3

THE SPAIN THAT Christopher Columbus and his crews left behind just before dawn on August 3, 1492, as they sailed forth from Palos and out into the Atlantic, was for most of its people a land of violence, squalor, treachery, and intolerance. In this respect Spain was no different from the rest of Europe.

Epidemic outbreaks of plague and smallpox, along with routine attacks of measles, influenza, diphtheria, typhus, typhoid fever, and more, frequently swept European cities and towns clean of 10 to 20 percent of their populations at a single stroke. As late as the mid-seventeenth century more than 80,000 Londoners—one out of every six residents in the city—died from plague in a matter of months. And again and again, as with its companion diseases, the pestilence they called the Black Death returned. Like most of the other urban centers in Europe, says one historian who has specialized in the subject, "every twenty-five or thirty years—sometimes more frequently—the city was convulsed by a great epidemic."[1] Indeed, for centuries an individual's life chances in Europe's pesthouse cities were so poor that the natural populations of the towns were in perpetual decline that was offset only by in-migration from the countryside—in-migration, says one historian, that was "vital if [the cities] were to be preserved from extinction."[2]

Famine, too, was common. What J. H. Elliott has said of sixteenth-century Spain had held true throughout the Continent for generations beyond memory: "The rich ate, and ate to excess, watched by a thousand hungry eyes as they consumed their gargantuan meals. The rest of the population starved."[3] This was in normal times. The slightest fluctuation in food prices could cause the sudden deaths of additional tens of thou-

sands who lived on the margins of perpetual hunger. So precarious was the existence of these multitudes in France that as late as the seventeenth century each "average" increase in the price of wheat or millet directly killed a proportion of the French population equal to nearly twice the percentage of Americans who died in the Civil War.[4]

That was the seventeenth century, when times were getting better. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries prices fluctuated constantly, leading people to complain as a Spanish agriculturalist did in 1513 that "today a pound of mutton costs as much as a whole sheep used to, a loaf as much as a *fanega* [a bushel and a half] of wheat, a pound of wax or oil as much as an *arroba* [25 Spanish pounds]."[5] The result of this, as one French historian has observed, was that "the epidemic that raged in Paris in 1482 fits the classic pattern: famine in the countryside, flight of the poor to the city in search of help, then outbreak of disease in the city following upon the malnutrition."[6] And in Spain the threat of famine in the countryside was especially omnipresent. Areas such as Castile and Andalusia were wracked with harvest failures that brought on mass death repeatedly during the fifteenth century.[7] But since both causes of death, disease and famine, were so common throughout Europe, many surviving records did not bother (or were unable) to make distinctions between them. Consequently, even today historians find it difficult or impossible to distinguish between those of the citizenry who died of disease and those who merely starved to death.[8]

Roadside ditches, filled with stagnant water, served as public latrines in the cities of the fifteenth century, and they would continue to do so for centuries to follow. So too would other noxious habits and public health hazards of the time persist on into the future—from the practice of leaving the decomposing offal of butchered animals to fester in the streets, to London's "special problem," as historian Lawrence Stone puts it, of "poor's holes." These were "large, deep, open pits in which were laid the bodies of the poor, side by side, row upon row. Only when the pit was filled with bodies was it finally covered over with earth." As one contemporary, quoted by Stone, delicately observed: "How noisome the stench is that arises from these holes so stowed with dead bodies, especially in sultry seasons and after rain."[9]

Along with the stench and repulsive appearance of the openly displayed dead, human and animal alike, a modern visitor to a European city in this era would be repelled by the appearance and the vile aromas given off by the living as well. Most people never bathed, not once in an entire lifetime. Almost everyone had his or her brush with smallpox and other deforming diseases that left survivors partially blinded, pock-marked, or crippled, while it was the norm for men and women to have "bad breath from the rotting teeth and constant stomach disorders which can be documented from many sources, while suppurating ulcers, eczema, scabs, run-

ning sores and other nauseating skin diseases were extremely common, and often lasted for years."[10]

Street crime in most cities lurked around every corner. One especially popular technique for robbing someone was to drop a heavy rock or chunk of masonry on his head from an upper-story window and then to rifle the body for jewelry and money. This was a time, observes Norbert Elias, when "it was one of the festive pleasures of Midsummer Day to burn alive one or two dozen cats," and when, as Johan Huizinga once put it, "the continuous disruption of town and country by every kind of dangerous rabble [and] the permanent threat of harsh and unreliable law enforcement . . . nourished a feeling of universal uncertainty."[11] With neither culturally developed systems of social obligation and restraint in place, nor effective police forces in their stead, the cities of Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were little more than chaotic population agglomerates with entire sections serving as the residential turf of thieves and brigands, and where the wealthy were forced to hire torch-bearing bodyguards to accompany them out at night. In times of famine, cities and towns became the setting for food riots. And the largest riot of all, of course—though the word hardly does it justice—was the Peasants' War, which broke out in 1524 following a series of local revolts that had been occurring repeatedly since the previous century. The Peasants' War killed over 100,000 people.

As for rural life in calmer moments, Jean de La Bruyère's seventeenth-century description of human existence in the French countryside gives an apt summary of what historians for the past several decades have been uncovering in their research on rustic communities in Europe at large during the entire late medieval to early modern epoch: "sullen animals, male and female [are] scattered over the country, dark, livid, scorched by the sun, attached to the earth they dig up and turn over with invincible persistence; they have a kind of articulate speech, and when they rise to their feet, they show a human face, and, indeed, they are men. At night they retire to dens where they live on black bread, water, and roots."[12]

To be sure, La Bruyère was a satirist and although, in the manner of all caricaturists, his portrait contains key elements of truth, it also is cruel in what it omits. And what it omits is the fact that these wretchedly poor country folk, for all their life-threatening deprivations, were not "sullen animals." They were, in fact, people quite capable of experiencing the same feelings of tenderness and love and fear and sadness, however constricted by the limitations of their existence, as did, and do, all human beings in every corner of the globe.

But what Lawrence Stone has said about the typical English village also was likely true throughout Europe at this time—that is, that because of the dismal social conditions and prevailing social values, it "was a place filled with malice and hatred, its only unifying bond being the occasional

episode of mass hysteria, which temporarily bound together the majority in order to harry and persecute the local witch." Indeed, as in England, there were towns on the Continent where as many as a third of the population were accused of witchcraft and where ten out of every hundred people were executed for it in a single year. In one small, remote locale within reputedly peaceful Switzerland, more than 3300 people were killed in the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century for allegedly Satanic activities. The tiny village of Wiesensteig saw sixty-three women burned to death in one year alone, while in Obermarchtal fifty-four people—out of a total population of barely 700—died at the stake during a three-year period. Thus, while it is true that the Europeans of those days possessed the same range of emotions that we do, as Stone puts it, "it is noticeable that hate seems to have been more prominent an emotion than love."[13]

At the time La Bruyère was writing (which was a good bit later than the time of Columbus, during which time conditions had improved), the French "knew every nuance of poverty," says one modern historian, and they had a battery of formal terms to describe precise levels of indigence: *pauvre, le vrai pauvre, le mauvais pauvre, pauvre valide ou invalide, pauvre honteux, indigent, misérable, nécessiteux, mendiant de profession, mendiant de bonne foi, mendiant volontaire, mendiant sédentaire,* and more. At the top were those who "at best lived at subsistence level, at worst fell far below," while at the bottom were those described as *dans un état d'indigence absolue,* meaning that "one had no food or adequate clothing or proper shelter, that one had parted with the few battered cooking-pots and blankets which often constituted the main assets of a working-class family."[14] Across the whole of France, between a third and half the population fell under one of these categories of destitution, and in regions such as Brittany, western Normandy, Poitou, and the Massif the proportion ascended upwards of two-thirds. In rural areas in general, between half and 90 percent of the population did not have land sufficient for their support, forcing them to migrate out, fall into permanent debt, or die.[15]

And France was hardly unique. In Genoa, writes historian Fernand Braudel, "the homeless poor sold themselves as galley slaves every winter." They were fortunate to have that option. In more northern climes, during winter months, the indigent simply froze to death. The summer, on the other hand, was when the plague made its cyclical visitations. That is why, in summer months, the wealthy left the cities to the poor: as Braudel points out elsewhere, Rome along with other towns "was a graveyard of fever" during times of warmer weather.[16]

Throughout Europe, about half the children born during this time died before reaching the age of ten. Among the poorer classes—and in Spain particularly, which had an infant mortality rate almost 40 percent higher even than England's—things were much worse.[17] In addition to exposure, disease, and malnutrition, one of the causes for such a high infant mortal-

ity rate (close to three out of ten babies in Spain did not live to see their first birthdays) was abandonment. Thousands upon thousands of children who could not be cared for were simply left to die on dungheaps or in roadside ditches.[18] Others were sold into slavery.

