

Rediscovering America

When Columbus landed in the New World, he found a society further developed in some ways than Europe

BY FRED GUTERL

1 **O**F ALL THE STORIES people tell, the least grounded in fact tend to be those about origins. Only a few decades ago, Christopher Columbus was the discoverer of America and a hero of the second-grade classroom. In recent years, however, Americans have moved toward a more brutally realistic view of their nation's beginnings. Now teachers are more likely to depict the slaughter of Native Americans at the hands of European settlers, and to paint Columbus as a ruthless tyrant who put peaceful, nature-loving natives in chains.

2 Despite this coming-to-terms, Americans have clung to certain founding myths. One is the notion that Europeans came to dominate the continent because they possessed superior technology and culture. Another is the idea that Native Americans coexisted side by side with natural wilderness without ruining it. In "1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus" (465 pages. Knopf), author Charles Mann demolishes both of these myths.

3 In his thorough and readable volume Mann pulls together years of scholarly work - little of which, to the author's surprise, has made its way into the popular sensibility. As a child, Mann (now 50) was told the story of

early English settlers struggling to survive in the New World. Friendly Indians teach these Pilgrims how to plant maize and live on the edge of the wilderness. The story may be true enough, but Mann paints a more complex picture of mutual distrust. When a rogue English officer kidnaps a handful of natives, tribal leaders declare themselves permanently hostile to all European settlers.

4 The Europeans might have been driven from the shores of Massachusetts forever, or at least faced the prospect of a costly war, had their diseases - smallpox and hepatitis, among others - not acted quickly to vanquish the natives. Technology, says Mann, wasn't the decisive factor. Contrary to popular wisdom, natives lost their fear of guns when they realized how hard they were to aim. Bows and arrows, by contrast, proved more accurate and had a longer range.



The climactic battle never occurred. The tribes had been wiped out by disease beforehand.

5 Technology and social organization, Mann argues convincingly, were, if anything, more advanced in the Americas than in Europe. In 1491, the Incas ruled “the greatest empire on earth,” in part by pulling off a unique feat of adaptation: they exploited the rugged terrain of the Andes by fashioning an economy based on trade among the different ecosystems - fish

from the coast, maize from the foothills, llama jerky from the Andes.

6 The Native Americans were far more populous than previously thought, say scientists. Feeding themselves would have required cultivation of nature on a massive scale. The New World wasn’t wild; it was a vast garden, shaped by human hands. Why isn’t this taught in American schools? Perhaps because it isn’t a convenient object lesson in conservation, Mann says. Some myths die harder than others. ■

Tekst 8 Rediscovering America

- 1p 35 How does Fred Guterl introduce the article in paragraph 1?
- A By describing how the image of Columbus has changed in the course of time.
 - B By expressing concern about the lessons on Columbus in American schools.
 - C By outlining the negative impact of Columbus on modern American society.
 - D By questioning the relevance of Columbus to America's development as a nation.
- 1p 36 What is the main point made in paragraph 3?
According to Fred Guterl
- A Mann blames the extinction of the Native Americans on their own suspicion of the newcomers.
 - B Mann claims that the English army had only the best of intentions towards the natives.
 - C Mann's description of how the settlers treated the Native Americans lacks credibility.
 - D Mann's version of American history differs from the still generally accepted one.
- 1p 37 "Technology, says Mann, wasn't the decisive factor." (aline 4)
Wat was dan wel doorslaggevend?
- 1p 38 What is Fred Guterl's opinion of Charles Mann's book, judging from the article?
- A It is controversial and draws far-fetched conclusions.
 - B It paints a romantic and idyllic picture of America's past.
 - C It presents historical falsehoods as proven facts.
 - D It provides interesting and scientifically well-balanced reading.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.