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Paradigms of Conquest: History, Historiography, and Politics

STEVE J. STERN

The Quandary of 1492

The year 1492 evokes a powerful symbolism.¹ The symbolism is most charged, of course, among peoples whose historical memory connects them directly to the forces unleashed in 1492. For indigenous Americans, Latin Americans, minorities of Latino or Hispanic descent, and Spaniards and Portuguese, the sense of connection is strong. The year 1492 symbolises a momentous turn in historical destiny: for Amerindians, the ruinous switch from independent to colonised history; for Iberians, the launching of a formative historical chapter of imperial fame and controversy; for Latin Americans and the Latino diaspora, the painful birth of distinctive cultures out of power-laden encounters among Iberian Europeans, indigenous Americans, Africans, and the diverse offspring who both maintained and blurred the main racial categories.

But the symbolism extends beyond the Americas, and beyond the descendants of those most directly affected. The arrival of Columbus in America symbolises a historical reconfiguration of world magnitude. The fusion of native American and European histories into one history marked the beginning of the end of isolated stagings of human drama. Continental and subcontinental parameters of human action and struggle, accomplishment and failure, would expand into a world stage of power and witness. The expansion of scale revolutionised cultural and ecological geography. After 1492, the ethnography of the humanoid other proved an even more central fact of life, and the migrations of microbes, plants and animals, and cultural inventions would transform the history of disease, food consumption, land use, and production techniques.² In addition, the

¹ This essay constitutes an outspoken reflection on the meaning of conquest in Latin American history and historiography, and is written for an audience familiar with the basic outlines of conquest history. This assumption about audience, and practical constraints of space, mean that my approach to bibliographical citation will be ruthlessly selective. The purpose is to provide example and illustration, and to guide interested readers to works that expand on the bibliographical coverage offered in footnotes to this essay.

² For a good introduction to biological and ecological themes, see Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Ct., 1972);

year 1492 symbolises the beginnings of the unique world ascendance of European civilisation. Before 1492, European civilisation's wealth and trading systems, science and technical inventions, power and cultural influences failed to eclipse those of the civilisations that had developed their own 'golden age' periods in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. Human civilisation and power tended towards continental or subcontinental dimensions, seafaring developed in comparatively close relation to land masses, the West was not necessarily superior or dominant. After 1492, European civilisation began its rise to a uniquely intercontinental and even global ascendance, and embarked upon a transition to capitalism whose economic linkages and transformations crossed several oceans and continents. Finally, within Europe itself, the historical geography and cultural premises of Western civilisation shifted sharply. Before 1492, Western civilisations pointed south and east. The West developed in a context of Old World crossroads and contention. North Africa, the Middle East, and southern Europe defined a great arc of contending civilisations and languages, empires and religions, that encircled the Mediterranean Sea and pushed eastward into Asia. After 1492, the centre of gravity shifted towards a North Atlantic axis. The centres of Western economic, political and cultural might moved towards western and northern Europe, and eventually, across the North Atlantic to the United States. The cultural premises also broke with the past. The West would construct proto-national cultures not out of the ebb and flow of Mediterranean heterogeneity, but out of more exclusionary claims to cultural and religious redemption. In Spain, the year 1492 marked not only the expansion into America, but also the expulsion of the Moslems and the Jews as the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon unified into a more powerful state. The symbols of exclusionary salvation, political unification, and imperial expansion condense into one.³

cf. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (New York, 1986). On the ethnography of the other and related intellectual issues, see Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (New York, 1982); Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964); the forthcoming book by Roger Bartra on European images of 'others' and 'savages' before 1492; and *Representations*, vol. 33 (Winter, 1991), special issue on 'The New World'. For a wide-ranging intellectual history that focuses on the eventual emergence and evolution of 'creole patriotism' in Spanish America, and is suggestive of the long-term impact of debates in the sixteenth-century Hispanic world, see David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (New York, 1991).

³ Two clarifications are in order. First, whether one accepts or rejects contemporary scholarly currents that promote a more Africa-centred approach to human civilisation,

Of course, the October 1492 landfall of Christopher Columbus and his associates did not really constitute the decisive or leading 'cause' of this vast reconfiguration of world history. The major historical causes both preceded and followed 1492; the key transitions were multiple and their connections often loose, not seamless; the major outcomes were not at all predestined or inexorably determined in 1492. The creation of the early modern era of world history rested on more than the luck or audacity of a single mariner who reportedly thought that he had encountered Asian lands and peoples in the Caribbean.⁴ The interest in the voyage and in Columbus quickens on historical anniversaries such as the quincentenary. But the quickening derives not so much from the conviction that Columbus constituted a supreme historical force in his own right as from symbolism: a sense that whether he realised it or not, he was the initiating

including Western civilisation, is not the main point under discussion here. One may accept or reject, for example, Martin Bernal's challenging and important interpretation of African cultural influence in the ancient Greek world, and the subsequent screening of that influence by European writers. See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (2 vols. to date, New Brunswick, 1987; 1991). But even less controversial accounts offer a vision of pre-1492 European empires and civilisations that acknowledges, at least in part, a context of Old World heterogeneity: crossroads, contact, influence, and contention involving the continents and cultures of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. See, for example, William H. McNeill, *A World History* (3rd ed., New York, 1979), Part II. McNeill's overall interpretation stresses 'equilibrium', autonomy, and the limited (i.e., voluntary and/or superficial) external influences among several centres of Old World civilisation, during the 2,000 years prior to 1500. But the thesis is set within an interpretive context and a narrative that acknowledges substantial cultural contact, contention, and expansionary movements within an Old World arena of plural civilisations and empires. For a brilliant evocation of fifteenth-century Spain as a society whose main drama was *not* the coming voyage of Columbus, but the wrenching transformation of a culturally and religiously heterogeneous world into a society founded on exclusionary purification by and for the builders of a more powerful state, see Homero Aridjis, *1492, The Life and Times of Juan Cabezón of Castile*, Betty Ferber, trans. (New York, 1991).

Second, the long-term movement towards a North Atlantic axis, and towards influence centred in more western and northern parts of Europe, did not wipe out in one sudden moment the pull of the Mediterranean. The initial impact of 1492 was to shift influence west *within* a Mediterranean milieu, and to set the stage for the eventual rise of Atlantic powers. This is more than evident in Fernand Braudel's masterpiece, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Sian Reynolds, trans. (2 vols., New York, 1972-73).

⁴ Even if one sets aside the valid point that from an indigenous American point of view, it is silly and even pernicious to argue that America was 'discovered' in 1492, the 'discovery' concept turns out to be problematic even in a Europe-centred context. Edmundo O'Gorman long ago argued, within a framework of Europe-centred intellectual history, that America was more an 'invention' than a 'discovery'. See O'Gorman, *La idea del descubrimiento de América* (Mexico city, 1951); cf. *The Invention of America* (Bloomington, 1961).

agent of a vast and historic transformation. Columbus initiated the Spanish claim to sovereignty, riches, and mission in America. The claim set off the rush to European imperial rivalry and indigenous disaster in America, to unification of continental histories into world history, to the building of power and prosperity on foundations of racial dominance and violence, to global expansion and ascendance of the West and capitalism. The Columbus voyage – or better yet, the date – stands as a kind of peak symbol for the dawning of modern world history.

The magnitude of consequence that issued from the collision of European and indigenous American histories: this, not Columbus himself, explains the outpouring of attention and commemoration, protest and debate, reflection and commercial hype, that has accompanied the quincentennial of 1492. The magnitude of consequence compels a certain interest. At bottom, it forces us to consider the problem of meaning: to discover, define, appropriate what 1492 means to human history.⁵

Inevitably, the process provokes debate. In the world of the late twentieth century, the debate has become heated indeed. In the Americas, in particular, racial and ethnic divisions make it difficult to define a common language of appropriation. For indigenous Americans, and many Latin Americans and indigenous sympathisers, the event invites a denunciation of five centuries of exploitation and ethnocide, a commemoration of five centuries of resistance and survival against formidable odds. But ethnic critique can cut in several directions at once. For many Latin Americans, and Hispanic or Latino minorities, the language of denunciation, even when warranted from an indigenous perspective, also slides into a 'Black Legend' of anti-Hispanic caricature and prejudice voiced by the Anglo heirs of an equally sordid racial history. The anniversary sparks a certain desire to redress the record, to move beyond

⁵ A useful, if rather bland, guide to activities connected to the quincentennial is the newsletter published by the Organization of American States: *Quinto Centenario del Descubrimiento... Quincentennial of the Discovery...* (1987–). Its strongest feature is institutional news and commemorations. The quincentennial's magnitude of consequence led the National Council for the Social Studies to issue a carefully crafted statement whose signatories include, among others, the American Anthropological Association and the American Historical Association. See American Historical Association, *Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 8 (Nov. 1991), pp. 20–21. Anyone who reads US-based 'popular' magazines such as *Newsweek* or 'high culture' ones such as *New York Review of Books* will have noted a quickening of interest and debate, organisation of Native American responses, and an outpouring of books of varied quality. For examples of works and responses by Latin Americans and Native Americans, see Jesús Contreras (ed.), *La cara india, la cruz del 92: Identidad étnica y movimientos indios* (Madrid, 1988); Iosu Perales (ed.), *1492–1992, Quinientos años después AMÉRICA VIVA* (Madrid, 1989); Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, M. Annette Jaimes (ed.), (Monroe, Me., 1992); cf. North American Congress on Latin America, *Report*, vol. 24, no. 5 (Feb. 1991), thematic issue on 'Inventing America, 1492–1992'.

a language of blame by defining more positive counterpoints. The latter may range from commemoration of the extension of Christianity and Western culture, to celebration of Hispanic defenders of Indians, to favourable contrast between Iberian-Latin and Anglo-Saxon values and social policies. Among the more common contrasts are those that focus on the thorny question of race itself: Iberian universalism and flexibility, evident in the building of multi-racial societies that incorporated everyone within the Church, and that openly recognised intermediate racial categories and shadings, may seem not at all inferior to Anglo parochialism and rigidity, evident in the exclusive 'city-on-a-hill' syndrome that consigned Indians to war and genocide on so-called frontiers, and that subjected peoples of mixed racial descent to bipolar racial thought and discrimination.⁶ This itemisation does not exhaust the discordant cacophony of voices. In the USA the sharp debate over multiculturalism and political correctness in educational and intellectual life has also spilled into the discussion. A quarter-century of intellectual turbulence and revamping has encouraged a will to frame 1492 within a context of plural cultural perspective that criticises the equation of Western expansion with human progress. Yet a conservative backlash has also materialised, that denounces multiculturalism and political sensibilities as forces that degrade academic life and intellectual inquiry. In Latin America, conservative backlash takes the form of Hispanophilia, outright conviction that Spain brought advance to indigenous America, and that the best future for Indians is to join the road to 'modernisation'.⁷

⁶ The most influential writers on comparatively inclusionary and flexible approaches to race in Latin America, especially Brazil, were Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande e senzala* (4th ed., 2 vols., Rio de Janeiro, 1943), and Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York, 1946). Cf. the contrast of Protestant and Catholic civilisations that emerges in Richard Morse, 'The Heritage of Latin America', in Louis Hartz et al., *The Founding of New Societies* (New York, 1964), pp. 123–77. The vision of Iberian approaches to race encouraged by the interpretations of Freyre and Tannenbaum have been subjected to stinging criticism since the 1960s, especially by academics, but they are still important in popular culture. For an illuminating recent discussion of shifts in scholarship and popular culture, for the case of Brazil, see Pierre-Michel Fontaine (ed.), *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles, 1985); for historical perspective, see the essay by Skidmore in the Fontaine anthology, and Emilia Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago, 1985), chap. 9.