East European children, particularly Romanians, seem to have been favorites of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century slave trade, although many thousands of adults were enslaved as well. Child slaves, however, were as expensive as adults, for reasons best left to the imagination, as is indicated by a fourteenth-century letter from a man involved in the business: "We are informed about the little slave girl you say you personally need," he wrote to his prospective client, "and about her features and age, and for what you want her. . . . Whenever ships come from Romania, they should carry some [slave girls]; but keep in mind that little slave girls are as expensive as the grown ones, and there will be none that does not cost 50 to 60 florins if we want one of any value."[19] Those purchasing female slaves of child-bearing age sometimes were particularly lucky and received a free bonus of a baby on the way. As historian John Boswell has reported: "Ten to twenty percent of the female slaves sold in Seville in the fifteenth century were pregnant or breast-feeding, and their infants were usually included with them at no extra cost."[20]

The wealthy had their problems too. They hungered after gold and silver. The Crusades, begun four centuries earlier, had increased the appetites of affluent Europeans for exotic foreign luxuries—for silks and spices, fine cotton, drugs, perfumes, and jewelry—material pleasures that required pay in bullion. Thus, gold had become for Europeans, in the words of one Venetian commentator of the time, "the sinews of all government . . . its mind, soul . . . its essence and its very life." The supply of the precious metal, by way of the Middle East and Africa, had always been uncertain. Now, however, the wars in eastern Europe had nearly emptied the Continent's coffers. A new supply, a more regular supply—and preferably a cheaper supply—was needed.[21]

Violence, of course, was everywhere, as alluded to above; but occasionally it took on an especially perverse character. In addition to the hunting down and burning of witches, which was an everyday affair in most locales, in Milan in 1476 a man was torn to pieces by an enraged mob and his dismembered limbs were then eaten by his tormenters. In Paris and Lyon, Huguenots were killed and butchered, and their various body parts were sold openly in the streets. Other eruptions of bizarre torture, murder, and ritual cannibalism were not uncommon.[22]

Such behavior, nonetheless, was not officially condoned, at least not usually. Indeed, wild and untrue accusations of such activities formed the basis for many of the witch hunts and religious persecutions—particularly of Jews—during this time.[23] In precisely those years when Columbus was trekking around Europe in search of support for his maritime adventures,

the Inquisition was raging in Spain. Here, and elsewhere in Europe, those out of favor with the powerful—particularly those who were believed to be un-Christian—were tortured and killed in the most ingenious of fashions: on the gallows, at the stake, on the rack—while others were crushed, beheaded, flayed alive, or drawn and quartered.

On the very day that Columbus finally set forth on his journey that would shake the world, the port of the city he sailed from was filled with ships that were deporting Jews from Spain. By the time the expulsion was complete between 120,000 and 150,000 Jews had been driven from their homes (their valuables, often meager, having first been confiscated) and then they were cast out to sea. As one contemporary described the scene:

> It was pitiful to see their sufferings. Many were consumed by hunger, especially nursing mothers and their babies. Half-dead mothers held dying children in their arms. . . . I can hardly say how cruelly and greedily they were treated by those who transported them. Many were drowned by the avarice of the sailors, and those who were unable to pay their passage sold their children.[24]

This was the world an ex-trader of African slaves named Christopher Columbus and his shipmates left behind as they sailed from the city of Palos in August of 1492. It was a world wracked by disease—disease that killed in massive numbers, but, importantly, that also tended to immunize survivors. A world in which all but the wealthy often could not feed themselves, and in which the wealthy themselves hungered after gold.[25] It was a world, as well, of cruel violence and certainty of holy truth. Little wonder, then, that the first report back from that Atlantic voyage, purportedly to the Orient, caused such sensations across the length and breadth of Europe.

In a letter composed aboard the *Niña,* as the returning ships passed through the Azores, Columbus described his discovery, during the previous fall and winter, of what he thought was the Indian Sea and its "many islands filled with people without number." One of the first major islands, which he called Juana, known to us today as Cuba, "was so long that I thought it must be the mainland, the province of [Cathay]." Another large island—the one we now know as Hispaniola, containing the nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic—he called La Spañola. Columbus had reason to be impressed with the size of these two islands, since together they were two-thirds as large as his home country of Italy.

The Admiral continued his description of the wonders he had seen, in a passage that must be quoted at length if we are to achieve even a small understanding of the impact his voyage almost immediately had on the people of Europe, living under the wretched conditions of their time and just coming out of another cold and miserable winter:

> As Juana, so all the other [islands] are very fertile to an excessive degree, and this one especially. In it there are many harbors on the sea coast, beyond comparison with others which I know in Christendom, and numerous rivers, good and large, which is marvelous. Its lands are lofty and in it there are many sierras and very high mountains, to which the island Tenerife is not comparable. All are most beautiful, of a thousand shapes, and all accessible, and filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, and they seem to touch the sky; and I am told that they never lose their foliage, which I can believe, for I saw them as green and beautiful as they are in Spain in May, and some of them were flowering, some with fruit . . . . And there were singing the nightingale and other little birds of a thousand kinds in the month of November, there where I went. There are palm trees of six or eight kinds, which are a wonder to behold because of their beautiful variety, and so are the other trees and fruits and plants; therein are marvelous pine groves, and extensive meadow country; and there is honey, and there are many kinds of birds and a great variety of fruits. Upcountry there are many mines of metals, and the population is innumerable. *La Spañola* is marvelous, the sierras and the mountains and the plains and the meadows and the lands are so beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, and for livestock of every sort, and for building towns and villages. The harbors of the sea here are such as you could not believe it without seeing them; and so the rivers, many and great, and good streams, the most of which bear gold.[26]

If it sounded like Paradise, that was no accident. Paradise filled with gold. And when he came to describe the people he had met, Columbus's Edenic imagery never faltered:

> The people of this island and of all the other islands which I have found and seen, or have not seen, all go naked, men and women, as their mothers bore them, except that some women cover one place only with the leaf of a plant or with a net of cotton which they make for that purpose. They have no iron or steel or weapons, nor are they capable of using them, although they are well-built people of handsome stature, because they are wondrous timid. . . . [T]hey are so artless and free with all they possess, that no one would believe it without having seen it. Of anything they have, if you ask them for it, they never say no; rather they invite the person to share it, and show as much love as if they were giving their hearts; and whether the thing be of value or of small price, at once they are content with whatever little thing of whatever kind may be given to them.[27]

For years to come Columbus repeatedly would insist that his expeditions and adventures in the New World had nothing to do with "mere reason, mathematics, and maps," as two scholars of the subject put it, but rather that "his 'execution of the affair of the Indies' was a fulfillment of prophecies in Isaiah."[28] In addition to helping explain, if taken seriously, why Columbus in many respects was a less successful navigator and helmsman than is commonly supposed (once into the Caribbean he rarely seemed

to know where he was and routinely lost ships that were under his command), this rhetorical claim of biblical guidance is a clue to understanding the European reaction to his reported find.[29]

Columbus finished his letter, describing what he had seen on his voyage, on March 4th of 1493. A printed version of it was published in Barcelona and was widely circulated less than a month later. A month after that a translated edition was circulating in Rome. A month after that a version that set the letter to verse appeared. Others followed in Antwerp, Basel, Paris, Florence, Strassburg, Valladolid, and elsewhere, most of them going back for second and third and fourth printings. At least seventeen different translated editions appeared throughout Europe within five years following Columbus's return from that first voyage.

If not the biblical Eden, or the fabled Fortunate Isles of classical myth, Columbus, it seemed, at least had found some sort of paradise on earth. Such places had long filled the legends and dreams of all the peoples of Europe, as they would on into the future: it is no coincidence that during the next two centuries the invented utopias of Bacon and More and Harrington and others invariably would be located in distant oceanic lands to the west.

But myths of paradise and utopia were complex—and often confused—affairs. On the one hand, in some versions, they represented a rediscovered time of innocent perfection dating from *before* the biblical Fall from Grace; on the other hand, some dreams of such perfection envisioned and were built upon the expectation of a *future* time of anticipated peace and harmony. And bound up with every myth, past, present, or future, was still another and contradictory vision of the primordial world, a Satanic vision of savagery and wildness and the dark.

Before long, reports were circulating that Satan himself resided on one of those islands in the Caribbean Sea. Perhaps it was only natural then, as Lewis Hanke has said, that "the popular image, in the first feverish months, of a terrestrial paradise was soon succeeded by that of a hostile continent peopled with armed warriors rushing out of the tropical forests or strange cities to resist the advance of the Spanish soldiers and the missionary efforts of their companion friars."[30]

It was only a matter of time before that stereotype of barbarically hostile natives had metamorphosed once again. As best described by its most famous proponent, the eminent Spanish scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the next representation of the New World's Indians was as creatures of a subhuman, Caliban-like nature who were intended by God "to be placed under the authority of civilized and virtuous princes or nations, so that they may learn, from the might, wisdom, and law of their conquerors, to practice better morals, worthier customs and a more civilized way of life."[31] That the visions of the ferocious Indian assailant or the inferior natural

slave were fictions, as much as the image of a prelapsarian American Eden had been, mattered not one bit to anyone. The myths were simply formed and re-formed, shaped and re-shaped, and made to do whatever work their propagators at any given moment wanted done.

