what we *imagine* to be the “reality” of our observations only makes what we imagine seem more real. In other words, the more something is portrayed a certain way and the more that portrayal is heard by other people, the more it becomes a belief among the population. Language itself is a challenge to discern the reality of, precisely because it is a human-made *reaction* to what we observe and *not* a perfect reflection of that observation.

This is no mere philosophical play with words, nor is it simply a generalized statement. It applies directly to the history of the developing world because most of the depictions of this region (Latin America, Asia, and Africa) during the modern era (1500–present) have come from people in the Developed World (i.e., the West). This does not necessarily mean the portrayals are inaccurate, but it is important to ask questions such as the following:

- “How have Westernized depictions of the developing world served Western interests?”
- “What is missing from these Westernized accounts of the developing world?”
- “How has the history of the developing world as told from the Western lens shaped Western attitudes toward these three regions?”

We could continue asking questions such as these, but then we would risk entering into a very complex web of theoretical explanations that we have no space for in this Introduction. However, we will discuss theories of various stripes in the final part. This book is broken down into four parts, with three chapters each. The first three parts cover the fundamentals of the modern history of the developing world, ranging from the European conquests and colonizations of Latin America, Asia, and Africa of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, to the revolutions and market reforms of the twentieth

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and twenty-first centuries. These parts are designed to lay a foundation of important historical geography, events, figures, and trends for the reader. This leads to the fourth part, which evaluates the varying schools of thought on the causes of development and underdevelopment. The first three parts are meant to foment discussion and debate about the specifics and implications of historical events.

The last part hopes to create discussion and debate over the merits of different theoretical approaches of some of the most prominent authors of development theory. We are in luck as of late because there are a plethora of academic studies available to us that have sought to address this subject. Professors and activists from a wide array of backgrounds such as Jeffrey Sachs, Lawrence Harrison, Samuel Huntington, Jared Diamond, David Landes, Noam Chomsky, Paul Farmer, Paul Collier, David Korten, Muhammad Yunus, Thomas Sowell, Niall Ferguson, and others will be included in this discussion. I have not hesitated to include my own analysis throughout the book, which is informed by personal observations and honest scholarship. Not every reader will agree with the tone of the book at times, for I at times emphasize the barbarity, dishonesty, and meaning of events and historical figures to degrees that some will find unfair. However, I do this for all sides equally, as you will see when you read my portrayals of such disparate figures as Hernan Cortez and Robert Mugabe, Mahatma Gandhi and Joseph Sese Mobutu, and Mao Zedong and George W. Bush. In other words, liberals may be offended by my critiques of some of their heroes, but conservatives may also be offended by my critiques of theirs. This is part of honest scholarship from my own personal perspective. My approach is inspired by both radical scholars such as Howard Zinn, Edward Said, and Noam Chomsky and by pro-West/pro-capitalist scholars such as Niall Ferguson, Jared Diamond, and Thomas Sowell. These scholars, unlike most, do not consider their positions as simply “professorial” and do not write and teach simply for a “love of history” or for the sake of posterity. These authors have taken their research to the level of outreach, which involves exposing one’s biases to an extent to be heard. It is in the same vein as these authors that I write this book.

Let us jump into this topic with both feet by really examining what we know about “the developing world.” Even if the reader comes from Asia, Africa, or Latin America, has traveled there, has relatives or friends from there, or has read much about these places, it is important that we lay out what we know or think we know. To “think” one knows something means a lot in our modern world. It determines behavior. It determines attitude. It leads to vote outcomes. It leads to wars, peace, happiness, and sorrow. It has results that affect people’s lives. How people in the Developed World (i.e., the West, the Industrialized World, the First World) think about the developing world determines whether people live or die there. The same could be said of how people of the developing world identify themselves. Just read the recent histories of India, Cuba, Vietnam, South Africa, and

China to see how post-colonialism and revolutionary ideas have drastically altered the lives of billions of people. To address the developing world in a manner conducive to critical analysis and depth of understanding, the reader may find it useful to engage in a four-step process based on the following questions:

- 1 What are your assumptions about this topic?
- 2 What sources inform your assumptions?
- 3 What level of legitimacy do you ascribe to those sources?
- 4 What do you gain from these assumptions?