For a brief example of the ways ethnic critique can cut in several directions, and spark a desire to 'redress the record', see the *New York Times* article on revisionary critiques of Columbus ('The Invasion of the Niña, The Pinta and the Santa María', 2 June 1991), and the letter it provoked by Teresa de Balmaseda Milam, *New York Times*, 4 July 1991. Balmaseda Milam pointedly noted that even though (because?) she had read Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York, 1990), she thought the revisionists had unfairly maligned Spain.

⁷ The connection to debates over political correctness is quite evident in journalistic treatments of the quincenary theme. See, for example, the *New York Times* article cited in note 6 above, and the 'Columbus Special Issue' of *Newsweek* (Fall/Winter,

We are left with a quandary: on the one hand, a sense of historical magnitude that compels some form of discussion and commemoration; on the other hand, a connection of the 'event' to a history of social grievance and political strife too intense and embittered to allow for a common language of discussion. Under the circumstances, one may understand the temptation to try to remove politics from the discussion, to strive for a more detached evaluation free of political passion and contentiousness. As one review of the contemporary controversy concluded, after 500 years, can we not step back from the political heat to embark on a 'time of great reflection' for all sides? Can we not consider the meaning of 1492 in a manner more spiritually and intellectually detached, less tainted by political controversy and alignment? Would not this approach yield a higher and more reflective understanding?⁸

This essay approaches the question from the double vantage point of history and historiography. It considers what the conquest of America by Spain meant to those who lived it ('history'), and what it has meant to professional historians who have interpreted it in the twentieth century ('historiography'). It argues, on both counts, that the quest for a higher understanding untainted by politics is a profoundly misleading illusion.

Let us offer a preview of the argument. From the beginning, there was no single meaning of conquest to those who lived it, even if one restricts the focus to only one side of the encounter between Iberians and Amerindians. Among Spanish conquistadors, one witnessed not one but several contending 'paradigms of conquest'. The contending paradigms, or utopias, turned out to be thoroughly inseparable from political interest and fireworks: deeply bound up with political rivalry, ambition, and controversy within the Hispanic world; repeatedly entangled by

1991). For a rather sophisticated example of conservative Hispanophilia, laced with a tragic tone suggesting sympathy for Indians who have suffered greatly but whose pre-Hispanic cultures were encumbered by fatal flaws and whose contemporary survival requires that they modernise, see Mario Vargas Llosa, 'Questions of Conquest: What Columbus wrought, and what he did not', *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 1990), pp. 45–51.

The lament that political correctness and multiculturalism have degraded academic life, and the related discourse that an overpowering intellectual fragmentation has destroyed larger meaning, are in my view profoundly exaggerated and misleading. For an exploration of these questions in the context of the recent history of professional historical knowledge, and the significance of work on Africa and Latin America, see Steve J. Stern, 'Africa, Latin America, and the Splintering of Historical Knowledge: From Fragmentation to Reverberation', in Frederick Cooper et al., *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, forthcoming).

⁸ The quotation is from *Newsweek*, 24 June 1991, p. 55; cf. *Ibid.*, 'Columbus Special Issue', p. 13.

indigenous responses and challenges to power that changed the colonisers' realities and expectations, and sometimes ignited new firestorms. Under the circumstances, to write a thoroughly depoliticised history of the conquerors or the conquest era takes on an air of unreality, a cleansing that does violence to the very concerns, priorities, and social dynamics of those who lived the conquest and its storms. The cleansing seems all the more distorted and artificial because sixteenth-century conflict and debate raised in acute form issues that resonate with the predicaments of our own times. If one turns from history to historiography, one finds that the legacy of political firestorms has left a profound imprint on the twentieth-century literature of conquest. But this imprint has not necessarily hindered understanding. On the contrary, political disquiet and sympathies have sparked key advances in scholarship, and a political sensibility illuminates the advantages and liabilities of major approaches to the indigenous experience of conquest in contemporary historiography.

Our reflections on history and historiography, in short, will caution that the desire to detach the discussion of 1492 from political sensibilities may be both unrealistic and undesirable. The caution recasts our quandary: a historical event that demands discussion yet defies a common language of discussion.

History: Coloniser and Colonised

The conquistadors brought three major frameworks, at once related and competing, to their conquest endeavours and exploits. We may think of each framework as an objective, a quest whose highest expression was a utopia. Utopia, beyond reach in Europe, seemed accessible in America. The conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo recalled the sense of entering into a Mexican panorama so wondrous that it seemed dream-like or magical in an Old World context: '...and we said that it seemed like the enchanted things told in the tale of Amadis, because of the great towers and pyramids and buildings rising from the water, all made of lime and stone, and some of our soldiers even said if it were this way it might be dreams.'⁹ Let us call the conquistador utopias those of wealth, social precedence, and Christian conversion.

Two of these utopias hardly constitute a revelation. The lust for gold and riches is well known. Díaz del Castillo acknowledged it in a matter-of-fact way in his commoner's version of a conquest chronicle. The Aztec informants of Bernardino de Sahagún offered a more striking portrait: a

⁹ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, Miguel León-Portilla, ed. (2 vols., 'Crónicas de América' ed., Madrid, 1984), chap. 87, vol. I, pp. 310–11. My translation differs slightly from that available in the 1963 Penguin edition translated by J. M. Cohen (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, p. 214).

fetish for gold so powerful that the sight and feel of it threw conquistadors into a trance-like state of joy and fingering, an uncontrollable exuberance. The Andean oral tradition reproduced by Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala summed up the obsession with riches in the story of an encounter between an Indian and a Spaniard in Cuzco, the old Inca capital. The Indian asked what it is that Spaniards ate. The answer: gold and silver. The utopia of wealth went beyond initial plunder and tributary extortion. Twentieth-century historians have documented the conquistadors' rush to establish ensembles of profit-making enterprises and commercial investments soon after the phase of plunder.¹⁰

Equally well known is the utopia of Christian conversion that stirred a minority of early priests and missionaries. The famous debates promoted by Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas, among others, rested firmly on the proposition that rapacious conquistadors had undermined the mission of Christian salvation and that, left unchecked, they would complete the destruction of the Indians. Studies in the twentieth century have documented millennial versions of America as an imminent Christian paradise, and the efforts of some missionaries and priests to construct utopian Christian communities peopled by newly converted souls free of Old World corruption.¹¹

Perhaps less well known is the utopia of social precedence. Social precedence implied three achievements: escape from stifling subordination and constraint in an old society, rise to a position of command and

¹⁰ See Díaz, *Historia verdadera, passim*; Miguel León-Portilla (ed.), *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston, 1962), pp. 51–52; Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, John V. Murra and Rolena Adorno, eds. (3 vols., Mexico City, 1980), pp. 342–43. On the rush to establish profit-making ensembles, the classic early essay is José Miranda, 'La función económica del encomendero en los orígenes del régimen colonial de Nueva España (1525–1531)', *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, vol. 2 (1941–6), pp. 421–62; cf. Carlos Sempat Assadourian, *El sistema de la economía colonial: mercado interno, regiones y espacio económico* (Lima, 1982), esp. pp. 109–34; Steve J. Stern, 'Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean', *American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 4 (Oct. 1988), esp. pp. 833, 839–40.

¹¹ The best introductions to Christian utopias and dissenters are Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston, 1949); John Leddy Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (2nd ed., Berkeley, 1970); Inga Clendinnen, 'Disciplining the Indians: Franciscan Ideology and Missionary Violence in Sixteenth-Century Yucatán', *Past and Present*, vol. 94 (Feb. 1982), pp. 27–48; see also Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus et L'Espagne* (Paris, 1937); Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán, 1517–1570* (New York, 1987); Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, Lesley B. Simpson, trans. (Berkeley, 1966). Our knowledge of these themes will be greatly enriched by the forthcoming dissertation of James Krippner-Martínez on early colonial Michoacán, 'Images of Conquest: Text and Context in Colonial Mexico' (University of Wisconsin–Madison, forthcoming 1992); for a partial preview, see Krippner-Martínez, 'The Politics of Conquest: An Interpretation of the *Relación de Michoacán*', *The Americas*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Oct. 1990).

authority over human dependents and clients in a new society, and acquisition of a recognised claim to high honour or service that legitimated reward and social superiority. The utopia of social precedence is most evident in subtleties of attitude and demeanour: the conquistadors' well known quarrelsomeness and sensitivity to slight; their rush to establish the aura of authority and face-to-face rule as patriarchs governing a network of concubines, servants, slaves, and clients; their disposition to proclaim loyal service to distant founts of legitimacy (God and King) while resisting fiercely intrusions by the local agents of God and King. The utopia of social precedence inspired an air of defiant command: *nadie me manda a mí, yo soy el mandón de otros* ('nobody bosses me, I give orders to others').¹²

There was no single meaning of conquest, then, to those who promoted its cause, but multiple paradigms, fantasies, and utopias. What emerged on the Spanish side of the conquest was a political struggle to define the terms of coexistence, collaboration, and contradiction among these visions and their relationship to a whole that included Europe's Crown and Church. Each utopia ensnared conquistadors in political intrigue and ambition, each brought out supremely political passions and sensibilities. Each raised the question of politics in its several fundamental senses: politics as right of rule (sovereignty), politics as public policy and decision (governance), politics as boundaries of legitimacy and jurisdiction (authority), politics as social alignment and struggle (contestation). The political struggle to define the meaning and spoils of conquest moved in unexpected and complex directions not only because Spaniards quarrelled among themselves, not only because contending objectives were not always smoothly compatible, and not only because epidemic disease and death decimated Amerindian populations. The struggle took unexpected turns, too, because the conquistadors contended with a formidable array of Indian initiatives and responses. Indians as well as Spaniards would end

¹² One of the most perceptive discussions of conquest utopias, and the social precedence aspect in particular, remains that of Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 152–75, to whose account I am indebted. (Wolf wrote his interpretation in an era that paid closer attention to interpreters of national culture such as Américo Castro and Eliseo Vivas, and I wish to acknowledge that my phrasing of Spanish demeanour resembles Wolf's quotation of Vivas.) The most original and illuminating recent scholarship on social precedence and colonial Iberian culture explores the theme from the vantage point of gender and honour codes. See especially Verena Martínez-Alier [now Stolcke], *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge, 1974); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, 'Honor Ideology, Marriage Negotiation, and Class-Gender Domination in New Mexico, 1690–1846', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 44 (Winter, 1985), pp. 81–104; cf. the more detailed and pluralised cultural analysis in Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, 1991).

up enlocked in the struggle to define what the Spanish Conquest meant, and what it might yet turn out to mean.