Numerous modern scholars have dissected and analyzed the effects of both biblical and classical myth on the minds of Europeans during this so-called Age of Discovery. But at least as strong as all the mixed-up imaginings of terrestrial heavens and Elysian fields, of lusty maidens and cannibalistic human beasts, was a fervent, and in many cases a truly maniacal, European craving for raw power and the wealth of gold and silver. Among the clergy, meanwhile, there was the promise of God's favor should they successfully introduce the New World's "pagan innocents" to the glory of his grace. It is not surprising, then, that in the very first sentence of his celebrated letter to the Spanish Crown Columbus says of the lands that he has found, "and of them all have I taken possession for Their Highnesses, by proclamation and with the royal standard displayed, and nobody objected." Consider the picture: standing alone with a few of his fellow officers in the white coral sand of a tiny island whose identification remains disputed to this day, an island "discovered" by Columbus despite the fact that it was well populated and had in fact been discovered by others thousands of years earlier, the admiral "took possession" of it—and of all the people it contained. And "nobody objected." Clearly, God was on the Spaniards' side.

So it went, from island to island, small and large, throughout the Caribbean. Wherever he went Columbus planted a cross, "making," as he said, "the declarations that are required," and claiming ownership of the land for his royal patrons back in Spain. Despite the fact that Columbus noted in his own journal of the voyage that "the people of these lands do not understand me nor I them," it seems to have been of particular satisfaction to him that never once did any of the onlooking Arawak-speaking islanders object to his repeated proclamations in Spanish that he was taking control of their lands away from them.[32] Ludicrous though this scene may appear to us in retrospect, at the time it was a deadly serious ritual, similar in ways equally ludicrous and deadly to the other famous ritual the Spanish bestowed upon the non-Spanish-speaking people of the Americas, the *requerimiento*.

Following Columbus, each time the Spanish encountered a native individual or group in the course of their travels they were ordered to read to the Indians a statement informing them of the truth of Christianity and the necessity to swear immediate allegiance to the Pope and to the Spanish crown. After this, if the Indians refused or even delayed in their acceptance (or, more likely, their understanding) of the *requerimiento*, the statement continued:

> I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of Their Highnesses. We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as Their Highnesses may command. And we shall take your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey and refuse to receive their lord and resist and contradict him.[33]

In practice, the Spanish usually did not wait for the Indians to reply to their demands. *First* the Indians were manacled; then, as it were, they were read their rights. As one Spanish conquistador and historian described the routine: "After they had been put in chains, someone read the *Requerimiento* without knowing their language and without any interpreters, and without either the reader or the Indians understanding the language they had no opportunity to reply, being immediately carried away prisoners, the Spanish not failing to use the stick on those who did not go fast enough."[34]

In this perverse way, the invasion and destruction of what many, including Columbus, had thought was a heaven on earth began. Not that a reading of the *requerimiento* was necessary to the inhuman violence the Spanish were to perpetrate against the native peoples they confronted. Rather, the proclamation was merely a legalistic rationale for a fanatically religious and fanatically juridical and fanatically brutal people to justify a holocaust. After all, Columbus had seized and kidnapped Indian men, women, and children throughout his first voyage, long before the *requerimiento* was in use, five at one stop, six at another, more at others, filling his ships with varied samples of Indians to display like exotic beasts in Seville and Barcelona upon his return.

On at least one occasion Columbus sent a raiding party ashore to capture some women with their children to keep his growing excess of captured native males company, "because," he wrote in his journal, his past experience in abducting African slaves had taught him that "the [Indian] men would behave better in Spain with women of their country than without them." On this date he also records the vignette of "the husband of one of these women and father of three children, a boy and two girls," who followed his captured family onto Columbus's ship and said that if they had to go "he wished to come with them, and begged me hard, and they all now remain consoled with him."[35]

But not for long. As a harbinger of things to come, only a half-dozen or so of those many captured native slaves survived the journey to Spain, and of them only two were alive six months later. On his second voyage Columbus tried an even more ambitious kidnapping and enslavement scheme. It is described by an Italian nobleman, Michele de Cuneo, who accompanied Columbus on this voyage:

> When our caravels in which I wished to go home had to leave for Spain, we gathered together in our settlement 1600 people male and female of those Indians, of whom, among the best males and females, we embarked on our caravels on 17 February 1495, 550 souls. Of the rest who were left the announcement went around that whoever wanted them could take as many as he pleased; and this was done. And when everybody had been supplied there were some 400 of them left to whom permission was granted to go wherever they wanted. Among them were many women who had infants at the breast. They, in order the better to escape us, since they were afraid we would turn to catch them again, left their infants anywhere on the ground and started to flee like desperate people.[36]

No one knows what happened to those six hundred or so left-over natives who were enslaved, on the Admiral's orders, by "whoever wanted them," or the four hundred or so who fled in terror, or their abandoned infants—but by the time Columbus's ships entered the waters outside Spain, of the 550 captured Indians he took with him two hundred had died. Says Cuneo: "We cast them into the sea." When they reached Cadiz, half of the remaining 350 slaves were sick and dying. Only a relative few survived much longer, because, Cuneo surmised, "they are not working people and they very much fear cold, nor have they long life."[37]

This final point—"nor have they long life"—would not have been true a few years earlier: the health and life expectancy of the natives had been far superior to that of the Europeans prior to the Columbian invasion. But by the time Cuneo was writing he was certainly correct. Once the first Spanish settlements had taken root, the hold on life that any Indian had, at any given moment, was tenuous at best. Spanish diseases had begun their own invasion of the Americas almost from the moment Columbus and his crews first breathed upon their New World hosts. But the systematic, genocidal destruction of the Indians did not begin until Columbus's return.

II

Columbus's second voyage was the true beginning of the invasion of the Americas. The royal instructions authorizing the expedition had directed that the finest ships in Andalusia be outfitted for the trip and that they be commanded by the most expert pilots and navigators in the realm. Seventeen ships made the voyage and aboard those ships were more than 1200 soldiers, sailors, and colonists—including a cavalry troop of lancers and half a dozen priests. Along the way, at the Canary Islands, some other passengers were boarded: goats and sheep and cattle, and eight pigs, were placed on deck and in the holds below.

In early January of 1494 the fleet arrived at the place on the northern coast of Hispaniola that Columbus had chosen to build his New World

capital, his town of Isabela. No sooner were the ships unloaded, however, than sickness broke out among the crews. It quickly spread among the natives, who had come to greet the ships with gifts of fish and fruits, "as if we had been their brothers," recalled one of the men on board.[38] Within a few days, the Admiral's surgeon reported, a third of the Spaniards had fallen ill, while natives everywhere were dead. Columbus directed groups of the healthy among his crews to explore the island's inland regions and find the fabulous gold mines they all were sure existed. But many of those men returned to the ships, having come down with the mysterious illness along the way.

For years historians have speculated as to what the epidemic was that laid low so many Spaniards and killed so many native people. Carl Sauer thought it might have been some sort of intestinal infection, while Samuel Eliot Morison diagnosed it as either malaria or something caused by "drinking well water and eating strange fish." Most recently, Kirkpatrick Sale has opted for bacillic dysentery—although he too lists malaria or even syphilis as among the likely culprits.[39] Others have thought it everything from smallpox to yellow fever. While it is possible (even probable) that more than one disease was causing the afflictions, the reported symptoms had nothing of the signs of syphilis, and malaria was not then present in the Indies or the Americas, nor would it be for many years to come.[40] For the same reasons, it could not have been yellow fever or smallpox that was wreaking all this havoc, and it certainly did not derive from something the Spanish ate or drank, because it spread like wildfire not only among the Spanish, but with particular virulence among the Indian people all across the island.[41] No, the most recent and original medically informed hypothesis—and the one that goes the furthest in explaining reported symptoms, including high mortality, and the extraordinary contagiousness—identifies influenza as the cause, influenza carried by those Canary Islands pigs.[42]

If, as the Spanish physician and medical historian Francisco Guerra now contends, the epidemic that ravaged Hispaniola in 1494 was swine influenza, it would have been a pestilence of devastating proportions. For it now appears that it was swine flu that swept the world in 1918, killing off at least 20,000,000 people before it finally dissipated. Like other people in the Americas, and unlike the Spanish, the natives of Hispaniola had no previous exposure to the virus—nor to the numerous other diseases that historically, in other parts of the world, had spread from domesticated animal hosts. Other than small dogs in some locations and llamas in the Andes, few animals were domesticated anywhere in the hemisphere. And of the many plagues that in time would overwhelm the Americas' native peoples, influenza—of various types, from both humans and non-human vectors—was second only to smallpox and maybe measles as the most rapid epidemic killer of them all.[43]

Whatever it was, in any case, the imported pathogen moved among the

native people with a relentlessness that nothing ever had in all their history. "So many Indians died that they could not be counted," wrote Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, adding that "all through the land the Indians lay dead everywhere. The stench was very great and pestiferous."[44] And in the wake of the plague they had introduced, the Spanish soldiers followed, seeking gold from the natives, or information as to where to find it. They were troubled by the illness, and numbers of them died from it. But unlike the island natives the European invaders and their forebears had lived with epidemic pestilence for ages. Their lungs were damaged from it, their faces scarred with pocks, but accumulations of disease exposure allowed them now to weather much. So they carried infections with them everywhere they went—burdensome, but rarely fatal, except to the natives that they met.