These four questions will be ever present throughout the book in various forms. They are included to keep our thinking oriented toward confronting the extent of our own understanding of each chapter topic so that we may gauge in an honest manner what we do and do not know. The notion that much of what we believe we know about the world is based on mere assumptions should not insult the reader. In fact, this is more of an educational tool I use to promote discussion of the myriad topics we cover herein. If you start reading with the mindset that you indeed do possess many baseless assumptions, you have leapt out of the realm of closed-mindedness and into the realm of enlightenment, so to speak. This is a philosophical standpoint I value especially when dealing with the developing world because there are so many misconceptions disseminated by wholly uninformed figureheads, whose attitudes about the region often lead to disasters for which they are not held accountable. At the same time, when we see the actions of informed observers, their results may not always turn out favorable, but they tend to consider factors that are more closely consistent with reality to a greater degree than the uninformed, and they are less likely to stoke flames that burn out of control. As college students, you have a choice to make: do you prefer to make decisions based on preconceived notions or do you prefer to make informed decisions?

Let us use the image on the front cover as an example. I took the photograph in August 2005 while on the Uros Islands on Lake Titicaca in Peru. The Uros people live on a group of small man-made islands built from a thick layering of reeds. This particular group of Uros islanders makes most of their living through tourism. People pay to visit the islands and see how the Uros peoples have traditionally lived. Another group does not permit tourists to visit because they prefer to preserve their ancient culture. What are some of the possible moral questions that could arise from the effects of tourism on Indigenous cultures? Would it be better to remove the tourist presence from the Uros islands to allow the people to protect their culture? Does that question assume too much about the desires and agency of the Uros islanders? Is it possible that those islanders involved in tourism prefer that lifestyle just as much as those who have chosen to forsake tourism? Can you see benefits in each group's choices?

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These questions are meant to help us explore, rather than conclude, to gain more texture in our understanding about the developing world. And that world is changing ever rapidly. The woman and child on the cover are not meant to convey a generalized image of the peoples of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The picture is meant to raise questions. Do most Westerners believe that most people in the developing world live in huts? Does the fact that many Uros people live in huts mean their lives are inferior (or superior, depending on your perspective) in quality to those in the West? Does the fact that the people portray themselves as living in huts mean they actually do live in huts? Or are the islands merely a stage to present a show to tourists who wish to see “primitive,” “authentic,” “Indigenous” peoples? Does the image represent poverty or progress? Is the developing world as underdeveloped (i.e., “poor”) as people in the West think?

Questions such as these should not lead to endless speculation; rather, they should encourage discussion based on observation and knowledge. There are many certainties in history, such as the proven existence of phenomena, the impact of leaders, the effects of wars, and environmental factors, to name a few. However, humans also view history in concrete ways that often lead to destructive behaviors. A large portion of the German population viewed Jews in a concretely negative way, and Hitler led the way toward their near elimination. The Hutus of Rwanda viewed the Tutsis this way, too, and their leaders facilitated the murder of most Tutsis. Countless other groups of people have carried out mass atrocities against other groups throughout history. In these cases, there was little room for analysis. The leaders did not encourage their followers to think critically about what they were doing. They were not confused about the cause when they killed unarmed men, women, and children. Though most of history is not made of genocide and war, these are poignant examples of the folly of unexamined ideas.

I have a saying in my classroom that aims to undermine my students’ inclination to rush to judgment: “If you leave my class more confused than when you arrived, I have done my job.” Of course, I do not wish for people to remain infinitely confused. The statement is intended to ask students to challenge their preconceived notions about the developing world. When we are humble in the face of information, abandoning nationalism, racism, sexism, classism, and all other prejudices aside from a belief in basic human rights and morality, we can use the study of history for the benefit of all mankind.

Geography

The landscape of the developing world and its usage has been the subject of much debate in the scholarship of the past century. Geographers are not alone in this endeavor, as biologists, geologists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and economists all must consider these factors as well. Although

Latin America, Asia, and Africa are physically separate, there are similarities in their geographical makeup.

- 1 The tropics (23 degrees north and south of the equator) make up an important part of all three regions.
- 2 Due to the lower level of industrialization in all three regions, land usage has been intimately tied to culture on a broader scale than in the West. In Western countries, 1 percent to 5 percent of the population works in agriculture, and in the developing world, this ranges from 12 percent to 90 percent, depending on the country.
- 3 Natural resources such as precious metals, wood, dyes, oil, and fertile soil in these three regions are what have traditionally drawn Western countries to seek to exploit them and, as such, many of their economies are still based on resource extraction and export.
- 4 Rapid urbanization in all three regions over the past century has unnaturally burdened many cities with the problems of overpopulation. Shantytowns, pollution, crime, housing shortages, price fluctuations, and unsafe buildings have emerged as crisis-producing ingredients in many cities. At the same time, cities have become the center of economic progress in all three regions.
- 5 The natural beauty of tropical, desert, and mountainous regions in Asia, Latin America, and Africa have been a huge source of revenue in the form of tourism from Westerners in the past two centuries in particular.