Even if we set aside temporarily the Amerindian side of the colonial equation, we may observe the ways each utopia proved inseparable from political controversy and intrigue. Ideally, of course, a close reciprocity might draw the three frameworks into harmony. The magic of unparalleled riches would open the door to lustrous social position in American lands, or upon return to Spain, and newfound wealth and social precedence would derive legitimacy from service in the spectacular expansion of Christianity under the auspices of the Spanish Crown. The process would not need to degenerate into controversy: all the conquistadors would benefit from the plunder of Amerindians and American riches, all would find pathways to social ascent and precedence, all would derive reflected glory from Christian conquest. In practice, however, utopia would prove short-lived or elusive to most conquistadors, coexisting objectives might not blend harmoniously or enjoy equal priority, political strife would drive the dynamics of conquest expansion.

Consider, for example, the interplay of wealth and social precedence within conquistador groups. In practice, the colonising groups quickly developed their own lines of hierarchy and seniority, their own distinctions between marginal beneficiaries and privileged inner circles close to a conquest governor or chieftain – a Cristóbal Colón (Columbus) of Hispaniola, a Diego Velásquez of Cuba, an Hernán Cortés of Mexico, a Francisco Pizarro of Peru, a Pedro de Valdivia of Chile. Those whose political connections or seniority placed them in the inner circle enjoyed superior rights to Indian labour and tribute. Well placed conquistadors, as *encomenderos* entrusted with allotments of Indian populations that granted rights to tribute, labour, and economic reward in theoretical conjunction with the obligation to oversee social order, wellbeing, and Christianisation, could most readily channel their gains into diversified commercial investments in mining, plantations, agriculture and ranching, textile workshops, and trade and transport companies. The result shut down the upper rungs of wealth and social precedence to many conquistadors – not only in the Caribbean lowlands where Indian slaving, gold placer mining, brutal conditions of work and sustenance, and epidemic disease virtually exterminated whole Amerindian peoples within decades, but also in the highlands of Mexico and Peru, where dense Indian populations persisted despite appalling losses.¹³

¹³ On hierarchy, seniority, and political restlessness among conquistadors, see Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera*, *passim.*; cf. James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin, 1972). On Spanish emigration in less than gloried contexts, see James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru. A Colonial*

The politics of the conquest groups split every colonising nucleus into factions that contested the inner circle for power. Not everyone could draw close to the utopias of wealth or social precedence. And when utopian dreams of riches and eminence beckoned, even the comparatively well off and respectable might yearn for a more dazzling trajectory. Conquest societies became dens of political intrigue and backstabbing. The restless factions embroiled the conquistador leaders in charges of moral corruption and betrayal of Crown interests, abuse of power and cruelty to Indians, favouritism and ineptitude. Christopher Columbus, who would taste revolt, imprisonment, and political humiliation within a decade of his first American landfall, prefigured a larger pattern. In Mexico, the political infighting drew the Cortés family into a complex legal struggle over political jurisdiction and economic rights, and facilitated a Crown drive to promote institutions of political control and reward that might 'tame' the encomenderos. In Peru, Hispanic infighting exploded in outright civil wars. Within a decade of the 1532 conquest, Francisco Pizarro and Diego Almagro, the partner-rivals who led the conquistadors, had each been assassinated by Spanish enemies. In the mid-1540s, the imperious viceroy Blasco Núñez de Vela – sent to rein in the conquistadors, in part by enforcing royal 'New Laws' regulating their encomienda allotments – provoked stiff opposition and was himself assassinated.¹⁴

Add to this political volatility the colonisers anchored in a third utopia or framework – the paradigm of Christian mission. The priests and missionaries derived their authority from the duty of Christian conversion of pagans that accompanied and legitimised imperial exploits. The Church folk were deeply political in their sensibilities. They had joined in the initial conquest expeditions, and had provided prayer, legitimacy, and political advice. They built their stature not simply as priests, but as priest-advocates: as ambassadors of alliance, conquest, and conversion vis-à-vis Amerindian peoples, as defenders of coloniser interests and behaviour vis-à-vis a sometimes sceptical Crown, as allies of one or another faction

Society, 1532–1560 (Madison, 1968); Ida Altman, *Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and America in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1989).

¹⁴ Information on political intrigue and factionalism in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Spanish South America may be gleaned from Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley, 1966); Sale, *Conquest of Paradise*; Bernardo García Martínez, *El Marquesado del Valle: Tres siglos de régimen señorial en Nueva España* (Mexico City, 1969); Lesley B. Simpson, *The Encomienda of New Spain: The Beginnings of Spanish Mexico* (rev. ed., Berkeley, 1950); Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera*; John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (New York, 1970); Andrew L. Daitzman, 'The Dynamic of Conquest: Spanish Motivations in the New World' (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1987).

during political infighting and debate over social policy, as advocates of Christian mission and conscience who denounced conquistador cruelty and excess. Each of these positions drew priests and missionaries directly into the drama of political charge and counter-charge, factionalism and alliance, that accompanied the building of conquest regimes. The majority of Church priests and officials aligned themselves with the conquistador groups, or with factions among them. But a minority would gain fame and notoriety by carving out more independent and controversial positions as Indian defenders and advocates who denounced their Spanish compatriots as unworthy wreckers of Christian mission. The Franciscans who built a political base for the transformation of Yucatán into a regional laboratory of evangelisation, the Vasco de Quiroga who used his authority as bishop and a background in the viceregal high court of Mexico City to build experimental communities suggestive of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, the Bartolomé de las Casas who pressed for a sharply altered framework of colonisation: all understood that their claims had drawn them into a political war to define who held the rightful reins of power in America, and with what purpose and restrictions.¹⁵

That a minority of Church critics and utopians denounced conquistadors as power-hungry tyrants who brooked no limits in their exploitation of Indians, and who thereby undermined Christian salvation even as they paid lip service to it, is well known to a History that seeks Iberian heroes and balancing counter-points to the 'Black Legend'. Less widely appreciated, perhaps, is that the Church critics were as much political insiders seeking and wielding power in their own right, as they were political outsiders wielding criticism from a distance. As political insiders who constructed their own power bases and social relations of authority, they too drew attack for imperious arrogance and abuse of power. Critics saw in Vasco de Quiroga an abusive and vengeful tyrant, encomendero interests complained that priests shamelessly exploited the labour and tribute of Indians, colonisers depicted missionaries as domineering men who not only monopolised access to Indians, but also resorted to cruelty and violence as methods of Christian instruction. In Mexico, the accusations of abuse exploded in scandal when Franciscan missionaries led by Diego de Landa reacted with violent rage upon discovery of religious 'betrayal' by the Maya individuals they had personally instructed. Suddenly the typical roles were inverted: selected colonisers defended

¹⁵ The alignment of Church officials in America with encomendero visions of politics comes through strongly in Simpson, *The Encomienda*, esp. pp. 133–39, and Hanke, *Spanish Struggle*, pp. 18, 43–45, 98. A brilliant depiction of Franciscan Yucatán as an arena of political ambition and egotism is Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*; the theme of missionaries, church officials, and political warfare with high stakes will be further illuminated in Krippner-Martínez, 'Images of Conquest'.

Indians from the cruel tortures of the religious, and demanded intervention to regulate and discipline missionary conduct.¹⁶

The politics of contending conquistadors and contending conquest utopias had two key effects beyond the promotion of Iberian factionalism. First, it constituted the engine of recruitment for conquest expansion. Restless groups or individuals could choose either to stake their destiny within an established colonial setting, or to break off on a new expedition in search of wealth, precedence, and salvation. Similarly, an embattled conquistador leader could choose either to control local rivals and malcontents, or to export them by commissioning exploratory ventures in new lands where utopia still beckoned. The political dynamics of conquest, in short, promoted the amazingly rapid proliferation of Spanish *entradas*, expeditions by secular colonisers and by missionaries to frontiers that might yet yield riches, status, or souls. Diego Velásquez of Cuba sent Hernán Cortés to Mexico (then had second thoughts in view of Cortés's ability and independence, and the great riches and power that seemed forthcoming); Cortés authorised *entradas* in all directions; Pizarro sent Almagro and Valdivia to Chile. Clusters of missionaries sought to forge their own social frameworks beyond the settled zones dominated by *encomenderos* and the institutional Church.¹⁷

On one or another frontier, distinctions among contending colonial frameworks might take more accentuated form. In slaving zones such as southern Chile, north-central Mexico (Zacatecas), and parts of Central America and the Brazilian interior, the search for wealth took the crudest form: open raiding on selected indigenous groups targeted for warfare and slavery in mines or plantations. The building of established social precedence in an enduring multi-racial social order, the development of the institutions and pretence of Christian conversion, took a back seat to raw human commerce in the service of mines, plantations, and more settled colonial zones. In backwater frontiers such as Paraguay, the quest for treasure quickly faded. The colonisers who remained settled for an alternative: positions of precedence and command as conquering patriarchs who developed webs of servant-relatives by marrying into Guaraní society, and thereby melding into and transforming its upper layer. Not only did treasure dreams become anachronistic. So did conventional Christian morality: the Paraguayan conquistadors discarded

¹⁶ For critiques and role inversions, see esp. Clendinnen, 'Disciplining the Indians'; Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*. Cf. Simpson, *The Encomienda*, pp. 75–77, 237–38; Steve J. Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640* (Madison, 1982), pp. 46, 49; and Krippner-Martínez, 'Images of Conquest'.