Following the Admiral's orders, reconnaissance parties were sent out across the island and off to Cuba, Jamaica, and to other nearby lands. The Spanish plagues raced on ahead. Still, the natives, as Columbus had observed during his first voyage, continued to be kind and generous to their guests, and so innocent in the use of dangerous weapons that when Columbus "showed them swords," he said, "they grasped them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance."[45]

Wherever the marauding, diseased, and heavily armed Spanish forces went out on patrol, accompanied by ferocious armored dogs that had been trained to kill and disembowel, they preyed on the local communities—already plague-enfeebled—forcing them to supply food and women and slaves, and whatever else the soldiers might desire. At virtually every previous landing on this trip Columbus's troops had gone ashore and killed indiscriminately, as though for sport, whatever animals and birds and natives they encountered, "looting and destroying all they found," as the Admiral's son Fernando blithely put it.[46] Once on Hispaniola, however, Columbus fell ill—whether from the flu or, more likely, from some other malady—and what little restraint he had maintained over his men disappeared as he went through a lengthy period of recuperation. The troops went wild, stealing, killing, raping, and torturing natives, trying to force them to divulge the whereabouts of the imagined treasure-houses of gold.

The Indians tried to retaliate by launching ineffective ambushes of stray Spaniards. But the combined killing force of Spanish diseases and Spanish military might was far greater than anything the natives could ever have imagined. Finally, they decided the best response was flight. Crops were left to rot in the fields as the Indians attempted to escape the frenzy of the conquistadors' attacks. Starvation then added its contribution, along with pestilence and mass murder, to the native peoples' woes.

Some desperate Hispaniola natives fled to other islands. One of these, a *cacique* named Hatuey, brought with him to Cuba as many of his surviving people as he could—and what little gold that they possessed. Once

there, in a place called Punta Maisi, he assembled his followers together and displayed for them the treasures that they had, explaining that this was what the Spanish troops were after, that these apparently were objects of worship to the murderous invaders. Whereupon, to protect his people from the greed and savagery of these vile strangers, he threw the gold to the bottom of a nearby river.

It didn't work. The Spanish found Hatuey and his people, killed most of them, enslaved the others, and condemned their leader to be burned alive. Reportedly, as they were tying him to the stake, a Franciscan friar urged him to take Jesus to his heart so that his soul might go to heaven, rather than descend into hell. Hatuey replied that if heaven was where the Christians went, he would rather go to hell.[47]

The massacres continued. Columbus remained ill for months while his soldiers wandered freely. More than 50,000 natives were reported dead from these encounters by the time the Admiral had recovered from his sickness.[48] And when at last his health and strength had been restored, Columbus's response to his men's unorganized depredations was to organize them. In March of 1495 he massed together several hundred armored troops, cavalry, and a score or more of trained attack dogs. They set forth across the countryside, tearing into assembled masses of sick and unarmed native people, slaughtering them by the thousands. The pattern set by these raids would be the model the Spanish would follow for the next decade and beyond. As Bartolomé de Las Casas, the most famous of the accompanying Spanish missionaries from that trip recalled:

> Once the Indians were in the woods, the next step was to form squadrons and pursue them, and whenever the Spaniards found them, they pitilessly slaughtered everyone like sheep in a corral. It was a general rule among Spaniards to be cruel; not just cruel, but extraordinarily cruel so that harsh and bitter treatment would prevent Indians from daring to think of themselves as human beings or having a minute to think at all. So they would cut an Indian's hands and leave them dangling by a shred of skin and they would send him on saying "Go now, spread the news to your chiefs." They would test their swords and their manly strength on captured Indians and place bets on the slicing off of heads or the cutting of bodies in half with one blow. They burned or hanged captured chiefs.[49]

At least one chief, the man considered by Columbus to be Hispaniola's ranking native leader, was not burned or hanged, however. He was captured, put in chains, and sent off by ship for public display and imprisonment in Spain. Like most of the Indians who had been forced to make that voyage, though, he never made it to Seville: he died en route.

With the same determination Columbus had shown in organizing his troops' previously disorganized and indiscriminate killings, the Admiral then set about the task of systematizing their haphazard enslavement of

the natives. Gold was all that they were seeking, so every Indian on the island who was not a child was ordered to deliver to the Spanish a certain amount of the precious ore every three months. When the gold was delivered the individual was presented with a token to wear around his or her neck as proof that the tribute had been paid. Anyone found without the appropriate number of tokens had his hands cut off.

Since Hispaniola's gold supply was far less than what the Spaniards' fantasies suggested, Indians who wished to survive were driven to seek out their quotas of the ore at the expense of other endeavors, including food production. The famines that had begun earlier, when the Indians attempted to hide from the Spanish murderers, now grew much worse, while new diseases that the Spanish carried with them preyed ever more intensely on the malnourished and weakened bodies of the natives. And the soldiers never ceased to take delight in killing just for fun.

Spanish reports of their own murderous sadism during this time are legion. For a lark they "tore babes from their mother's breast by their feet, and dashed their heads against the rocks." The bodies of other infants "they spitted . . . together with their mothers and all who were before them, on their swords." On one famous occasion in Cuba a troop of a hundred or more Spaniards stopped by the banks of a dry river and sharpened their swords on the whetstones in its bed. Eager to compare the sharpness of their blades, reported an eyewitness to the events, they drew their weapons and

> began to rip open the bellies, to cut and kill those lambs—men, women, children, and old folk, all of whom were seated, off guard and frightened, watching the mares and the Spaniards. And within two credos, not a man of all of them there remains alive. The Spaniards enter the large house nearby, for this was happening at its door, and in the same way, with cuts and stabs, begin to kill as many as they found there, so that a stream of blood was running, as if a great number of cows had perished. . . . To see the wounds which covered the bodies of the dead and dying was a spectacle of horror and dread.[50]

This particular slaughter began at the village of Zucayo, where the townsfolk earlier had provided for the conquistadors a feast of cassava, fruit, and fish. From there it spread. No one knows just how many Indians the Spanish killed in this sadistic spree, but Las Casas put the number at well over 20,000 before the soldiers' thirst for horror had been slaked.

Another report, this one by a group of concerned Dominican friars, concentrated on the way the Spanish soldiers treated native infants:

> Some Christians encounter an Indian woman, who was carrying in her arms a child at suck; and since the dog they had with them was hungry, they tore the child from the mother's arms and flung it still living to the dog, who

> proceeded to devour it before the mother's eyes. . . . When there were among the prisoners some women who had recently given birth, if the new-born babes happened to cry, they seized them by the legs and hurled them against the rocks, or flung them into the jungle so that they would be certain to die there.[51]

Or, Las Casas again, in another incident he witnessed:

> The Spaniards found pleasure in inventing all kinds of odd cruelties, the more cruel the better, with which to spill human blood. They built a long gibbet, low enough for the toes to touch the ground and prevent strangling, and hanged thirteen [natives] at a time in honor of Christ Our Saviour and the twelve Apostles. When the Indians were thus still alive and hanging, the Spaniards tested their strength and their blades against them, ripping chests open with one blow and exposing entrails, and there were those who did worse. Then, straw was wrapped around their torn bodies and they were burned alive. One man caught two children about two years old, pierced their throats with a dagger, then hurled them down a precipice.[52]

If some of this has a sickeningly familiar ring to readers who recall the massacres at My Lai and Song My and other Vietnamese villages in the not too distant past, the familiarity is reinforced by the term the Spanish used to describe their campaign of terror: "pacification."[53] But as horrific as those bloodbaths were in Vietnam, in sheer magnitude they were as nothing compared with what happened on the single island of Hispaniola five hundred years ago: the island's population of about eight million people at the time of Columbus's arrival in 1492 already had declined by a third to a half before the year 1496 was out. And after 1496 the death rate, if anything, accelerated.