Still, the distinctions between the three regions are infinitely more important to the people who live there. That goes for each individual country, state, city, and ethnicity as well. Down to the smallest countries, such as Rwanda, El Salvador, and Laos, the people feel different than their neighboring countries, and even within each, the differences in tribe, ethnicity, or subcategory of governmental administration (state, department, county, city, hamlet, village, etc.), the people feel distinct. Therefore, any treatment of these regions as a whole must keep in mind the smaller entities that will be inevitably overlooked at times for the sake of space in this book.

Latin America

There are hundreds of Indigenous languages and dialects that have been preserved since the time of the conquest of the Americas. Recent research indicates that people have inhabited Mexico for anywhere between 13,000 and 50,000 years. Corn was first domesticated in Mexico approximately 8,000 to 6,000 years ago, or approximately 3,000 to 5,000 years after domestication of wheat and barley in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East. The history of the Indigenous peoples of Mexico and the rest of Latin America prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus is mostly lost due to the fact that the

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Figure 0.1 Map of South America

Spanish conquistadors systematically destroyed nearly all the written records they found. At the same time, most of the Americas never produced writing systems before Columbus. Much of what we know of this period comes from Spanish chroniclers during the colonial era and the work of archeologists and historians beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing to this day.

For the past five centuries, the main image people received about Latin America was Eurocentric, but the five decades of progressive scholarship has yielded a rich record detailing the advancements of Indigenous society the likes of which most outsiders could not imagine precisely because it contradicted the narrative handed down for generations before. Now, it is clear that the Nahua, Maya, Arawak, Quechua, Aymara, Tupi, Guarani, and Mapuche, to name only the dominant groups, lived in complex societies with technological and governmental advancements that rivaled those of the Old World.

Unlike Africa and Asia, Latin America is not a continent. It is a region that spans North America and South America. Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean are considered part of North America and the continent of South America begins at the border between Panama and Colombia. Much of the land is mountainous, with many mostly dormant volcanoes, with the dominant mountain chain being the Sierra Madre that runs south from Canada through the United States, Mexico, Central America, and the Andes down to the tip of Chile and Argentina (Tierra del Fuego).

The north of Mexico is mostly desert with semi-arid lands as well, with tropical forests running south along the east and southwest coasts and northeast through the Yucatan, then down through all of Central America. Environmental degradation has been a major problem over the past century due to overuse of the land, increased population density, and urbanization; thus, the natural forest has disappeared in most places. With the exception of Belize, which speaks English primarily, Spanish is the main language of Mexico and Central America.

The Caribbean is more diverse per capita than the rest of Latin America due to the many different European countries that colonized and fought over the islands during the colonial era. Spanish is the dominant language by far, and both French, with its Creole variations, and English and Dutch are also spoken. Cuba is the most prominent feature due to its size by comparison to the rest. Hispaniola is the second largest island, and it is divided by two bitter enemies, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago (one country despite the “and”) are also major players in the Caribbean, while the smaller countries of the Bahamas, Curacao, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and others cannot be left out.

South America is quite diverse as well, with Spanish and Portuguese spoken by an almost equal number of people, myriad Indigenous languages (new ones are still being discovered), and record-setting starkly different geographical features side by side. The Amazon River is the largest river in the world, and Brazil's Patanal region is the world's largest wetlands. There is more rainforest territory in South America than any place on Earth. Not far from the rainforest is the driest region on the planet, Chile's Atacama Desert, and it is right next to the world's longest mountain chain, the Andes, which are also the second highest in the world. This geography has proved to be an impediment to unity throughout history but, in recent years, the

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leaders of South America have sought to overcome these obstacles through regional trade agreements and political solidarity on a level never seen before.