¹⁷ See the sources cited in note 14 above; and for visual representations, Cathryn L. Lombardi et al., *Latin American History: A Teaching Atlas* (Madison, 1983), pp. 22, 24, 25 (cf. pp. 26, 28, 29).

the fusion of formal monogamy and informal concubinage tolerated by the Church, and turned toward the Guaraní practice of open polygamy. In missionary frontiers such as the far Mexican north, Vasco de Quiroga's Michoacán, or parts of Amazonia, the preponderant authority of the religious supervisors of missionary communities eclipsed that of more secular colonising interests. The latter walked an unusually mediated path if they were to secure access to Indian labour, social influence, and political power.¹⁸

The politics of conquest yielded not only factionalism and an engine of expansion. It also provoked a half-century of bitter debate about values, behaviour, and social policy. Within a generation, fierce denunciations of destruction and abuse by colonisers of all stripes punctuated a political struggle to define the rules and institutions that ought to govern relations between European and Amerindian, Christian and pagan, Spanish American coloniser and European monarch. We need not review here the details of these debates.¹⁹ For our purposes, three points suffice. First, although Bartolomé de las Casas contributed the most thunderous and widely known polemics to the debate, the controversy represented far more than individual statement or dissent. The debate both preceded and outlasted Las Casas. The Dominicans of Hispaniola launched it in 1511, against the backdrop of Amerindian death and disaster, when Antonio de Montesinos excoriated the evils of the colonisers who had gathered for Sunday worship. 'This voice declares that you are in moral sin and live and die therein by reason of the cruelty and tyranny that you practice... Tell me, by what right or justice do you hold these Indians in

¹⁸ For the slaving and war zones mentioned, see Robert C. Padden, 'Cultural Change and Military Resistance in Araucanian Chile, 1550-1730', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 13 (Spring, 1957), pp. 103-21; Philip Wayne Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver* (Berkeley, 1952); Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America. A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (Berkeley, 1973); John Hemming, *Red Gold: The Conquest of the Brazilian Indians, 1500-1760* (Cambridge, Ma., 1978); cf. Daitsman, 'Dynamic of Conquest'; Alvaro Jara, *Guerra y sociedad en Chile* (Santiago de Chile, 1971); Philip Wayne Powell, *Mexico's Miguel Caldera: The Taming of America's First Frontier (1548-1597)* (Tucson, 1977); Richard Morse (ed.), *The Bandeirantes: The Historical Role of the Brazilian Pathfinders* (New York, 1965). On Paraguay, the key introduction remains Elman R. Service, *Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay* (Ann Arbor, 1954); for a more long-term view encompassing a wider geographical area, see Juan Carlos Garavaglia, *Mercado interno y economía colonial (Tres siglos de historia de la yerba mate)* (Mexico City, 1983); Bartomeu Meliá, 'Las reducciones jesuíticas del paraguay: un espacio para una utopía colonial', *Estudios Paraguayos*, vol. 6 (1978), pp. 157-63. For an introduction to regions where missionary power eclipsed or at least rivalled that of more secular colonising interests, see (aside from the Hemming and Meliá works already cited in this note) Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Missionaries, Miners and Indians: Spanish Contact with the Yaqui Nation of Northwestern New Spain, 1533-1820* (Tucson, 1981); Krippner-Martínez, 'Images of Conquest'.

¹⁹ For an introduction to debates and early post-conquest intellectual history, see Hanke, *Spanish Struggle*; Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*.

such cruel and horrible slavery?’²⁰ For the Crown, denunciations of conquistador wickedness buttressed with moral legitimacy the fear that self-serving and independent-minded conquistadors would – if granted too much slack – end up undermining royal interests, revenues, and political control. A half-century after Montesinos’s sermon, the Crown continued to debate whether to allow inheritance of the *encomienda* allotments in perpetuity, or to limit the *encomiendas* to a one-generation reward for service.

Second, out of these debates emerged two of History’s most lasting images of conquest: the notion that the Spaniards were exceptionally avaricious, irresponsible and violent in their conquest exploits and obsessions, and the related notion that the Conquest heaped upon the Indians a traumatic devastation of almost unthinkable proportions. These images, abundant in the polemics of Las Casas and readily circulated by Spain’s imperial rivals in Europe, constitute the core of the so-called Black Legend.

Third, the political storms that shook the Hispanic world did not proceed in isolation from native American initiatives and responses to colonialism. Until this point in the discussion, we have artificially suspended the doubled vision necessary to achieve a wider comprehension of the conquest era. We have done so for the sake of argument. To establish the multiplicity of conquest paradigms and factions, and the ways multiplicity fed into political intrigue, ambition, and debate over social policy and moral values, we have examined conquest from the standpoint of the conquistadors. We have argued, in effect, that a history nobly detached from political sensibility and controversy is a history that fails to engage and comprehend the priorities, passions, and ideas of the conquistadors themselves. The restricted focus is heuristically useful, but only as a temporary device. It omits a huge and under-appreciated dimension of conquest politics and paradigms. As matters turned out, the conquistador utopias ran up against indigenous initiatives and challenges to power. These responses entangled the would-be utopias and ambitions of Spaniards in a wider and more unpredictable struggle. Indigenous responses unravelled European expectations, they kept political firestorms going or ignited new ones, they added further policy issues to the agenda of colonial debate and decision. In short, Amerindian peoples fully engaged the struggle to define what the conquest meant, and what it might yet turn out to mean.

A full examination of this indigenous engagement lies beyond the scope

²⁰ The quote is from the account given by Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias* (3 vols., Mexico City, 1951), vol. II; pp. 441–42, as cited and translated by Benjamin Keen, ed., *Latin American Civilization: History and Society, 1492 to the Present* (4th ed., Boulder, 1986), p. 63.

of this essay. (I have, in any event, written extensively on the topic elsewhere.) But we may illustrate briefly by turning to each of the colonisers' main paradigms of conquest. The utopia of riches dazzled many a conquistador mind. After the initial plunder of indigenous treasures in Mexico and Peru, riches derived mainly from the exploitations of silver mines, from the establishment of commercial enterprises linked to cities and mining camps or to the international export–import trades, and from access to Indian labour and tribute that subsidised entrepreneurial schemes. In each of these arenas, the conquistadors sought maximum advantage and freedom of action. But they discovered, to their dismay, that they would have to compete with Indians. The fabulous mines of Potosí (Bolivia) set off a silver rush after 1545. For many a Spaniard, the utopia of riches seemed imminent, and colonisers indeed harvested enormous wealth. But they also found themselves locked in competition with Indian labourers and entrepreneurs who appropriated ores in the mines, controlled the smelting process, set up their own ore markets, labour customs, and ancillary enterprises, and diverted a substantial share of Potosí's riches into Indian hands. When, in the 1560s, this unanticipated competition coincided with a drop in ore quality, coloniser and Crown revenues from Potosí faltered. In only 20 years, the silver utopia had given way to disappointment, policy debate, and reform proposals. Not until Viceroy Francisco de Toledo promoted a major reorganisation of property rights, labour policy, and refining technology in the 1570s would Spaniards revitalise their control and send registered silver production soaring once more. Even so, the reorganisation did not end competition with Indians over the appropriation of crude ore and refined silver. The struggle continued on altered terms, and a sense of disappointment and reformism would reemerge during the course of the next century.²¹

Similar stories could be told of the other pathways to riches. Whether the enterprise was coca leaf shipped from the eastern Andean jungle slopes up to the highland mines, or silk, wheat, and animals funnelled to regional markets in Antequera (Oaxaca) and Puebla, or textile workshops and putting-out networks scattered across the Mexican and Andean highlands: in each of these arenas of commercial investment, Spanish *encomenderos* and other entrepreneurs sought to control products that would provide a lucrative connection to emerging urban and mining markets. In each instance, however, Indians – communities as well as individuals, commoners and social climbers as well as established ethnic lords and notables

²¹ See Stern, 'Feudalism, capitalism, and the World-System', pp. 848–58, for a succinct discussion of Potosí, comparison with other colonial mining centres, and orientation to the vast scholarly bibliography.

– actively competed with Europeans for advantage in the post-conquest commercial economy. Even on the question of the early *encomenderos*' tribute and labour quotas, the fragile politics of alliance, mediation, and negotiation sometimes yielded ambiguous results. It was not always clear, especially in the Andes, who retained the lion's share of the wealth: the *encomenderos*, the ethnic peoples assigned to them, or the chiefs who acted as brokers between Europeans and Andeans. In short, in the varied pathways to conquistador riches, Amerindians refused to consent meekly to the role of moulded and exploited labour force in a Hispanised commercial economy. The conquistadors competed against Indians as well as against themselves.²²

Let us not exaggerate. A minority of conquistadors amassed fabulous fortunes, largely at Indian expense, and a still larger group came to enjoy impressive prosperity, also at Indian expense. Exploitation, violence, and humiliation were commonplace. Nonetheless, during at least one generation of post-conquest historical time, the world of wealth would be populated not only by clusters of conquistadors who had struck it rich, but also by clusters of Indian communities and individuals who had launched their own initiatives. The pattern was not entirely destroyed in a single generation. As late as 1588, Don Diego Caqui, son of a Tacna lord (*kuraka*), owned four vineyards and a winery, a llama train to transport wine to Potosí, and two frigates and a small sloop for commerce between Tacna, Arica, and Callao (Lima's port). His was not an isolated example, but a manifestation of broader social pattern and initiative.²³ A large part of the story of sixteenth-century social relations and politics lies in the transition from utopias to struggles by Spaniards to roll back or suppress the competition: to undercut the ability of Indians to out-organise, circumvent, or undersell Spaniards; to institutionalise coloniser monopolies and advantages that made the commercial arena and its riches a more purely Hispanic affair. These efforts placed new policy items on the

²² Examples of Indian competition involving the commodities mentioned in this paragraph may be found in Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 38–39; Karen Spalding, *De indio a campesino: cambios en la estructura social del Perú colonial* (Lima, 1974), pp. 31–60; Fernando Silva Santisteban, *Los obrajes en el Virreinato del Perú* (Lima, 1964); María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi, 'Economía y vida de los españoles en la Mixteca Alta: 1519–1720' (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Iberoamericana [Mexico], 1985); Woodrow Borah, *Silk Raising in Colonial Mexico* (Berkeley, 1943); Simpson, *The Encomienda*, pp. 137–9. On the ways the early politics of alliance might affect early tribute and labour quotas, see Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 40–44. For a long-term view of indigenous participation in markets in the Andes, see Olivia Harris et al. (eds.), *La participación indígena en los mercados surandinos: Estrategias y reproducción social, siglos XVI a XX* (La Paz, 1987).