In plotting on a graph the decline of Hispaniola's native population there appears a curious bulge, around the year 1510, when the diminishing numbers seemed to stabilize and even grow a bit. Then the inexorable downward spiral toward extinction continues. What that little blip on the demographic record indicates is not, however, a moment of respite for the island's people, nor a contradiction to the overall pattern of Hispaniola's population free-fall following Columbus's arrival. Rather, it is a shadowy and passing footnote to the holocaust the Spanish at the same time were bringing to the *rest* of the Caribbean, for that fleeting instant of population stabilization was caused by the importation of tens of thousands of slaves from surrounding islands in a fruitless attempt by the Spanish to replace the dying natives of Hispaniola.[54]

But death seized these imported slaves as quickly as it had Hispaniola's natives. And thus, the islands of the Bahamas were rapidly stripped of perhaps half a million people, in large part for use as short-lived replacements by the Spanish for Hispaniola's nearly eradicated indigenous inhabitants. Then Cuba, with its enormous population, suffered the same fate.

With the Caribbean's millions of native people thereby effectively liquidated in barely a quarter of a century, forced through the murderous vortex of Spanish savagery and greed, the slavers turned next to the smaller islands off the mainland coast. The first raid took place in 1515 when natives from Guanaja in the Bay Islands off Honduras were captured and taken to forced labor camps in depopulated Cuba. Other slave expeditions followed, and by 1525, when Cortés arrived in the region, all the Bay Islands themselves had been entirely shorn of their inhabitants.[55]

In order to exploit most fully the land and its populace, and to satisfy the increasingly dangerous and rebellion-organizing ambitions of his well-armed Spanish troops, Columbus instituted a program called the *repartimiento* or "Indian grants"—later referred to, in a revised version, as the system of *encomiendas*. This was a dividing-up, not of the land, but of entire peoples and communities, and the bestowal of them upon a would-be Spanish master. The master was free to do what he wished with "his people"—have them plant, have them work in the mines, have them do anything, as Carl Sauer puts it, "without limit or benefit of tenure."[56]

The result was an even greater increase in cruelty and a magnification of the firestorm of human devastation. Caring only for short-term material wealth that could be wrenched up from the earth, the Spanish overlords on Hispaniola removed their slaves to unfamiliar locales—"the roads to the mines were like anthills," Las Casas recalled—deprived them of food, and forced them to work until they dropped. At the mines and fields in which they labored, the Indians were herded together under the supervision of Spanish overseers, known as *mineros* in the mines and *estancieros* on the plantations, who "treated the Indians with such rigor and inhumanity that they seemed the very ministers of Hell, driving them day and night with beatings, kicks, lashes and blows and calling them no sweeter names than dogs." Needless to say, some Indians attempted to escape from this. They were hunted down with mastiffs. When found, if not torn apart on the spot, they were returned and a show-trial was held for them, and for the edification of other Indians who were made to stand and watch. The escapees were

> brought before the *visitador* [Spanish inspector-magistrate] and the accuser, that is, the supposedly pious master, who accused them of being rebellious dogs and good-for-nothings and demanded stiff punishment. The *visitador* then had them tied to a post and he himself, with his own hands, as the most honorable man in town, took a sailor's tarred whip as tough as iron, the kind they use in galleys, and flogged them until blood ran from their naked bodies, mere skin and bones from starvation. Then, leaving them for dead, he stopped and threatened the same punishment if they tried it again.[57]

Occasionally, when slaves were so broken by illness, malnutrition, or exhaustion unto death that they became incapable of further labor output,

they were dismissed from the mines or the fields where they worked. Las Casas estimated that perhaps 10 percent of the Indian conscripts survived long enough for this to happen. However, he continued:

> When they were allowed to go home, they often found it deserted and had no other recourse than to go out into the woods to find food and to die. When they fell ill, which was very frequently because they are a delicate people unaccustomed to such work, the Spaniards did not believe them and pitilessly called them lazy dogs, and kicked and beat them; and when illness was apparent they sent them home as useless, giving them some cassava for the twenty- to eighty-league journey. They would go then, falling into the first stream and dying there in desperation; others would hold on longer, but very few ever made it home. I sometimes came upon dead bodies on my way, and upon others who were gasping and moaning in their death agony, repeating "Hungry, hungry."[58]

In the face of utter hopelessness, the Indians began simply surrendering their lives. Some committed suicide. Many refused to have children, recognizing that their offspring, even if they successfully endured the Spanish cruelties, would only become slaves themselves. And others, wrote Las Casas,

> saw that without any offence on their part they were despoiled of their kingdoms, their lands and liberties and of their lives, their wives, and homes. As they saw themselves each day perishing by the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Spaniards, crushed to the earth by the horses, cut in pieces by swords, eaten and torn by dogs, many buried alive and suffering all kinds of exquisite tortures . . . [they] decided to abandon themselves to their unhappy fate with no further struggles, placing themselves in the hands of their enemies that they might do with them as they liked.[59]

Other natives, in time, did find ways to become reunited with whatever remained of their families. But when most wives and husbands were brought back together,

> they were so exhausted and depressed on both sides that they had no mind for marital communication and in this way they ceased to procreate. As for the newly born, they died early because their mothers, overworked and famished, had no milk to nurse them, and for this reason, while I was in Cuba, 7,000 babies died in three months. Some mothers even drowned their babies from sheer desperation, while others caused themselves to abort with certain herbs that produced stillborn children. In this way husbands died in the mines, wives died at work, and children died from lack of milk, while others had not time or energy for procreation, and in a short time this land which was so great, so powerful and fertile, though so unfortunate, was depopulated.[60]

By 1496, we already have noted, the population of Hispaniola had fallen from eight million to between four and five million. By 1508 it was

down to less than a hundred thousand. By 1518 it numbered less than twenty thousand. And by 1535, say the leading scholars on this grim topic, "for all practical purposes, the native population was extinct."[61]

In less than the normal lifetime of a single human being, an entire culture of millions of people, thousands of years resident in their homeland, had been exterminated. The same fate befell the native peoples of the surrounding islands in the Caribbean as well. Of all the horrific genocides that have occurred in the twentieth century against Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Ibos, Bengalis, Timorese, Kampucheans, Ugandans, and more, none has come close to destroying this many—or this great a proportion—of wholly innocent people.[62]

And then the Spanish turned their attention to the mainland of Mexico and Central America. The slaughter had barely begun. The exquisite city of Tenochtitlán was next.

III

Unlike most of the Caribbean peoples the Spanish encountered, the inhabitants of Mexico had a good deal of experience with warfare. To be sure, Aztec warriors were trained in highly individualistic fighting techniques, since the aim of battle was not to kill masses of the enemy, but rather to capture and bring back a single worthy opponent to be sacrificed at the following year's ceremonies of fertility.[63] Still, those fighting skills were formidable. And when combined with the Aztecs' enormous numerical advantage, they were more than a match for any invading army out of Europe. As the European interlopers' own accounts make clear, individual Indian warriors repeatedly showed themselves the equal, and more, of any among the Spanish militia. The story of one Aztec soldier who, in hand-to-hand combat, fought off a handful of Spanish horsemen—"when they could not bring him down, one of the Spaniards threw his lance at the Indian, who caught it and fought for another hour before being shot by two archers and then stabbed"—was but one among innumerable such reports from the conquistadors themselves.[64]

The Indians' battlefield experience, however, was the result of complex political rivalries that had existed in the region for centuries, rivalries the Spanish under Hernando Cortés were able to turn to their advantage. As one scholar of Aztec military strategy recently has emphasized, "while the Spanish conquest is now seen as a major watershed in the history of the New World," to the various competing Indian polities at the time "the Spanish were simply another group, albeit an alien one, seeking to gain political dominance in central Mexico." As such, although the first people the Spanish confronted, the Tlaxcaltecs, could easily have defeated the conquistadors, they saw in them instead potential confederates against their traditional adversaries.[65] It was thus with a formidable army of In-

dian allies—at one point Cortés refers to 150,000 warriors who accompanied his band of less than a thousand Spanish soldiers—that the conquistadors marched on Tenochtitlán.[66]

Rather than meeting resistance when he approached the great city, Cortés was greeted in friendship and was welcomed by Montezuma. In retrospect this behavior of the Aztec leader has usually seemed foolish or cowardly or naïve to Western historians. But Mesoamerican political traditions had always dictated that war was to be announced before it was launched, and the reasons for war were always made clear well beforehand. War was a sacred endeavor, and it was sacrilegious to engage in it with treachery or fraud. In fact, as Inga Clendinnen recently has noted: "So important was this notion of fair testing that food and weapons were sent to the selected target city as part of the challenge, there being no virtue in defeating a weakened enemy."[67] In this case, therefore, not only was there no reason for Montezuma to suppose Cortés intended to launch an invasion (the Tlaxcaltec troops who accompanied him could have been part of an effort to seek political alliance), but Cortés had plainly announced in advance that his purposes were not warlike, that he came as an ambassador of peace.