There are 33 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean, only one of which is still a dictatorship. Dictatorship was the norm in the region until the rise of democratic systems in the past three decades, and although right-wing governments were the norm into the 1980s, the left has come to power in the past decade in nearly every Latin American country, with some exceptions (Mexico and Colombia, especially). This has a lot to do with the left's belief in the malfunctioning of the U.S.-style capitalist model (referred to as "The Washington Consensus" or "neo-liberalism") implemented in the 1980s, and although figures such as Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro (Fidel stepped down in 2006) have some influence, in general, Latin Americans have shifted away from the revolutionary politics of the Cold War era and toward a more moderate progressivism. Left-leaning leaders such as Luis Ignacio da Silva (Lula) of Brazil, Michelle Bachelet of Chile, and Mauricio Funes of El Salvador are much more the norm. However, as the history of the past century has demonstrated time and again, Latin American politics can shift in an instant. Witness the revolutions in Mexico, Cuba, and Nicaragua that took observers by surprise with the magnitude of the change they installed, not to mention the rapid reduction of the military's power in government throughout the region after the 1980s (despite its role in the Drug War, no small matter). We will address these recent events more fully in Part III.

Asia

The largest continent, containing half the planet's population, Asia stands out as a giant on the global scene and especially by comparison to its western neighbor, Europe. Asia is the only continent of the three we will be studying that has an east-west orientation, but its width from north to south is also considerable. Asia's western border technically begins with the Ural Mountains in Russia in the northwest and stretches southwest to the Arabian Peninsula. Turkey is Asia's westernmost country, and from there, one travels 6,000 miles east through forty-seven countries, two of which have the largest populations on Earth (China and India), and at least four of which have reached "Developed World" status (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore). Hong Kong could be on that list of countries as well, but it has never had the status of a country. It was under British control until 1997, when it was consumed by China. Going eastward from Turkey, one crosses south into the Arabian Desert on the Arabian Peninsula, then crosses the Persian Gulf to Ancient Persia and modern-day Iran before heading north and east into the "seven stans" (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) of Central Asia, with the Himalayan Mountains on the eastern side.



Figure 0.2 Map of Asia

Once into the Himalayas (the highest mountains on the planet), the culture, climate, and terrain alter dramatically. The Himalayan villages in Bhutan, India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Tibet, and Pakistan have a different way of life from their lowland neighbors. They have more ancient attributes and have adapted to their environment in physical ways unlike anyone except in the Andes. The Tibetans do not technically have their own country because

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the Chinese Communists carried out a war of annexation there in the 1950s, and Tibet has become the focus of international attention and debate ever since.

Next, we go south from the Himalayas to India, the second largest population in the world. At 1.2 billion people, India has been a major player on the Asian scene for millennia. The Indus Valley civilization flourished there (and in Pakistan) between 5,000 and 3,000 years ago, and it was the birthplace of two of the world's five major religions, Buddhism and Hinduism. Hinduism preceded Buddhism (indeed, the Buddha was born in India), and yet Buddhism was the religion that spread far beyond India east and north throughout the rest of Asia.

Yet, it was Europe that conquered the world, industrialized, and set the pace of global life over the past 500 years. This is changing in the twenty-first century, with the rise of the developing world, especially Asia. What should not surprise readers is that before the modern era, Asia and Europe were not that different in terms of their development. Indeed, it was only in the past 2,500 years that Europeans have created advanced civilizations; whereas Asians have a 5,000-year history of advancement. Asians invented farming more than 11,000 years ago, the first on the planet. The ancient Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Indus Valley civilization, the Chinese, and others have traditions dating back thousands of years before the Greeks and Romans. And yet, Asia's longer history of civilization did not signify economic, political, and social progress above that of Europe by the nineteenth century.

Asian history could not possibly be covered anywhere near what it merits in this book due to its size, population, and rich history. China, India, Japan, the Middle East, and Indonesia alone are individually significant enough to merit entire chapters here and more, but we will have to accept general pictures of them under the regional designation of "Asia."

Africa

The continent with the longest history of human inhabitation, Africa is the homeland of us all. *Australopithecus* lived there between 4 and 2 million years ago, then came *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*, and *Homo sapiens*, as countless laboratories full of their remains show us with overwhelming evidence. Humans migrated out of Africa some 50,000 years ago to inhabit Europe and Asia, later traveling to the Americas and all tracing their roots back to the motherland. In addition, most languages can be traced to their African roots, and today, there are more than 1,500 languages spoken there.

Africa is the longest continent from north to south and has a tremendous range of climate, terrain, resources, and peoples in fifty-two countries. North Africa comprises Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Sudan, with all except the latter having Mediterranean coastlines. These countries



Figure 0.3 Map of Africa

are inhabited by descendants of Arabs, Berbers, whites and blacks who speak Arabic and French, while the vast majority south of North Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa) are black and speak a variety of native and European languages. Sedentary agriculture and advanced civilization arrived in this area much earlier than Sub-Saharan Africa due to contact with the Middle East and Europe.