²³ See Franklin Pease G. Y., *Del Tawantinsuyu a la historia del Perú* (Lima, 1978), pp. 198–99 (n. 8); cf. John V. Murra, 'Aymara lords and their European agents at Potosí', *Nova Americana*, vol. 1 (Torino, 1978), pp. 231–33; Harris et al., *La participación*.

political agenda: did Europeans have the right to impose on Indians socially massive and disruptive labour drafts in the service of Potosí or other silver mines? could they declare a Spanish monopoly in wheat trading? did they have the right to control the monies Indians deposited in community cash boxes fattened by sales of silk or textiles? what regulations, rights, or limitations ought to accompany such policies? Each question signalled the unravelling of utopias by Amerindians. Each signified political struggle to define the contours of social control and legitimacy in a colonial order.²⁴

The utopia of social precedence also met with Amerindian initiatives and entanglements. The Mexican and Peruvian conquest expeditions themselves had required a complex game of political alliance and manoeuvre that drew Spaniards and specific Amerindian peoples, armies, and lords into a collaboration against the indigenous rulers of pre-Columbian empires. These were fragile collaborations of ambivalence and ambiguity: the partners shared neither a cultural framework in common, nor a similar medium-term vision of social rank and precedence among the new partners; objectives differed, and temporary considerations of force, necessity, and opportunism loomed large in the calculus of alliance. As conquistadors spread out from imperial capitals into regional provinces and hinterlands, aspiring colonisers and local Amerindian groups constructed similarly complex histories of alliance, conflict, and mutual entanglement.²⁵

The entanglements and ambiguities failed to vanish immediately after the initial conquest expeditions. Amerindian peoples simply refused to concede a Spanish monopoly on access to high authority, social reward, and policy debate. The Tlaxcalans of Mexico, and the Huancas of Peru, for example, sought to capitalise on their service in the conquest expeditions by securing Crown approval of formal titles of nobility, reward, and

²⁴ The policy questions that derived from indigenous competition in commodity markets may be gleaned from the sources cited in notes 21–22; on community cash boxes, see Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 98, 100; Vilma Cevallo López, 'La caja de censos de indios y su aporte a la economía colonial, 1565–1613', *Revista del Archivo Nacional del Perú*, vol. 26, entrega 2 (Lima, 1962), pp. 269–352. For a long-term view of the practical mechanisms developed by colonial hacendados to battle smallholder competition, see Brooke Larson, 'Rural Rhythms of Class Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Cochabamba', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 60, no. 3 (Aug. 1980), pp. 407–30; cf. Larson, *Colonialism and Agrarian Transformation in Bolivia: Cochabamba, 1550–1900* (Princeton, 1988); Enrique Florescano, *Precios del maíz y crisis agrícolas en México (1708–1810)* (Mexico City, 1969).

²⁵ On the politics of alliance at the imperial level, see Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera*; Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*. For the sub-imperial level, see Steve J. Stern, 'The Rise and Fall of Indian–White Alliances: A Regional View of "Conquest" History', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 61 (Aug. 1981), pp. 461–91; cf. Krippner-Martínez, 'Politics of Conquest', and the sources cited in note 26 below.

exemption that might grant them and their lords a privileged place in the new order. This was but one manifestation of a larger entry by indigenous peoples as 'players' in the labyrinthine game of policy debate, social alliance, legal manoeuvre, and offstage intrigue that comprised the world of Spanish colonial politics. In the 1560s, while Philip II wavered amidst continuing debate about perpetuating the *encomienda* by granting it inheritable status, native Andean peoples and chiefs served formal and informal notice that they would not leave the world of high policy and adjudication to the Spanish. A network of Andean lords, aware that financial service to the Crown greased the wheels of Spanish decision-making and negotiation, sent a spectacular offer to Philip II. They accompanied their policy proposal with a bribe: an offer to increase by 100,000 ducats *any* amount volunteered by the *encomenderos*. When the Crown sent a commission to investigate the merits of the *encomienda* issue, Indians gathered to participate in a travelling debate between Juan Polo de Ondegardo, an important jurist who supported perpetuity of the *encomienda*, and Domingo de Santo Tomás, a prominent bishop, Indian ally, and critic of the *encomenderos*. Santo Tomás and the Indian audiences who turned out to meet the touring officials promoted the vision of a royal colony run not by destructive *encomenderos* and their heirs, but by councils of native Andean chiefs in alliance with selected priest-allies and Crown agents. To conduct policy debates before Indian audiences who would judge merits and choose sides, to have the debate focus on terminating the fundamental institution of early conquest stature and enrichment, to see Indians mobilising countervailing channels of appeal, alliance, and financial payoff within State and Church: this struggle was far removed from the dream of indisputable glory and social precedence that had fired the imagination of the conquistadors.²⁶

Amerindian initiatives and responses also punctured the utopia of Christian conversion. Indigenous peoples did not necessarily prove unresponsive to the ritual and teaching activities, devotional gatherings, and church construction work interpreted as Christianisation processes by priests and missionaries. Even if we cast aside vexing assumptions that natives immediately equated Spanish conquistadors or divinities with indigenous deities, or that they were mesmerised by horses also considered gods, we may encounter strong historical reasons for this receptivity. The military victories of Spaniards might signify the strength and powers of victorious gods too formidable to be ignored, and at least temporarily more powerful than indigenous gods. Conquest disasters might signify a

²⁶ See Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* (2nd ed., Stanford, 1967); Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *La destrucción del imperio de los incas* (Lima, 1973); Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 48–9; Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*, pp. 385–90.

world-change or cataclysm, the beginning of a new cycle of human relations with deities, perhaps accompanied by a return of deities consigned to the margins of the cycle whose time would shortly expire. The arrival of missionaries in a region whose conquistadors had first conducted brutal military campaigns and imposed harsh economic and sexual demands might signify a political opening, a space for Indian–white alliance and intra-Hispanic division that offered relief. In one way or another, all of these varied motivations testified to a desire to understand and tap the social relations, knowledge, and powers associated with Spanish deities and their brokers. (‘Deities’ is a more apt term than ‘deity’, since the Christian pantheon of ancestors, spirits, and entities with supernatural attributes or powers included not only God, but Jesus, the Holy Ghost, and the various saints. And this listing does not even include such complex matters as the interpretation of the Devil or of sacred symbols such as the Cross, the Bible, baptismal waters, or blood-wine for Mass.)

This receptivity, however, was not necessarily Christianisation as the priests and missionaries understood it. To placate or obligate powerful Spanish deities, to gain access to the specialised knowledge and powers of Spanish priests and missionaries, to develop a tolerable or even healthy relationship with the deities and spiritual brokers of the Spanish world: these desires to incorporate and reappropriate Hispanic supernatural power, knowledge, and social relations did not necessarily imply abandonment of the ritual devotions, social obligations, and powers associated with the world of indigenous deities. From indigenous vantage points, Christianisation implied not the substitution of one religious pantheon or framework by another, but a selective incorporation and redeployment of Christianity within a framework of indigenous understandings. Nor did Indian Catholicism necessarily imply unthinking devotion, an absence of continuous rethinking and innovation justified by dutiful faith.²⁷

²⁷ On indigenous receptivity to Christianity within a context of selective incorporation and redeployment, the following works offer illuminating analysis, and further bibliographical orientation: Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*; Sabine MacCormack, ‘*Pachacuti*: Miracles, Punishments, and Last Judgment: Visionary Past and Prophetic Future in Early Colonial Peru’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 4 (Oct. 1988), pp. 960–1006; Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson, 1989). Cf. Susan E. Ramírez (ed.), *Indian-Religious Relations in Colonial Spanish America* (Syracuse, 1989); Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, 1984); Serge Gruzinski, *La colonisation de l’imaginaire: Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1988). On indigenous intellectuals, a topic that includes but spills beyond that of Christianity, see Rolena Adorno, *Guaman Poma: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* (Austin, 1986); Adorno (ed.), *From Oral to Written Expression: Native Andean Chronicles of the Early Colonial Period* (Syracuse, 1982), esp.

When indigenous redeployment and rethinking came to the fore, utopias vanished. Priests and missionaries discovered not only that they contended with Spanish rivals who competed for political clout, and whose short-term interest in plunder alienated Indian souls. They also discovered that even cooperative natives strained the image of spiritual innocents guided down the path of salvation. In Yucatán, the power of the early Franciscan missionaries, bent on moulding the Maya into willing beneficiaries of Christian persuasion, eclipsed that of Spanish explorers and settlers moved by more worldly drives. Utopia seemed within reach, Maya students seemed responsive to the Franciscan style of persuasion by self-abnegation and humility. Then, in 1562, it all turned into a delusion. The Franciscans discovered that the Maya, even the most Christianised schoolmasters on whom the missionaries had lavished their greatest efforts, secretly practised old idolatries, even human sacrifice, in their communities. The missionaries exploded in rage, and the fury of their violence shocked other Franciscans as well as more secular colonisers. In Huamanga, Peru, where colonisers had established an uneasy but workable pattern of alliance and collaboration with indigenous ethnic groups, a deepening native disillusion burst forth in an anti-Christian millenarian movement. Taki Onqoy, the 'dancing sickness', preached that earlier Indian-Spanish collaboration had been a mistake whose time had passed, that the weakened Andean huacas (deities) had now regained their strength, that the coming cataclysm would cleanse the Andean world of Hispanic and Christian corruptions. Both scandals erupted in the 1560s, only about a quarter-century after colonisers and priests first established themselves in the two regions. Both scandals brought new policy items to the agenda of colonial Hispanic politics. What measures of violence and punishment could the extirpators of idolatry legitimately impose upon Indian pagans who had betrayed their erstwhile Christianisation? Both scandals made and broke political careers. What institutional punishment or humiliation ought discipline the violent fury and arrogance of an extirpator such as Diego de Landa? What institutional favour or placement ought to reward an extirpator such as Cristóbal de Albornoz?²⁸

The scandals of Yucatán and Huamanga were merely among the most dramatic instances of Amerindian disruption of Spanish expectations. A wider disenchantment set in and rendered naive earlier expectations that

the essay by Frank Salomon; see also Nancy M. Farriss, 'Remembering the Future, Anticipating the Past: History, Time, and Cosmology among the Maya of Yucatan', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 29 (1987), pp. 566-93; Susan Schroeder, *Chimalpahin and the Kingdoms of Chalco* (Tucson, 1991).

