

History 206/354 (Colonial Latin America, 1492-1810)

Paper #1

We have recently read excerpts from two accounts by Christopher Columbus recounting the “discovery” of the New World from a fifteenth-century, European perspective. Additionally, we have read contemporary works by Tzvetan Todorov and Pauline Watts who recast and reinterpret this same story, focusing on Columbus’ internal motivations, religious beliefs, and medieval world view. The one source missing in each of these cases, is a native account that describes how indigenous groups in the Caribbean conceived of their own “discovery” of Europe and of Europeans. If we had a native source that described this period of European-indigenous relations, what would it say? For your assignment, please tell the story of Columbus’ “discovery” of the New World from a native perspective.

This is a creative assignment, and could take a number of different forms. For example, you might create (or rather “forge”) a letter written by a native Arawak or Carib that describes Columbus and/or his men to another tribe or indigenous group. Alternatively, you could feign to be an anthropologist who has “discovered” the account of an ancient native chronicler (passed down from generation to generation), and pretend to publish the newly-discovered source with commentary. Other options include writing a short story with a fictional (or historical) protagonist, bringing a fifteenth-century Caribbean Indian to the present-day for a radio interview, etc. The main point is that the paper should not only be historical (with references and footnotes to explain your reasoning and back up your approach), but also creative, providing the reader with an indigenous perspective that is otherwise missing from the primary sources of the period.

If you are registered for HIS 206, the paper should be approximately 6 pages in length (ca. 1800 words), and if you are registered for HIS 354 it should be approximately 7-8 pages in length (ca. 2400 words). All papers should include references and footnotes that back up your approach and point of view. In large part, it should be based upon your creative interpretation of the material that we have read for class (Columbus, Todorov, Watts, and Asimov). For your convenience, I have placed supplementary material that might be helpful on the [course web page](#), including an unabridged copy of Columbus’ entire journal and also a letter that he wrote to Spain on his return voyage. You are welcome to do outside research if you feel you need more material to successfully recreate the events of the period, but this is not required.

Given the length and nature of this assignment, I would encourage you to begin by choosing a single point that you would like to make about indigenous-European relations, then craft a paper that dramatically illustrates this point in a creative and thought-provoking manner.

Due Date: Friday, October 3 (via Canvas)