The most significant point in time for them came with the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Arab traders, diplomats, and invaders extending their

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influence west from the Arabian Peninsula embarked on the largest religious conversion in world history. The Muslim World includes more than 1 billion people today, and this includes North Africa and the northern half of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The Ottoman Empire dominated much of North Africa from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, and European conquest in the nineteenth century later altered their racial and cultural makeup.

The Sahara Desert is the largest desert in the world and extends unrelentingly from east to west and south through the northern halves of Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and all of Western Sahara. Their racial makeup is a combination of Arabic and black, with black more prevalent, and they are religiously similar to their northern neighbors. In fact, this region has long been known for conflict between Christians and Muslims, especially in Sudan, where civil wars have claimed the lives of over 2.5 million people recently. While Ottoman power did not extend this far south, Europeans conquered nearly this entire region in the nineteenth century.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a term to describe the largest poor region on Earth. Books often use the term in contrast to the higher economic development of northern and southern part of the continent. There is truth in this statement, but it overlooks the complexity of the region. Though half of the world's poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 700 million, and the region has been beset by wars and disease over the past two decades in particular, it also contains rich cultural and environmental value. The most significant historical phenomenon to hit this region came with the Bantu migrations that lasted between 1500 BCE and 1000 CE. The Bantus make up the largest ethnic group in Africa, and they all share a common language group. Great kingdoms, smaller city-states, and tribal communities arose throughout this region in the wake of the migrations, only to suffer conquest and subjugation by European invaders during the modern era.

A central geographical feature of Sub-Saharan Africa is the Congo River basin. This contains vast stretches of verdant, lush land in central Africa that has nurtured the development of a wide variety of tribal groups. The Portuguese first entered the Congo in the fifteenth century to extract slaves bound for Europe and later the Americas. The Belgians, French, and Germans conquered this area for its resources in the nineteenth century. Endeavors by outsiders such as these have caused environmental and cultural devastation, and much of the forested areas have become barren as a result. The amount of natural resources such as rubber, ivory, palm, uranium, gold, coltan, and oil have long lured both outsiders and locals to seek control over the region. Today, they are used in part by armed groups who extract their wealth to finance wars. The eastern Congo, comprising the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, is perhaps the most war-torn region of the past two decades on the planet, with a drastic reduction in the past several years.

Southern Africa is geographically quite different from most of Sub-Saharan Africa due to its distance from the equator. It is outside of the tropics and, in fact, some places have climates similar to that of Europe. South Africa became particularly welcoming for Europeans who eased into settlement there more easily than any place else on the continent beginning in the seventeenth century. Southern Africa is also a zone with a wide mixture of cultures: Native Africans, Europeans, and Indians of the Subcontinent have mixed there for centuries. In addition, Germany, England, and Portugal all had colonies in the region between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Africa's most recent history should be seen as a conflict between reality and imagination, and though this is the truth with all three regions covered in this book, it matters most for Africa. The reason is because Africa is the poorest continent on the planet, and yet the image of Africa as simply "impoverished" obscures the reality that Africa is also prospering rapidly. Economically, politically, and socially, the continent has excelled in leaps and bounds in the short period of time since Independence from Europe began only fifty years ago. They have elected female heads of state, something the United States has never done in 230 years of independence. Their market capacity has drawn many new investors to the region recently, as cities have exploded in size, and farmers in many regions are able to gain greater harvest yields due to microcredits, native innovations, and financial and technical assistance. The scourge of the continent is the spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria in particular, which take millions of lives every year. Without these threats, there is no telling what Africa could accomplish, and images of the destitute continent should not dominate our thoughts about its 900 million diverse peoples.

The last note of this Introduction is this: Though it is my hope that readers walk away informed, it is also my hope to confuse, for if we believe we are fully informed, we risk becoming complacent. To avoid this, we must always realize that we are involved in a dialogue with the material we read. Books are not like food, which can be ingested and are fully understood in their capacity to fuel us. Books are an author's attempt to contribute toward humanity's knowledge and, as such, students should take what they learn from the book to the next level by reading even more. I have provided a list of further readings, films, and online content at the end of each chapter to facilitate this. Good luck and enjoy.