Once the Spanish were inside the city's gates, however, it soon became apparent that this was a far from conciliatory mission. In the midst of a great public celebration of the feast of the god Huitzilopochtli, the Spanish, led by Cortés's ruthless lieutenant Pedro de Alvarado, entered and surrounded the ceremonial arena. It was filled, recalled the sixteenth-century Spanish historian Bernardino de Sahagún, with "nobles, priests, and soldiers, and throngs of other people." Still unaware of the conquistadors' intentions, says Sahagún, "the Indians thought that [the Spanish] were just admiring the style of their dancing and playing and singing, and so continued with their celebration and songs." Then the assault began:

> The first Spaniards to start fighting suddenly attacked those who were playing the music for the singers and dancers. They chopped off their hands and their heads so that they fell down dead. Then all the other Spaniards began to cut off heads, arms, and legs and to disembowel the Indians. Some had their heads cut off, others were cut in half, and others had their bellies slit open, immediately to fall dead. Others dragged their entrails along until they collapsed. Those who reached the exits were slain by the Spaniards guarding them; and others jumped over the walls of the courtyard; while yet others climbed up the temple; and still others, seeing no escape, threw themselves down among the slaughtered and escaped by feigning death. So great was the bloodshed that rivulets [of blood] ran through the courtyard like water in a heavy rain. So great was the slime of blood and entrails in the courtyard and so great was the stench that it was both terrifying and heartrending. Now that nearly all were fallen and dead, the Spaniards went searching for

> those who had climbed up the temple and those who had hidden among the dead, killing all those they found alive.[68]

As word spread of what was happening, Aztec soldiers appeared and drove the Spanish into the royal quarters where they held Montezuma prisoner. Before this event had occurred, the ruling nobles and priests had expressed unhappiness with Montezuma's apparent weakness when confronted with these heavily armed strangers. Now, when Montezuma appeared on the palace rooftop, in chains and accompanied by Spanish soldiers, and appealed through a spokesman for peace, the populace revolted. According to Sahagún: "One of them spoke out, 'What is he saying, this whore of the Spaniards?' " And a siege of the palace began. Montezuma was killed in the ensuing battle. Two weeks or so of intermittent struggle later, says Sahagún, Cortés demonstrated the "courage and skill" that all "brave captains [do] in the time of greatest need." He ordered a retreat from the city under cover of night.[69]

In retreat, however, Cortés left behind an invisible killer that would prevent the Aztecs from following and destroying his broken army, and that would begin the process of wreaking his revenge: the microscopic smallpox bacillus. Smallpox was a fearsome killer wherever it existed, but among a people with no previous exposure to the disease it was catastrophic. It first had appeared in the New World in 1518 on the huge and dying island of Hispaniola, a sort of dreadful *coup de grâce* to that once enchanting place's dwindling few survivors.[70] After being released among the Aztecs, wrote Cortés's secretary Francisco Lopez de Gomara, "it spread from one Indian to another, and they, being so numerous and eating and sleeping together, quickly infected the whole country. In most houses all the occupants died, for, since it was their custom to bathe as a cure for all diseases, they bathed for the smallpox and were struck down." Gomara continues:

> Those who did survive, having scratched themselves, were left in such a condition that they frightened the others with the many deep pits on their faces, hands and bodies. And then came famine, not because of a want of bread, but of meal, for the women do nothing but grind maize between two stones and bake it. The women, then, fell sick of the smallpox, bread failed, and many died of hunger. The corpses stank so horribly that no one would bury them; the streets were filled with them; and it is even said that the officials, in order to remedy this situation, pulled the houses down to cover the corpses.[71]

The epidemic seems to have lasted for about two months, during which time, and for months after, Cortés was reorganizing his defeated forces and marching on and burning smaller towns in the region.[72] Once the disease dissipated—having devastated the city's residents and killed off most

of the Aztec leaders—Cortés prepared to attack again. First, he had ships constructed that were used to intercept and cut off food supplies to the island capital. Then he destroyed the great aqueduct that brought fresh water to the city. Finally, the Spanish and their Indian allies laid siege to the once brilliant white metropolis and its dwindling population of diseased and starving people.

"Siege," as Inga Clendinnen has observed, was for the Aztecs "the antithesis of war." Viewing it as cowardly and dishonorable, "the deliberate and systematic weakening of opposition before engagement, and the deliberate implication of noncombatants in the contest, had no part in their experience."[73] But it had been the European mode of battle for many centuries, deriving its inspiration from the Greek invention of ferocious and massively destructive infantry warfare.[74] To the Spanish, as to all Europeans when committed to battle, victory—by whatever means—was all that mattered. On the other side, for reasons equally steeped in ancient tradition, the people of Tenochtitlán had no other option than to resist dishonor and defeat until the very end.

The ensuing battle was furious and horrifying, and continued on for months. Tenochtitlán's warriors, though immensely weakened by the deadly bacteria that had been loosed in their midst, and at least initially hobbled by what Clendinnen calls their "inhibition against battleground killing," were still too formidable an army for direct military confrontation. So Cortés extended his martial strategy by destroying not only the Aztecs' food and water supplies, but their very city itself. His soldiers burned magnificent public buildings and marketplaces, and the aviaries with their thousands of wondrous birds; they gutted and laid waste parks and gardens and handsome boulevards. The metropolis that the Spanish had just months earlier described as the most beautiful city on earth, so dazzling and beguiling in its exotic and brilliant variety, became a monotonous pile of rubble, a place of dust and flame and death.

Because of the way the city was built on canals, however, burning was not always the most efficient means of despoliation. Often "we levelled the houses to the ground," recalled Bernal Díaz, "for if we set fire to them they took too long to burn, and one house would not catch fire from another, for each house stood in the water, and one could not pass from one to the other without crossing bridges or going in canoes."[75] Every day the Spanish crushed houses and other buildings in the city, and piled the debris into the canals; and each night the Aztecs dredged the canals in a desperate effort to keep the waters running free. Some captured Indians finally told the Spanish just how bad things were for the city's residents. Recalled Cortés:

> We now learnt from two wretched creatures who had escaped from the city and come to our camp by night that they were dying of hunger and used to

> come out at night to fish in the canals between the houses, and wandered through the places we had won in search of firewood, and herbs and roots to eat. . . . I resolved to enter the next morning shortly before dawn and do all the harm we could. . . . and we fell upon a huge number of people. As these were some of the most wretched people and had come in search of food, they were nearly all unarmed, and women and children in the main. We did them so much harm through all the streets in the city that we could reach, that the dead and the prisoners numbered more than eight hundred.[76]

With the advantage finally theirs—even if it was against "wretched . . . unarmed . . . women and children in the main"—Cortés and the Spanish pressed on. "That day," wrote Cortés, "we did nothing save burn and raze to the ground the houses on either side of that main street, which indeed was a sad sight; but we were obliged to do it, there being no other way of accomplishing our aims." They moved their forces to another section of the city where they slaughtered and captured more than twelve thousand people. Within a day or two they had another multitude of helpless citizens penned in: "They no longer had nor could find any arrows, javelins or stones with which to attack us." More than forty thousand were killed in that single day, and "so loud was the wailing of the women and children that there was not one man amongst us whose heart did not bleed at the sound." Indeed, because "we could no longer endure the stench of the dead bodies that had lain in those streets for many days, which was the most loathsome thing in all the world," recalled Cortés, "we returned to our camps."[77]

But not for long. The next morning the Spanish were in the streets again, mopping up the starving, dehydrated, and disease-wracked Indians who remained. "I intended to attack and slay them all," said Cortés, as he observed that:

> The people of the city had to walk upon their dead while others swam or drowned in the waters of that wide lake where they had their canoes; indeed, so great was their suffering that it was beyond our understanding how they could endure it. Countless numbers of men, women and children came out toward us, and in their eagerness to escape many were pushed into the water where they drowned amid that multitude of corpses; and it seemed that more than fifty thousand had perished from the salt water they had drunk, their hunger and the vile stench. . . . And so in those streets where they were we came across such piles of the dead that we were forced to walk upon them.[78]

In all their writings on the Aztecs, the Inquisition-loving Spanish—like most Western writers who have followed them—expressed indignant horror at their enemies' religious rituals involving human sacrifice. And indeed, the Aztec toll in that regard was great. Perhaps as many as 20,000 enemy warriors, captured in battle, were sacrificed each year during the

peak of the Aztecs' brief reign as the lords of central Mexico—although what one conquistador said of the reports of Inca human sacrifice may hold true here as well: "These and other things are the testimony we Spaniards raise against these Indians," wrote Pedro de Cieza de León in 1553, "endeavoring by these things we tell of them to hide our own shortcomings and justify the ill treatment they have suffered at our hands. . . . I am not saying that they did not make sacrifices . . . but it was not as it was told."[79] Las Casas claimed the same was true of the reports from Mexico—"the estimate of brigands," he claimed, "who wish to find an apology for their own atrocities,"—and modern scholars have begun to support the view that the magnitude of sacrifice was indeed greatly exaggerated by the New World's conquerors, just as it was, for the same reasons, by Western conquerors in other lands.[80] Even if the annual figure of 20,000 were correct, however, in the siege of Tenochtitlán the invading Spaniards killed twice that many people in a single day—including (unlike Aztec sacrifice) enormous numbers of innocent women, children, and the aged. And they did it day after day after day, capping off the enterprise, once Tenochtitlán had been razed, by strip-searching their victims for any treasure they may have concealed before killing them. As an Aztec chronicler recalled: "The Christians searched all the refugees. They even opened the women's skirts and blouses and felt everywhere: their ears, their breasts, their hair."[81] Lastly, they burned the precious books salvaged by surviving Aztec priests, and then fed the priests to Spanish dogs of war.