²⁸ See Clendinnen, 'Disciplining the Indians'; Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*; Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 51-70.

indigenous Christian conversion would displace commitments to pagan rituals, obligations, ideas, and social relations that Spaniards viewed as a mix of superstition and Devil's work. The Indians' version of Christ and saints did not necessarily follow the trajectory envisioned by their self-styled teachers and guardians. The disenchantment reconfigured the politics of Church careers and evangelisation. What methods of persuasion and coercion, reward and punishment, interrogation and investigation, defined the contours of religious legitimacy in colonial contexts? When Christianisation turned out to imply an unending dialectic of conversion and extirpation, which pagan practices could be tolerated as harmless folk superstition, which should be aggressively pursued as blasphemous subversion?²⁹

Even this rather brief examination of native American responses and initiatives makes salient one of the chief deficiencies of the so-called Black Legend. The problem is not the accusation of Spanish exploitation and violence against Amerindians: there was no shortage of either, the colonisers did indeed construct an engine of social exploitation whose plundering could reach brutal extremes. Nor is the problem merely one of simplification or anti-Hispanic prejudice, although it is true that Black Legend denunciations may skip lightly over the more nuanced and contradictory features of the colonisers and their social policies and institutions, and may slide into a prejudice that ignores an equally brutal history of racial violence and exploitation by other European colonisers. The main problem is that the entire Black Legend debate – the dialectic of denunciation of destructive exploitation and abuse on the one side, the celebration of paternalist protectionism and internal Hispanic debate on the other – reduces the Conquest to a story of European villains and heroes. Amerindians recede into the background of Black Legend history. They become the mere objects upon which evil is enacted, heroism

²⁹ On disenchantment, and the continuing potential for extirpation of idolatry campaigns, see (aside from the sources cited in note 27) Sabine MacCormack, "'The Heart Has Its Reasons': Predicaments of Missionary Christianity in Early Colonial Peru', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 67 (1985), pp. 443–66; Pierre Duviols, *La lutte contre les religions autochtones dans le Pérou colonial (L'extirpation de l'idolâtrie entre 1532 et 1660)* (Lima, 1971). For an important argument that continuing 'paganisms' might encourage not only resignation or outrage, but opportunism – a Church careerism founded on 'discoveries' of idolatry designed to win reward or to counter charges of abuse – see Antonio Acosta, 'Los doctrineros y la extirpación de la religión indígena en el arzobispado de Lima, 1600–1620', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, vol. 19 (1982), pp. 69–109; Acosta, 'La extirpación de las idolatrías en el Perú. Origen y desarrollo de las campañas: a propósito de *Cultura Andina y represión* de Pierre Duviols', *Revista Andina*, vol. 5, no. 1 (July 1987), pp. 171–95; Henrique Urbano, 'Cristóbal de Molina, el Cusqueño. Negocios eclesiásticos, mesianismo y Taqui Onqoy', *Revista Andina*, vol. 8, no. 1 (July 1990), pp. 265–83, esp. 268–9.

exerted. Their only role is to accept or rebel against that which is done to them.³⁰ This one-dimensionality simplifies the process of moral denunciation and defence. But it evades the historical fact that in myriad ways Amerindians engaged – assisted, resisted, appropriated, subverted, redeployed – European colonial projects, utopias, and relationships. This history of engagement made it impossible for Europeans to act simply as moral villains and heroes, free to shape a blank social slate in accord with inner will, impulse, or conscience. The Europeans acted as seekers of wealth, stature, and souls caught up in complex struggles for control with indigenous peoples and amongst themselves.

We have argued that there was no single meaning of conquest among its promoters, but multiple paradigms and fantasies. The Spanish dynamics of conquest entailed a political struggle to define the terms of coexistence, collaboration, and contradiction among contending visions of utopia and contending clusters of colonisers. When we expand our vision to include the vast array of indigenous responses and initiatives, we begin to appreciate the enormous dimensions of a political struggle to define the spoils and meaning of conquest. The multiple frameworks and internal contentiousness of the colonisers, their problematic relationship to the Crown and royal authorities, the activism, innovations, and resistance of colonised peoples charting their own agendas and pursuing their own interior conflicts, the unexpected encounters with rampant disease and death: all injected enormous fluidity and uncertainty into the conquest era. All raised hotly disputed questions of political authority and jurisdiction, social policy and values. For both Amerindians and Europeans, moreover, the questions arose in an unprecedented intellectual context: the unfolding discovery, amidst struggles over wealth, social rank, and religious imperative, of altogether unknown ‘worlds’ inhabited by peoples who had once pursued separate historical and cultural trajectories. On each side as well as across the newly joined Amerindian and European worlds, the times had unleashed not only struggles for power, but struggles for understanding and cultural self-definition. The political struggle to define

³⁰ This syndrome helps to explain why early historical work by *indigenistas* focused on the documentation of open rebellion by Indian heroes and dissidents, including ‘precursors’ of independence. For historiographical orientation, see Steve J. Stern, ‘The Age of Andean Insurrection, 1742–1782: A Reappraisal’, in Stern (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries* (Madison, 1987), pp. 36–38. One intellectual effect of the Black Legend was to restrict the range or variety of Indian responses to the problem of conquest: the ‘pro-Indian’ stance demonstrated the severe brutality of colonial exploitation, and the fact that Indians did not simply accept abuse but sometimes exploded in revolt. For a striking example, see the narrative structure and climactic closing sentence in a fine article by John H. Rowe: ‘The Incas Under Spanish Colonial Institutions’, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 37, no. 2 (May 1957), pp. 155–99.

the spoils and meaning of conquest was also a cultural struggle to define and interpret the values and social order that would prevail in a new era.³¹

For the sake of space, and because this essay focuses primarily on the first generation or two of post-conquest history, we have not analysed the additional impact of Africans and mestizos. In some regions, however, Africans or mestizos injected new aspirations, struggles, and quests for understanding into the early colonial equation. To analyse the social relations and quests of either group would further underscore the fluidity and uncertainty, at once cultural and political, of the conquest era.³²

The profound struggle over what the Spanish Conquest meant, and what it might yet turn out to mean, calls into question the use of 'culture' as a concept that might elevate the history of 1492 beyond vexed political discussion. Superficially, 'culture' offers an inviting pathway to a more detached and reflective discussion, an escape from polarising language and controversy. If one speaks of culture as the 'values of the day', one may rise above vulgar finger-pointing, moralising and denunciation of individual carriers of the culture. After all, very few individuals stand above the values of their era. Denunciations of individuals for failing to rise above their times is an exercise that misses the point; it simply condemns choice targets for lacking the trans-historical vision that escapes most of us. Similarly, if one frames the conquest as a problem of 'culture contact' – first-time interactions among the carriers of distinct cultural frameworks – we may conclude that the main tragedy lay not so much in sordid questions of power and exploitation, but in culturally

³¹ The sense of cultural and intellectual struggle comes through quite strongly, on the indigenous side, in Adorno, *Guaman Poma*, and Frank Salomon, 'Chronicles of the Impossible: Notes on Three Peruvian Indigenous Historians', in Adorno, *From Oral to Written Expression*, pp. 9–39; cf. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*; Farriss, 'Remembering the Future'. On the Spanish side, see the sources cited in note 19 above, and note the splendid evocation in Aridjis, *1492*, of a fifteenth-century Spain that was itself passing through a period of interior fluidity and struggle, a crisis at once political and cultural, as it approached the epic events of 1492.

³² On Africans in America in early colonial contexts that put a premium on cultural fluidity and creativity, see the brilliantly suggestive theoretical essay by Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia, 1976); cf. the specific incidents recounted in Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835* (New York, 1985), pp. 48–9; Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford, 1974), p. 188; and the general vision that emerges in Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge, Ma., 1976), and the works of Richard Price, esp. *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, 1983); *Alabi's World* (Baltimore, 1990). On mestizos and political conspiracy in Peru, see Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*, pp. 342–43. Unfortunately for our purposes, Robert Douglas Cope's splendid study of racially mixed plebeians focuses mainly on the mid-colonial period: 'The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660–1720' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1987).

preordained failures of understanding. The agents of each culture carried in their heads the 'scripts' they had inherited from a pre-contact culture history. The scripts framed the meaning of contact events differently, they destined coloniser and colonised to act on cultural imperatives incomprehensible to the other, they imprisoned each side's vision in a house of cultural mirrors and refracted self-projections. When cultural projection of inherited values and expectations makes it impossible to know and reach genuine accord with the 'other', a critical analysis of power relations is an exercise that misses the point; it simply condemns choice targets for lacking the cross-cultural wisdom that eludes most of us – even after several centuries of added experience with ethnographic and racial encounter on a smaller, more unified global stage.³³

There are important truths in these claims, and they warn against facile languages of blame and celebration. But pressed too far, they evade an equally compelling truth: that the year 1492 launched an era of tremendous cultural fluidity, a struggle not simply to enact inherited cultural scripts and values of the day, but to determine what the values and social arrangements of the day would turn out to be. Amerindians and Europeans, whether they saw the conquest as cataclysm or utopia or both, understood that something amazing and wondrous had happened, and that it would require self-conscious efforts to chart the cultural values, social and economic policies, and political and religious arrangements that would prevail in a new cycle of human history. The struggle to chart a new trajectory was at once political and cultural. It embroiled Amerindians and Europeans in interior conflicts with the self and with rival factions of their own cultures, as well as more exterior struggles with foreign peoples.