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Part I

Imperialism

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1 Latin America and the Caribbean (1492–1898)

Timeline

1492	Columbus “discovers” the Americas
1500	Pedro Cabral “discovers” Brazil
1519	Hernan Cortez arrives in Mexico
1532	Francisco Pizarro arrives in Peru
1542	The New Laws pass, forbidding Indian slavery
1697	Treaty of Ryswick gives Haiti to French
1791–1804	Haitian war of Independence
1810–1826	Wars of Independence in all Spanish territories except the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Puerto Rico
1822	Brazilian Independence achieved
1823	Monroe Doctrine declared
1846–1848	The Mexican American War
1868–1898	Cuban wars of Independence
1888	Slavery abolished in Brazil
1898	Spanish American War

1492 and the legacy of Christopher Columbus

Before embarking on the material from this chapter, take some time to consider the following questions:

- 1 What are your assumptions about Columbus’s role in history?
- 2 What sources inform your assumptions about him?
- 3 What level of legitimacy do you ascribe to those sources?
- 4 What do you gain from believing in these sources?

When Christopher Columbus secured funding for his expedition across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a westward route to Asia, he knew his name would go down in history as one of its greatest discoverers. Indeed, Columbus is considered *the* greatest discoverer in history by most observers, especially when one considers how often his name is accompanied by the words

“discovered America,” but how much do we know about his actions and their consequences? The foregoing set of four questions serves the purpose of prompting students to think about Columbus as an agent of historical change in as many ways as possible. Did he actually “discover” the Americas, or would you use a different verb to describe what he did? Should he be admired for his accomplishments, or should he be vilified? Do you know how answers to these questions might vary within different ethnic groups in the Americas? Or, can you only *assume* what those answers might be?

October 12, 1992 was the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s arrival, and there were two major camps dedicated to recognizing this event. Anti-Columbus groups pointed to the near depopulation of the native peoples of the Americas and their displacement with Europeans, Africans, and an entire host of people of mixed races, whereas those who championed his legacy chose to focus on what his actions meant for “civilization” and “progress.”

If we examine what we know or think we know about Columbus, the answers are sure to range across the spectrum from positive to negative in a manner unlike many other historical figures whose actions also led to the deaths of millions. People such as Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are less “controversial” than Columbus because it is next to impossible to make positive arguments about *their* legacies. The technological and economic advances they oversaw were dwarfed by the tens of millions of people they killed in such a short period of time. In the case of Columbus, we have a figure responsible for bringing the Western and Eastern hemispheres into permanent future contact, which has led to myriad results. Many see this single act as the beginning of the largest scale of human suffering to ever hit the planet. The near extinction of Native Americans and the enslavement of millions of Africans for European profit on the sugar and tobacco plantations, not to mention the silver, diamond, and gold mines of the Americas, is enough fodder for Columbus’s detractors. However, many also see Columbus representing the pinnacle of human progress during Europe’s surge toward global prominence, and they believe he deserves to be among the most celebrated people in history.

This chapter covers 400 years of what resulted from Columbus’s discovery. October 12, 1492, the Italian navigational expert believed he had finally spotted Asia. If he had, the planet would have been nearly half its actual circumference, and Columbus would have fulfilled his initial goal of establishing a trade route benefiting his benefactors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. Trade had flourished across the Eastern hemisphere for thousands of years, but the 8,000 mile overland distance from the Iberian Peninsula on the westernmost tip of Europe to the east coast of China has forever been a mountainous obstacle to trade and communication. Columbus did not know it even on his death bed in 1506, after four trips to the New World, but he had failed to complete his mission.

He had, in fact, found a route to an unknown continent (except that the Vikings had settled in modern-day Newfoundland about 500 years prior and

then left). Columbus's letters to Spain spoke of the abundance of gold and the docility of the people he found in the Caribbean islands, which he assumed to be islands just off the coast of Asia. Gold was especially important because it served as currency in the Old World. Elated at the prospect of acquiring both large gold deposits and new souls for conversion to the Catholic faith, the Spanish Crown felt a compulsion to exploit Columbus' discovery by supporting further voyages. As is well known by now, the resulting influx of European settlers led to armed conflict with the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean (the Arawaks, Caribs, and Tainos). Though the Europeans held the advantage, this was not due to mere superiority of weapons, intelligence, or military tactics; in fact, 90 percent to 95 percent of all Indigenous peoples died as a result of communicable diseases against which they possessed virtually no immunities. This experience was unique to the colonization of the Americas, for when Europeans conquered much of Africa in the nineteenth century, it was not the Indigenous Africans who died due to European diseases but the other way around.