This initial phase of the Spanish bloodbath in the region finally over, Cortés now returned to camp where he spent three or four days "attending to many items of business . . . . concerning myself with the good order, government and pacification of these parts." What this meant, first of all, as he says in his very next sentence, was the collecting and dividing up of the gold ("and other things, such as slaves") that were the spoils of the carnage. Although much had been destroyed or lost in the fury of the battle, these valuables included "many gold bucklers," which he promptly melted down, "plumes, feather headdresses and things so remarkable that they cannot be described in writing nor would they be understood unless they were seen."[82]

Through prior arrangement with his king, Cortés's share of the loot was one-fifth. In gold and jewelry and artwork, that was a fortune, probably more than $10,000,000 in 1990 American currency. In terms of slaves, it meant at least 3000 human beings for his personal and private use, not counting about 23,000 Indian "vassals," even after the Crown reduced his holdings in 1529. Immediately setting his slaves to labor in the placer mines, he drove them until they dropped. Before long, almost all of them had died from neglect and overwork. No matter how quickly he moved to replenish his human capital (an individual slave cost only six or seven pesos because they were so plentiful), Cortés killed faster than he could

purchase or commandeer. By the time of his own death in 1547 his personal holdings in Indian slaves, despite constant infusions of new bodies was barely one-tenth of what he started with.[83]

Meanwhile, Tenochtitlán effectively was no more. About a third of a million people dead, in a single city in a single lake in the center of Mexico. And still this was just the beginning.

Smallpox and other new diseases—new, at least to the Indians—were now rippling out in currents of destruction across the Mexican and Central American landscape. The microbes moved even faster than the ambitious conquistadors on their horses, but the conquistadors moved as quickly as they could. And few if any were as ambitious as Pedro de Alvarado, who had led the temple massacre during the feast day ceremonies for the god Huitzilopochtli. Alvarado and his compatriots headed south, seeking gold for their coffers and flesh for their mines. Others headed north. Like parasites feeding on the remains of whatever was left alive once the winds of epidemic fever had passed over the native populations they encountered, the Spanish adventurers invaded, conquered, and enslaved the peoples living in the rest of Mexico and in what today is Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

No one knows how many they killed, or how many died of disease before the conquistadors got there, but Las Casas wrote that Alvarado and his troops by themselves "advanced killing, ravaging, burning, robbing and destroying all the country wherever he came." In all, he said:

> By other massacres and murders besides the above, they have destroyed and devastated a kingdom more than a hundred leagues square, one of the happiest in the way of fertility and population in the world. This same tyrant wrote that it was more populous than the kingdom of Mexico; and he told the truth. He and his brothers, together with the others, have killed more than four or five million people in fifteen or sixteen years, from the year 1525 until 1540, and they continue to kill and destroy those who are still left; and so they will kill the remainder."[84]

Alvarado, of course, was but one among many engaged in this genocidal enterprise. Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán was one of those who led armies to the north, torturing and burning at the stake native leaders, such as the Tarascan king, while seizing or destroying enormous native stores of food. Guzmán later was followed by Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado, by Francisco de Ibarra, and countless other conquerors and marauders. As elsewhere, disease, depredation, enslavement, and outright massacres combined to extinguish entire Indian cultures in Mexico's northwest. Among the region's Serrano culture groups, in barely more than a century the Tepehuán people were reduced in number by 90 percent; the Irritilla people by 93 percent; the Acaxee people by

95 percent. It took a little longer for the various Yaqui peoples to reach this level of devastation, but they too saw nearly 90 percent of their numbers perish, while for the varied Mayo peoples the collapse was 94 percent. Scores of other examples from this enormous area followed the same deadly pattern.[85]

To the south the story was the same—and worse. By 1542 Nicaragua alone had seen the export of as many as half a million of its people for slave labor (in effect, a death sentence) in distant areas whose populations had been destroyed. In Honduras about 150,000 were enslaved. In Panama, it was said, between the years of 1514 and 1530 up to 2,000,000 Indians were killed. But again, since numbers such as these are so overwhelming, sometimes it is the smaller incident that best tells what it was like—such as the expedition to Nicaragua in 1527 of Lopez de Salcedo, the colonial governor of Honduras. At the start of his trip Salcedo took with him more than 300 Indian slaves to carry his personal effects. Along the way he killed two-thirds of them, but he also captured 2000 more from villages that were in his path. By the time he reached his destination in León only 100 of the more than 2300 Indian slaves he had begun with or acquired during his journey were still alive.[86] All this was necessary to "pacify" the natives.

As Bishop Diego de Landa (who was a brutal overlord himself) described the process in his region of the Yucatán: "the Spaniards pacified [the Indians of Cochua and Chetumal] in such a way, that these provinces which were formerly the thickest settled and most populous, remained the most desolate of all the country." In these besieged provinces, added Fray Lorenzo de Bienvenida, "the Indians fled from all this and did not sow their crops, and all died of hunger. I say all, because there were pueblos of five hundred and one thousand houses, and now one which has one hundred is large."[87] The Spanish had a saying, recalled Alonso de Zorita, that it was easy to find one's way from province to province, because the paths were marked with the bones of the dead. There are "certain birds," he added, "that, when an Indian falls, pick out his eyes and kill and eat him; it is well known that these birds appear whenever the Spaniards make an incursion or discover a mine."[88] Indeed, to this day there exist in Yucatán towns and villages Spanish buildings and monuments that celebrate the sixteenth-century slaughter. One example is Montejo house in Mérida—on the coast, near the sites of the ancient Maya cities of Uxmal and Chichén Itzá—whose façade is decorated with two proud and preening conquistadors, each of whom has his feet planted atop the severed heads of Indians.[89]

The gratuitous killing and outright sadism that the Spanish soldiers had carried out on Hispaniola and in central Mexico was repeated in the long march to the south. Numerous reports, from numerous reporters, tell of Indians being led to the mines in columns, chained together at the neck,

and decapitated if they faltered. Of children trapped and burned alive in their houses, or stabbed to death because they walked too slowly. Of the routine cutting off of women's breasts, and the tying of heavy gourds to their feet before tossing them to drown in lakes and lagoons. Of babies taken from their mothers' breasts, killed, and left as roadside markers. Of "stray" Indians dismembered and sent back to their villages with their chopped-off hands and noses strung around their necks. Of "pregnant and confined women, children, old men, as many as they could capture," thrown into pits in which stakes had been imbedded and "left stuck on the stakes, until the pits were filled."[90] And much, much more.

One favorite sport of the conquistadors was "dogging." Traveling as they did with packs of armored wolfhounds and mastiffs that were raised on a diet of human flesh and were trained to disembowel Indians, the Spanish used the dogs to terrorize slaves and to entertain the troops. An entire book, *Dogs of the Conquest,* has been published recently, detailing the exploits of these animals as they accompanied their masters throughout the course of the Spanish depredations. "A properly fleshed dog," these authors say, "could pursue a 'savage' as zealously and effectively as a deer or a boar. . . . To many of the conquerors, the Indian was merely another savage animal, and the dogs were trained to pursue and rip apart their human quarry with the same zest as they felt when hunting wild beasts."[91]

Vasco Núñez de Balboa was famous for such exploits and, like others, he had his own favorite dog—Leoncico, or "little lion," a reddish-colored cross between a greyhound and a mastiff—that was rewarded at the end of a campaign for the amount of killing it had done. On one much celebrated occasion, Leoncico tore the head off an Indian leader in Panama while Balboa, his men, and other dogs completed the slaughter of everyone in a village that had the ill fortune to lie in their journey's path. Heads of human adults do not come off easily, so the authors of *Dogs of the Conquest* seem correct in calling this a "remarkable feat," although Balboa's men usually were able to do quite well by themselves.[92] As one contemporary description of this same massacre notes:

> The Spaniards cut off the arm of one, the leg or hip of another, and from some their heads at one stroke, like butchers cutting up beef and mutton for market. Six hundred, including the cacique, were thus slain like brute beasts. . . . Vasco ordered forty of them to be torn to pieces by dogs.[93]

Just as the Spanish soldiers seem to have particularly enjoyed testing the sharpness of their yard-long rapier blades on the bodies of Indian children, so their dogs seemed to find the soft bodies of infants especially tasty, and thus the accounts of the invading conquistadors and the padres who traveled with them are filled with detailed descriptions of young In-

dian children routinely taken from their parents and fed to the hungry animals. Men who could take pleasure in this sort of thing had little trouble with less sensitive matters, such as the sacking and burning of entire cities and towns, and the destruction of books and tablets containing millennia of accumulated knowledge, wisdom, and religious belief.

