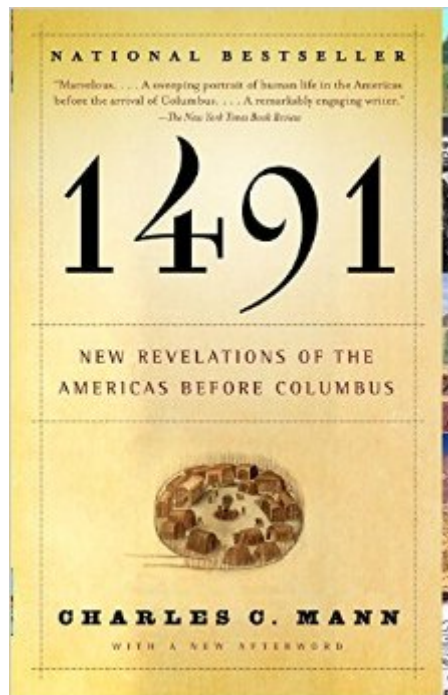


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1491 (Second Edition): New Revelations Of The Americas Before Columbus



Synopsis

In this groundbreaking work of science, history, and archaeology, Charles C. Mann radically alters our understanding of the Americas before the arrival of Columbus in 1492. Contrary to what so many Americans learn in school, the pre-Columbian Indians were not sparsely settled in a pristine wilderness; rather, there were huge numbers of Indians who actively molded and influenced the land around them. The astonishing Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan had running water and immaculately clean streets, and was larger than any contemporary European city. Mexican cultures created corn in a specialized breeding process that it has been called man's first feat of genetic engineering. Indeed, Indians were not living lightly on the land but were landscaping and manipulating their world in ways that we are only now beginning to understand. Challenging and surprising, this a transformative new look at a rich and fascinating world we only thought we knew. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

I have been a volunteer at Cahokia Mounds for about three years, leading guided tours of the Historic site. I have read extensively about Cahokia's history, attended a few conferences and had

access to several of the principal archeologists at the site. I consider myself fairly well informed. Several visitors at Cahokia, and a few of my friends, recommended that I read 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus, written in 2005, by Charles C. Mann. Mr. Mann relies heavily on the work of Dr William I. Woods, a geography professor at University of Kansas. I have found a book Envisioning Cahokia: a Landscape Perspective, co-authored by Dr. Woods. Not an easy read, but I am currently tackling it to see if I can learn more. I have recently finished 1491 (Vintage Books, second edition, July 2011) and I have a few observations. Some of the things the author states as "facts" about Cahokia are speculation. Some of the things he says are clearly incorrect. This makes me question the rest of the book. The best known landmark at Cahokia is Monks Mound. Standing 100 feet high, with four terraces and a base of 14 acres, Monks Mound is the largest earthen structure in the Americas. Mr. Mann tells us that "the elite revamped Monks Mound. By extending a low platform from one side, they created a stage for priests to perform ceremonies in full view of the public." (pg303) The first terrace of Monks Mound is a late addition and it very well may have been used as a stage to address large gatherings in the forty acre Grand Plaza. I mention this in my tours, but point out that it is speculation.

Although recent years have yielded significant progress in understanding how "Indians" lived throughout the Americas before 1492 and Columbus, only isolated bits of the story have reached the popular press. Far too many people still hold to one of two myths of the Indians, or have little conception at all of pre-Columbian America. The first popular myth is that the Indians were a bunch of primitive savages just keeping the land warm until superior Europeans showed up. It's sad to read reviews here that assert that because Indians used stone tools they were therefore "stone age", with the implication that their culture was no further advanced than that early period. The second myth makes the Indians into proto-flower-children, naively and simply in tune with their environment. Both myths are based on stereotyping and are condescending to the pre-Colombians. How could people spread over two continents and many millennia be briefly summarized? They can't be! The Americas saw the development of a broad range of cultures, just like every other inhabited area of the world. Some cultures overstressed their environment and soon collapsed. Others created stable conditions under which they could survive for generations. (Which is not the same as saying they didn't impact nature.) But even the latter could be brought down by climate change, political instability, disease (especially European), or contact with outsiders (Indian or European). Great cities arose in Mesoamerica and the Andes, and also in other areas when the right conditions prevailed. And sophisticated cultures existed even where city building wasn't

1491 favored. This book takes the reader through a vibrant overview of centuries of Indian culture both before and shortly after Columbus landed.

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