Pre-Columbian history

The most well-known Latin American civilization was the Olmec, which thrived from approximately 1500 BC to 400 BC in Mexico. The Olmecs also influenced future generations of Mexican and Central American civilizations for centuries to come. The first recorded use of the zero occurred in the Olmec region of influence, known as Mesoamerica in 32 BC and, by this time, the Olmec had faded, and the Maya had risen in its place. The Europeans who later deemed Native Americans inferior failed to see the thousands of examples of the Indigenous peoples, many of which are readily available for observation in archeological sites, museums and books today.

The Olmec cities such as Tres Zapotes and the rest were abandoned in last centuries BC, giving rise to the Maya (in southern Mexico, Yucatan, and northern Central America) and the Teotihuacanos of the Central Valley of Mexico. Large city-states containing enormous pyramids were used for religious and political purposes, demonstrating the intricacies of these new civilizations. The Maya and the Teotihuacanos in particular were known for their trade networks (with Teotihuacan at the center until the seventh century AD), art, and literacy. Teotihuacan is one of the most visited archeological sites in the world today. Just situated outside of Mexico City, it boasted a population of more than 200,000 in the first centuries AD. The Maya had many more cities, however, with a wide variety of structures still intact in Palenque (Mexico), Tikal (Guatemala), and Copan (Honduras), which are visited every day by tourists and researchers. The period in which Teotihuacan and the Maya city states thrived was 300 to 900 AD (the Classic era), and when these cities were abandoned between the eighth and ninth centuries, there began a new era, the Post-Classic Era (1000–1450 AD).

Were these the only major city complexes to speak of in Latin America, they would indeed stand out as exceptional for their uniqueness alone; however, the vast array of ruins left behind by the Inca and pre-Inca peoples of the Andes shatters that notion entirely. One has only to glimpse the stone aqueducts created by the Chavin de Huantar civilization in northern Peru more than 2,900 years ago to understand this. These peoples harnessed the power of hydraulics as they tapped into the water sources of the Andes at heights of up to 14,000 ft. above sea level to divert water for irrigation to the valleys below.

The Chavin peoples ruled northern Peru from 900 BC to 200 BC and included a wide variety of city complexes that helped set in motion a wave of civilization, which was augmented in the south and west by other groups. Eventually, the Inca Empire came to dominate Peru, along with most of Bolivia, Ecuador, and parts of Chile, Colombia, and Argentina. They expanded their reach over the course of one century (1435–1532) and produced such architectural marvels as Cuzco, Sacsayhuaman, Pisac, Ollantaytambo, Machu Picchu, and many others. These were a combination of urban and rural peoples who had adapted extremely well to a harsh environment, again demonstrating how far Native Americans had climbed on the eve of Columbus's arrival.

The Conquest of the Americas

Hernan Cortez became the most well-known conquistador of his day. A conquistador could be either praised or hated, depending on those whose story was heard the loudest. In the case of Cortez, a strong commander seeking glory for Spain and for himself, the year 1519 would place him in the history books. His 1519–1521 expedition to Mexico by way of Cuba quickly brought down the Aztec Empire so that Spain could enhance its own imperial domain and status within Europe. Cortez and his 500 conquistadors arrived in Mexico in 1519 and soon followed a path through the dense mountain passes and jungles between Veracruz and Mexico City, finally arriving in 1520 at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Along the way, Cortez acquired more Indian assistance from people seeking to resist the rule of the Triple Alliance (Aztecs). Most important among them were the fierce Tlaxcalans, who fought Cortez initially and then decided to join forces, adding thousands to the conquistador's cause. Upon arrival in Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards quickly kidnapped the Triple Alliance ruler, Moctezuma, and used him as a puppet king until fighting broke out between both sides. Moctezuma was killed either by the Spanish or by his own people. Soon, the people of Tenochtitlan drove out the Spanish occupants, killing two-thirds of them in the process.

The Spaniards had left behind an unseen and silent killer. Smallpox spread throughout the city over the course of the next few months, killing one-third of the city's population. As the epidemic progressed, Cortez recovered

his army's strength by recruiting thousands of Indigenous enemies of the Triple Alliance and building ships. The great battle for Tenochtitlan lasted throughout the summer of 1521 until the Spanish captured the last emperor, Cuauhtemoc, and the city with him. He was tortured and executed soon after.