In short, if the year 1492 launched an era of 'discovery' in the Americas, the object of discovery was both the self and the other. The conquest confrontations promoted not acts of being, but acts of becoming: politically and religiously charged acts of self-discovery and self-definition. The discoveries were not always pleasant. Thousands of Huamanga natives proved receptive to a Taki Onqoy message that proclaimed that Indian collaborators with the Hispanic world had

³³ Even compelling and sophisticated treatments of conquest and culture contact themes sometimes slide towards a discourse of cultural determinism emphasising fundamental inabilities to comprehend the other, or to respond effectively to fluid developments, or to step outside cultural understandings that are homogeneous to the group rather than elements within a more plural range of possible understandings and responses within the group. See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (New York, 1984), particularly his depiction of Aztec culture; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985); cf. Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, from whom I have borrowed the house of mirrors metaphor (p. 127); Farriss, 'Remembering the Future'.

neglected and angered the Andean gods, who would now destroy natives who did not cleanse their ways. Imperial Incas and Aztecs discovered that their legitimacy among sub-imperial peoples crumbled – more readily than Incas might have expected, as readily as Aztecs might have feared. More than one first-generation encomendero, as he approached death, concluded retrospectively that he had so exceeded even evolving Spanish standards of legitimate colonial conduct that he would have to authorise a partial restitution of damages to Indians to prepare for the afterlife. Others discovered they could walk a more tranquil path to colonial arrogance and cynicism: the author of the ‘Requirement’, a document designed to defuse Montesinos’s early critique by appealing to Indians to accept the peaceful preaching of Christianity or else suffer ‘just war’ and enslavement, chuckled at tales of the document’s absurdity. Conquistadors, when they bothered to proclaim the theological message in Spanish, did not exactly wait to find an effective translator before proceeding on with war and slaving. They thought the matter something of an inside joke. Even missionaries ran up against sometimes unpleasant self-discoveries. More than one discovered that when Indian converts failed to respond to teaching by persuasion, he was not above imposition by authority and even violence. Other priests discovered their pragmatic indifference: Indian redeployments of Christianity and discreet continuance of paganisms did not end up mattering so much after all, so long as appearances were maintained and a colonial living sustained.³⁴

The drama unleashed in 1492 was precisely the drama of a struggle that merged politics and culture: problems of power and legitimization, exploitation and lifeways, among plural peoples brought together on a single world stage. To detach the analysis or commemoration of 1492 from political sensibilities is to isolate it from the central issues of the times. To neutralise controversy by appealing to cultural legacies and values that prescribed each side’s behaviour is to miss the sense of fluidity and wonder, struggle and self-discovery, that demanded of everyone a reevaluation of world view and social ethos, cultural expectation and relations with the sacred. The quest for noble detachment pursues a profoundly misleading mirage. It not only diverts us from the fundamental preoccupations and conflicts of the conquest era, it also evades the as yet unresolved legacy of 1492 for our own times. After all, Latin America is

³⁴ For the examples cited, see Stern, *Peru’s Indian Peoples*, pp. 51–70, 46, 98; Stern, ‘Rise and Fall’; Guillermo Lohmann Villena, ‘La restitución por conquistadores y encomenderos: un aspecto de la incidencia lascasiana en el Perú’, *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, vol. 23 (1966), pp. 21–89; Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general...*, as cited in Keen (ed.), *Latin American Civilization*, pp. 64–65; Clendinnen, ‘Disciplining the Indians’; Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, pp. 49–60; cf. Acosta, ‘Los doctrineros’; Acosta, ‘La extirpación’; McCormack, ‘The Heart Has Its Reasons’.

a part of the world whose interplays of race and class, gender and honour, religion and politics still bear witness to the enduring and sometimes painful imprint of colonial times.³⁵ And for the Americas as a whole, the problem of establishing legitimate relationships and even unity among peoples divided by a history that blends cultural and racial diversity into relationships of unequal power, resurfaces time and time again. The refusal of the issue to fade away reminds us that 1492 marks the symbolic dawn of a historical day whose sun has not yet set.

From History to Historiography: The Scholarship of Conquest

My reflections on historiography will be exceedingly brief. The brevity in part defers to limitations of space; in part acknowledges that politically sensitive review of the historiography of conquest is available elsewhere;³⁶ in part derives from a sense that history and historiography are in any event not rigidly separated domains of enquiry and analysis. People think, speak, and write historical analysis of the immediate and recent events of their times. In this sense, 'historiography' is an inescapable part of lived 'history'. Conversely, a scholar's vision of distant history establishes a dialogue, implicit or explicit, with immediate and recent historiography. In this sense, our extensive discussion of paradigms of conquest in 'history' has already laid a groundwork for evaluating 'historiography'.

Two succinct observations are in order. First, although a legacy of political controversy left a profound imprint on the twentieth-century literature of conquest, the imprint did not necessarily hinder the advance of knowledge and interpretation. On the contrary, the major movements of twentieth-century historiography emerged in relation to political sensibilities. Disquiet over Black Legend caricatures inspired an array of revisionist works that yielded a more complex and subtle understanding of Spanish colonial institutions and policies, culture and ideas.³⁷

³⁵ For a classic introduction to this theme, see Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America* (New York, 1970); cf. Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Historia contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid, 1969); Steve J. Stern, 'Latin America's Colonial History: Invitation to an Agenda', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Winter, 1985), pp. 3–16, esp. 3, 13–14.

³⁶ See Benjamin Keen's superb 'Main Currents in United States Writings on Colonial Spanish America, 1884–1984', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 65, no. 4 (Nov. 1985), pp. 657–82, which may be supplemented by William B. Taylor, 'Between Global Process and Local Knowledge: An Inquiry into Early Latin American Social History, 1500–1900', in Olivier Zunz (ed.), *Reliving the Past: The Worlds of Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 115–90; Stern, 'Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System', esp. pp. 832–45.

³⁷ This development is associated especially with writings from the late 1920s through the 1950s, and is ably reviewed and critiqued in Keen, 'Main Currents', pp. 664–9. Aside from the works by Hanke, Lanning, Leonard, Simpson, and Tannenbaum discussed (among others) by Keen, one should also note the subtle essays by Richard

Continuing controversy over colonial destruction of Amerindian peoples provoked closer scrutiny of the many dimensions of conquest devastation: the population collapse linked to waves of epidemic disease and mortality; the exploitation and pressures that induced a powerful deterioration of indigenous societies and economies, and greater vulnerability to disease; the ecological degradations that transformed natural and agricultural environments once capable of sustaining large human populations; the 'destruction' of the internal indigenous relations of economy, authority, and culture that had enabled native peoples to flourish in the society and politics of pre-Conquest times.³⁸ Finally, dissatisfaction that the framework of Black Legend debate consigned Indians to a marginal status in the making of early colonial history inspired efforts to write a history that went beyond the story of European villains, heroes, and microbes acting upon devastated and pliable Indians.³⁹ A new history saw in early colonial Indians something more than victimised and ineffectually protected objects of trauma and paternalism. It sought to explore Indian agency, adaptations, and responses within a colonial framework of oppressive power and mortality. It sought to unearth the impact of

Morse: 'Toward a Theory of Spanish American Government', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1954), pp. 71–93; and 'The Heritage of Latin America'.

³⁸ Sophisticated scrutiny of devastation and burden took off in the 1950s and 1960s, and remained influential writing well into the 1970s and 1980s. For major 'early' works on the specific topics mentioned, see esp. Woodrow Borah and Sherburne F. Cook, *The Aboriginal Population of Central Mexico on the Eve of Spanish Conquest* (Berkeley, 1963), in many ways the culminating statement of a cycle of 'Berkeley School' research that crystallised in the 1950s; Rowe, 'The Incas'; José Miranda, *El tributo indígena en la Nueva España durante el siglo XVI* (Mexico City, 1952); Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford, 1964); MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*; Lesley B. Simpson, *Exploitation of Land in Central Mexico in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1952); Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*; Nathan Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished: The Spanish Conquest of Peru through Indian Eyes, 1530–1570* (orig. 1971; New York, 1977). Cf. the discussion in Keen, 'Main Currents', pp. 669–72. The arrival of the quincentennial has given a new lease of life to this perspective. See, e.g., Sale, *Conquest of Paradise*.

³⁹ This is in part, of course, an autobiographical statement about the origins of the questions that inspired my own research for *Peru's Indian Peoples*. But my own path to a history that explored agency was part of a larger trend in historiography on Latin America and other world areas. Pioneering early work in this direction, for the topic of indigenous peoples and conquest, was contributed by Karen Spalding in three important articles: 'Social Climbers: Changing Patterns of Mobility among the Indians of Colonial Peru', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 4 (Nov. 1970), pp. 645–64; 'Kurakas and Commerce: A Chapter in the Evolution of Andean Society', *ibid.*, vol. 53, no. 4 (Nov. 1973), pp. 581–99; 'The Colonial Indian: Past and Future Research Perspectives', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1972), pp. 47–76. Cf. Stuart B. Schwartz, 'Indian Labor and New World Plantations: European Demands and Indian Responses in Northeastern Brazil', *American Historical Review*, vol. 83, no. 1 (Feb. 1978), pp. 43–79.

Amerindian initiative on the early colonial social order as a whole. Each of the advances in the modern historiography of conquest developed in relation to political sympathies and controversies that surrounded and energised the Conquest theme as a whole.

Second, the contributions and pitfalls of contemporary scholarship – the ‘paradigms of conquest’ in the historiographical sense – are illuminated by a heightened political sensibility. During the last several decades, a vast historiographical shift has focused attention on the indigenous experience of conquest. Three major frameworks have influenced this literature: conquest as a problem of cultural encounter between ‘others’, conquest as an avalanche of destruction and trauma, conquest as a relationship of power that received a response.

It is not that difficult, of course, to find something appreciative or critical to say about all three scholarly paradigms of conquest. At their worst, they all prove vulnerable to slashing critique. Crude formulations of the first encourage us to view the conquest as an event of crosscultural blunder and exchange, a kind of Early Modern Fulbright Exchange Program: ‘Europe sent wheat and got potatoes, America sent silver and got Christianity.’ The second may slide easily into patronising Western romanticism: ‘Pity the stooped noble savage, wrecked by Europeans [especially those dastardly Spaniards!] on the road from innocent Paradise to cruel Modernity.’ The third may reduce itself to a tale of ill-fated rebellions and heroes, a parody of a famous political chant: ‘The People, United, Rise Up to be Defeated’ (*‘El pueblo, unido, se alza para ser vencido’*). At their best, or for specific topics or geographical regions, the various scholarly paradigms of conquest may yield trenchant insights. The framework of cultural encounter marred by mutual strangeness and incomprehension seems unavoidable, for example, if one examines the history of religious conversion and conflict, and missionary utopia. The conquest as overwhelming human destruction looms especially large if one focuses on Caribbean and tropical lowland zones where disease, slaving, and brutal conditions of work and nutrition led to rapid exterminations and near-exterminations of whole peoples. The vitality of indigenous responses to colonial power becomes evident not only in the complex history of Indian–European alliance, manoeuvre, and conflict that shaped the conquests of Mexico and Peru, but in ‘frontier’ regions whose indigenous peoples mounted fierce and sometimes successful campaigns of military resistance. Not surprisingly, given the insight and pertinence of all three approaches, and the eclecticism of much historical scholarship, few of the best works embody only one of these interpretive tracks to the exclusion of the others. In practice, all three approaches find their way into single interpretations; otherwise contrasting works may

offer similar substantive treatments of specific topics such as labour, religion, or epidemiology. The contrasts are often ones of emphasis and overarching framework.⁴⁰

The critique of scholarly paradigms of indigenous experiences of conquest, therefore, ought to strive for a characterisation more subtle than simple praise of one or another insight, easy condemnation of crude versions of one or another paradigm, or convenient pretence that the three paradigms define mutually exclusive interpretive tracks. To place the politics of contending conquest paradigms and human factions at the centre of historical analysis is to discover patterns that suggest a more subtle critique of interpretations grounded in the cultural encounter and conquest trauma frameworks. The critique is necessary and important: even works that seek to explore Indian agency, adjustment, and resistance under colonial rule may succumb to a sense that in the first colonial years, devastating destruction and cultural ignorance of the other prevailed. Only after the initial trauma and bewilderment passed did indigenous peoples slowly reconstruct an effective response to the colonial situation.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Obviously, the quotes are invented parodies that attempt to capture the flavour of crude versions of one or another paradigm. The discourse of 'cultural exchange' reaches as far back as the sixteenth century (see the discussion of Juan de Matienzo in Stern, *Peru's Indian Peoples*, pp. 72–73). The romanticised vision of the stooped Indian/peasant who had suffered a great Fall not only has a long history, it also became an important element in the construction of 'national culture' in twentieth-century societies such as Mexico and Peru. See, e.g., Roger Bartra, *La jaula de la melancolía: Identidad y metamorfosis del mexicano* (Mexico City, 1987); Gonzalo Portocarrero and Patricia Oliart, *El Perú desde la escuela* (Lima, 1989). On the celebration of failed rebellions, see note 30 above.