History is almost always told by the victors but, in this case, we have records from both sides. One of Cortez's men, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, chronicled his perspective in his book, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517–1521*. From the Triple Alliance side, we have the Mexican scholar Miguel Leon-Portilla's rendition of the conquest through his use of native documents and accounts given to sixteenth century Spanish chroniclers. His book, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, should be read as a companion piece to Castillo's.

There were several key differences between the conquests and subsequent colonization efforts carried out against the Aztecs and the Maya. After completing the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the conquistadors had a foothold for conquering the rest of Mexico and Central America. The conquest of the Maya of the Yucatan Peninsula and Central America, however, differed from that of the Triple Alliance because the Maya lived in small city-states and hunter-gatherer tribes. Thus, one definitive battle against a centralized authority would not take place outside of Tenochtitlan. As a result, Spanish control was limited in the Yucatan and, therefore, concentrated much more on the subjugation of Central American and central Mexican Indigenous peoples, and the conquest of the Maya took all of the 1520s to complete.

Cortez's example was quickly followed in the conquest of the Incas in South America. South America's greatest civilizations cropped up in the Andes mountains. The Incas were only the latest empire to dominate a large region of the Andes by the time of the arrival of the conquistadors in 1532. The Incas, however, set the bar higher than all of the other Indigenous empires before. Their control stretched more than 3,000 miles from Colombia to Chile along the spine of the Andes. An 18,000-mile road system connected all regions of the Empire to the capital of Cuzco, Peru.

It was not until the arrival of the smallpox epidemic in the 1520s, which had begun in Mexico and made its way south through Central America and finally to South America, that the beginning of the end was signaled. This epidemic killed untold numbers of Incas in the decade prior to Pizarro's arrival. Both the Inca king and his heir apparent died in quick succession from the epidemic, and the ensuing battle over succession between the brothers Huascar and Atahualpa provided an opportunity for the newly arrived conquistadors serving under Francisco Pizarro to exploit.

Pizarro's 1532 entrance in the midst of the Inca civil war was one of history's precipitous moments. Atahualpa, fresh from victory over his brother, no doubt was at the height of his confidence when Pizarro challenged his authority. Atahualpa agreed to meet with the Spaniard in Cajamarca on November 16. There, the Inca lost thousands of men and his own freedom to

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a Spanish surprise attack. Pizarro had only 165 men, but he had the element of surprise and firearms.

Atahualpa was taken captive, much as Cortez had done with Montezuma in Mexico, and the following year had him executed. With the Inca gone, the Spanish quickly established authority over the former empire. As disease spread throughout the land at a quickening pace throughout the sixteenth century, 90 percent to 95 percent of the Inca's former subjects perished. The Spanish also forcibly took Inca lands for themselves, often enslaving the Indians to be used for mining and agriculture as they had done in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America. By the 1540s, the Spanish had explored and conquered lands throughout the Andes and the west coast of South America, and the Portuguese had control over the east coast of Brazil.

The conquest of the Americas set in motion the Christianization of the native peoples, further empowering the Catholic Church. It also initiated the widespread loss of native lives and territories. The conquest also gained a foothold for Spanish and Portuguese power in former strongholds of native empires. Mexico's name under Spanish colonial rule was New Spain, and the former Inca Empire became Peru. The conquest also kick-started the "Columbian Exchange," a term made popular by Alfred Crosby to describe the interwoven process of New World and Old World exchanges in foods, maps, disease, culture, economies, environment, and other elements. The Columbian Exchange theory posits that an understanding of the effect of European contact with the Americas can best be understood as an environmental, economic, and biological interaction. The landscape of the Americas, with its new germs, plants, animals, goods, and people, were forever altered as a result of European conquest and colonization. The *mestizo* race (mixture of European and Indigenous blood) also resulted from this exchange. This new race, along with a wide number of other racial mixtures resulting from African arrivals, helped create a variety of hybrid cultures across the Americas that comprise the majority of today's population there.

Another result was cultural. The Europeans who arrived in the sixteenth century set in motion a pattern of framing the Americas in Eurocentric terms. By portraying the Indigenous people as "simple," "childlike," "savage," or "uncivilized" and the land as "virgin" in need of exploitation, the Americas were seen as in need of European rectification. It is important to note that although European culture supplanted Indigenous culture in many ways, the Indigenous culture has remained in many ways as well.

Colonization

Spanish and Portuguese colonization followed on the heels of conquest. This process disrupted and altered the lives of the Native peoples rather quickly as the Europeans sought to control their labor and religion. Indigenous peoples were forced to relocate to Spanish-style cities and towns, where