For perceptive works sufficiently inclusive or eclectic to emphasise one or another paradigm while drawing selectively on the insights of others, see the following examples: Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, for an overarching framework of cultural encounter between strangers that incorporates a sense of power politics and indigenous response to power; Gibson, *Aztecs*, for a formal framework that emphasises exploitation and destructive pressure, yet is tempered by a sense of Indian endurance, response, and survival; Karen Spalding, *Huarochirí: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford, 1984), for a framework that emphasises a long-term view of indigenous agency and responses to power, yet interprets the early post-conquest period as one of extreme plunder and exploitation leading to collapse.

⁴¹ The continuing strength of the cultural encounter and conquest trauma frameworks for interpretation of the *early* colonial period is evident in at least three ways in works of quality and sophistication. First, pioneering works that offer us a vision of Indian agency, response, and survival in the long run may nonetheless depict the early colonial period as one of traumatic plunder and devastation. See, for example, Spalding, *Huarochirí*; William B. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages* (Stanford, 1979). Second, the turn towards a renewed emphasis on culture and language in social history has reinvigorated study of conquest and its early aftermath within a context of cultural encounter, misunderstanding, and 'dialogical frontiers'. See, for several among many potential examples, Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth* (who invokes the 'dialogical frontier' as a key concept); Gruzinski, *La colonisation*; Seminario de Historia de las Mentalidades, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia

The conquest as cultural encounter between mutually ignorant others clarifies the swirling mix of missteps, projections, fantasies, surprises, and preconceived expectations that bedevilled relations between coloniser and colonised. But taken too far, it evades the crucial dimensions of fluidity and power: the ways that conquest induced fluid struggles for cultural self-definition and redefinition on all sides; the ways that dynamics of power rather than ignorance spawned colonial tragedy and strife; the ways that uncertainty and interest induced practical 'ethnographies of the other', probings that yielded sufficient knowledge and communication to carry on with the practical issues of tribute and labour, religion and sacred ritual, markets and entrepreneurship, politics and warfare.

Similarly, the politics of contending conquest paradigms and factions opens the door to a critique of the trauma framework. To be sure, the conquest as overwhelming avalanche of destruction clarifies the scale of the disaster confronted by many indigenous peoples in the wake of European conquest. The collapsing and often diseased populations; the ruthless pressure of conquistadors bent on immediate plunder and utopia; the tearing apart of interrelated preconquest webs of rank and reciprocity, agriculture and ecology; the building of colonial societies and labour systems on foundations of economic looting and social degradation: the combined pressures could become crushing within only one or two generations, and could in some instances encourage the kind of grudging acquiescence offered by peoples who seek bare survival while reeling from nearly unthinkable disaster. Yet taken too far, the conquest as disaster paradigm evades a history of indigenous resourcefulness, manipulations, and resistance that went beyond futile gesture doomed to failure. Many Amerindian peoples remained sufficiently large, socially cohesive, economically endowed, politically engaged, and culturally independent to take colonisers down paths of conflict, frustration, disillusion and struggle the Europeans might never have imagined. Taken too far, the conquest-as-trauma model obliterates the spaces for initiative opened up by Amerindians, as individuals and as collective groups or factions,

(Mexico), *El placer de pecar y el afán de normar* (Mexico City, 1987). On new approaches to culture in historical analysis, a useful introduction is Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989). Third, works that observe effective Indian survival and response in the early colonial period sometimes emphasise regional peculiarity. That is, lesser pressure by colonisers in backwater regions, where conquest pressures did not reach the intensity associated with more mainstream regions of colonisation, help explain less than traumatic outcomes in the early colonial period, and set the stage for more intense 'second conquests' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See, e.g., Farriss, *Maya Society*.

sometimes with the active or passive complicity of European individuals or factions, sometimes in the face of a more unified coloniser opposition.

This obliteration not only tends to dehumanise Indians by reducing them to objects of abuse, exploitation, and protection by European others. It also tends, more ironically, to dehumanise the European colonisers. They become the greedy agents of a massive devastation that they promoted of their own free and short-sighted will, effectively unconstrained by any human force or moral vision. (This is the Black Legend revisited.) Or they join the Indians as marginal actors who witnessed the apocalyptic destruction wrought by uncontrolled microbial agents. (This is Providential History revisited in more secular times.)

The paradigm of conquest as a relationship of power that received a response invites research and enquiry that moves beyond dehumanisation. To capture the political firestorms, struggles for control, and human initiatives, both Amerindian and European, that shaped option and constraint not only transports Amerindians from the realm of devastated objects of destruction who arouse scorn by European exploiters, pity by European protectors of the exotic and the innocent. The framework also transports colonisers from the realm of larger-than-life historical demons from whom we can proclaim a safe moral distance. It returns the colonisers to more recognisable human dimensions as exploiters, power seekers, visionaries, and associated beneficiaries whose projects of social domination were encumbered by human contentiousness, initiative, and response from within and without. Contrary to facile cliché, to take seriously the polarising dynamics of power and struggle that generated so much moral debate and critique is to draw closer to a more 'humanised' interpretation of the conquest experience. The interpretation need not exclude appreciation of the importance of cultural strangeness, pre-conception, fantasy, and misunderstanding in the conquest era. Nor need it minimise the intensity and scale of the destructive pressures faced by indigenous peoples. The main danger is more subtle – the danger that one will forget that not all indigenous activity had as its purpose a response to colonial power, and that some responses were quite indirect. One response to power was precisely the determination to forge social and cultural spaces beyond the problem of power and response to power, spaces of expression and even joy driven by more 'endogenous' identities and aspirations.⁴²

⁴² A particularly noteworthy interpretation whose endogenous thrust reminds us not to reduce the totality of Indian aspiration to direct responses to colonial power is Marcello Carmagnani, *El regreso de los dioses. El proceso de reconstitución de la identidad étnica en Oaxaca: Siglos xvii y xviii* (Mexico City, 1988); cf. the discussion of community bonding in Farriss, *Maya Society*.

Conclusion: A Quandary Revisited

We began with a quandary that appeared to lend itself to a voluntarist solution, an individual decision to rise above the problem. The immensity of the historical transformations symbolised by 1492 forces us to acknowledge, commemorate, and define the meaning of the event. Yet the political grievances and debate that infuse commemoration of the event defy a common language of discussion. Why not choose, in accord with free will and intellect, to pursue a higher and more detached reflection, beyond political strife and contentiousness, on the meaning of 1492?

We have journeyed in this essay towards a quandary more historically anchored and intellectually intractable. The conquest expeditions launched no single paradigm of conquest – neither amongst Spaniards and Amerindian peoples considered separately, nor in the new societies they constructed in conflict and collaboration with one another and with persons of African and mixed racial descent. The expeditions launched instead an era of ferocious contentiousness and factionalism, a profound struggle to define the social rules and relationships that would prevail and win legitimacy in a ‘new world’ populated by diverse peoples. How to reconcile the plurality of human cultures and historical trajectories with the impulse to proclaim universal humanity and values, how to establish legitimate and even fruitful social relations among diverse peoples and cultural groups when those same relations are permeated by power, otherness, profiteering, and inequality: these issues carried a political, religious, and moral change for coloniser and colonised alike. The charge has not yet dissipated. We continue to grapple with the implications of human diversity even as the course of history draws peoples onto a more unified world field of human endeavour and power. The year 1492 symbolises the early modern dawn of our own day. The sun has not yet set, it is not even clear that we have made it to the mid-afternoon of historical time.

The search for a higher understanding, beyond the taint of political sensibilities, is not only illusory. It also exacts an enormous cost. Something may be gained, of course, from the stance of moral and political detachment. To disentangle reflection from the polarising discourses of grievance and power, legitimacy and critique, may facilitate the generosity of intellect and spirit that enables one to reach for an understanding of the era and its peoples on terms that go beyond the Manichaeon. And it is of course true that at its worst, a vulgar brand of intellectual politics spreads its message with a trowel, encourages a reduction of humans to caricature, of history to presentist fantasy. But the danger of crudeness does not necessarily demonstrate the wisdom or

insight of detachment or objectivism. Too determined a cleansing brings its own risks, creates its own futility. A conquest history detached from political sensibilities is a history detached from the central concerns and passions of sixteenth-century conquistadors and Amerindians. It is a history detached, too, from the great issues of our own times. If the beauty and power of history is its invitation to enter a meaningful dialogue between past and present, the risk of a nobly detached history of the conquest era is that it become self-defeating. It drains the life force out of *both* ends of the dialogue, and gives way to competing accounts and mythologies.

The solution to the quandary is to welcome it. That 1492 demands discussion yet defies a common language of discussion, provokes thinking and research. It may even provoke understanding. To welcome the quandary is to call into question the dubious assumption that tranquil detachment from society's polemical fire is the precondition of deep historical and philosophical reflection. To welcome the quandary is not only to remain true to the human agents of the conquest era. It is also to recognise, with relief, that we have not yet grown cynically indifferent to the painful convergences of power, ethnic rank and multicultural encounter in our own time.