Even when supposedly undoing the more extreme acts of violence perpetrated by their compatriots, the conquistadors seemed unable to restrain themselves from one last act of savagery. For a number of years Indians who were enslaved had their chattel status burned into their faces with branding irons that stamped them with the initials of their owners. When sold from one Spaniard to another, a replacement brand was made. Consequently, some slaves' faces were scarred with two or three or four branding mutilations identifying them as transferable pieces of property. Once, however, writes William Sherman, "when a ship put in at a Nicaraguan port loaded with illegally enslaved encomienda Indians, the governor freed them and sent them home. But first the natives, some of whom were women and suckling children, had their face brands canceled. Fresh letters spelling 'libre' were burned into their scarred faces."[94]

The treatment of Indian females is particularly revealing, in light of the Catholic *machismo* ideology of the Spanish that celebrated the purity of their own women. The tone for such treatment was set at the start, with the first description that exists of a sexual encounter between a European and an Indian woman. It occurred during Columbus's second voyage and was described by the protagonist himself, not a Spaniard in this case, but the Italian nobleman Michele de Cuneo:

> While I was in the boat I captured a very beautiful Carib woman, whom the said Lord Admiral gave to me, and with whom, having taken her into my cabin, she being naked according to their custom, I conceived desire to take pleasure. I wanted to put my desire into execution but she did not want it and treated me with her finger nails in such a manner that I wished I had never begun. But seeing that, (to tell you the end of it all), I took a rope and thrashed her well, for which she raised such unheard of screams that you would not have believed your ears. Finally we came to an agreement in such manner that I can tell you she seemed to have been brought up in a school of harlots.[95]

Cuneo here expresses an attitude toward raped women that soon would become a staple of violent pornography and male sadistic fantasy: she enjoyed it. While still in the Caribbean, a report to the king's minister by a group of Dominicans provides a different, but equally vivid, example of the other classic function and fantasy of rape—the demonstration of power and the degradation of both the victim and her loved ones. Typically, when an enslaved workman returned from the mines at the end of a day, the friars reported, "not only was he beaten or whipped because he had not

brought up enough gold, but further, most often, he was bound hand and foot and flung under the bed like a dog, before the [Spanish] foreman lay down, directly over him, with his wife."[96]

These were just precursors to the open trade in enslaved women that the Spanish delighted in as the decades wore on. Native women—or *indias*—were gambled away in card games and traded for other objects of small value, while stables of them were rented out to sailors who desired sexual accompaniment during their travels up and down the coast. If an *india* attempted to resist, she was whipped or tortured or burned alive. Even when laws were passed to curb the more extreme of such atrocities, the penalties were a joke. When, for example, an uncooperative Nicaraguan Indian woman was burned to death in her hut by a Spaniard who tried to rape her, he was prosecuted by the governor—and fined five pesos.[97]

Those women who were not valued as enslaved concubines were forced to do back-breaking work. Writes one modern historian:

> Some of the *indias* even as late as the 1580s were being broken physically, their insides literally bursting in some instances from the heavy loads they had to carry. Unable to endure more, some of them committed suicide by hanging, starving themselves, or by eating poisonous herbs. Encomenderos forced them to work in open fields where they tried to care for their children. They slept outside and there gave birth to and reared their babies, who were often bitten by poisonous insects. Mothers occasionally killed their offspring at birth to spare them future agonies. . . . [Other] working mothers present a poignant image when we hear of them returning home after weeks or months of separation from their children, only to find that they had died or had been taken away.[98]

Concludes this writer: "All of those factors help explain the fact that on tribute rolls married couples were frequently entered as having no children at all or only one, and seldom more than two."[99] In even the most healthful of environments birth rates of this level will mean zero population growth at first, and then increasingly precipitous decline. In an environment of such enormous mortality from genocide and firestorms of disease, as was the rule in the Americas during the Spanish conquest, birth rates this low were a blueprint for extinction.

And that is precisely what happened in community after community. Almost everyone was killed. There were, of course, exceptions. But overall in central Mexico the population fell by almost 95 percent within seventy-five years following the Europeans' first appearance—from more than 25,000,000 people in 1519 to barely 1,300,000 in 1595. And central Mexico was typical. Even using moderate estimates of the pre-1492 population, in southeastern Mexico the number of inhabitants dropped from 1,700,000 to less than 240,000 in a century and a half. In northern Mex-

ico, over a somewhat longer period, the native population fell from more than 2,500,000 to less than 320,000. Wherever the invaders went, the pattern was the same. On the island of Cozumel, off the eastern coast of Mexico, more than 96 percent of the population had been destroyed less than 70 years after the Spaniards' first arrival. In the Cuchumatan Highlands of Guatemala the population fell by 82 percent within the first half-century following European contact, and by 94 percent—from 260,000 to 16,000—in less than a century and a half. In western Nicaragua 99 percent of the people were dead (falling in number from more than 1,000,000 to less than 10,000) before sixty years had passed from the time of the Spaniards' initial appearance. In western and central Honduras 95 percent of the people were exterminated in half a century. In Córdoba, near the Gulf of Mexico, 97 percent of the population was extinguished in little more than a century, while simultaneously, in neighboring Jalapa, the same lethal pattern held: 97 percent of the Jalapa population was destroyed—falling from 180,000 people in 1520 to 5000 in 1626. With dreary regularity, in countless other locales across the length and breadth of Mexico and down into Central America, the European intrusion meant the sudden and near total disappearance of populations that had lived and flourished there for thousands upon thousands of years.[100]

Those natives who survived remembered, however, and in poetry they passed on to posterity the dreadful tale of what had happened. Recalled an Aztec poet:

> Broken spears lie in the roads;
> we have torn our hair in grief.
> The houses are roofless now, and their walls
> are red with blood.
>
> Worms are swarming in the streets and plazas,
> and the walls are splattered with gore.
> The water has turned red, as if it were dyed,
> and when we drink it,
> it has the taste of brine.
>
> We have pounded our hands in despair
> against the adobe walls,
> for our inheritance, our city, is lost and dead.[101]

The Maya book of *Chilam Balam* adds "what the white lords did when they came to our land":

> They taught fear and they withered the flowers. So that their flower should live, they maimed and destroyed the flower of others. . . . Marauders by day, offenders by night, murderers of the world.[102]

Then the Spanish, joined now by other European adventurers and their military escorts, pushed on into South America.

IV

Peru and Chile, home of the Incas and one of the wealthiest and largest empires anywhere, covering virtually the entire western coast of the South American continent, had contained at least 9,000,000 people only a few years before the Europeans arrived, possibly as many as 14,000,000 or more. As elsewhere, the conquistadors' diseases preceded them—smallpox, and probably other epidemics swept down through Mexico and across the Andes in the early 1520s, even before Pizarro's first foray into the region—but also as elsewhere the soldiers and settlers who followed wreaked terrible havoc and destruction themselves. Long before the close of the century, barely 1,000,000 Peruvians remained alive. A few years more and that fragment was halved again. At least 94 percent of the population was gone—somewhere between 8,500,000 and 13,500,000 people had been destroyed.[103]

Here, as in the Caribbean and Mexico and Central America, one could fill volumes with reports of murderous European cruelties, reports derived from the Europeans' own writings. As in those other locales, Indians were flogged, hanged, drowned, dismembered, and set upon by dogs of war as the Spanish and others demanded more gold and silver than the natives were able to supply. One ingenious European technique for getting what they wanted involved burying Indian leaders in earth up to their waists after they had given the Spanish all the goods that they possessed. In that helpless position they then were beaten with whips and ordered to reveal the whereabouts of the rest of their treasure. When they could not comply, because they had no more valuable possessions, more earth was piled about them and the whippings were continued. Then more earth. And more beating. At last, says the Spanish informant on this particular matter, "they covered them to the shoulders and finally to the mouths." He then adds as an afterthought: "I even believe that a great number of natives were burned to death."[104]

Pedro de Cieza de León, in what is justly regarded as the best first-hand account of the conquest of the Incas, describes in page after page the beautiful valleys and fields of this part of the world, the marvelous cities, the kind and generous native people—and the wholesale slaughter of them by the Spanish "as though a fire had gone, destroying everything in its path."[105] Cieza de León was himself a conquistador, a man who believed in the right of the Spaniards to seize Indians and set them to forced labor, but only, he wrote, "when it is done in moderation." He explains:

> I would not condemn the employment of Indian carriers . . . but if a man had need of one pig, he killed twenty; if four Indians were wanted, he took a dozen . . . and there were many Spaniards who made the poor Indians carry their whores in hammocks borne on their shoulders. Were one ordered to enumerate the great evils, injuries, robberies, oppression, and ill treatment inflicted on the natives during these operations . . . there would be no end of it . . . for they thought no more of killing Indians than if they were useless beasts.[106]

But, like many others, Cieza de León's point is better made in incidentals of detail than with grand pronouncements—as in the offhand reference, in his immediately succeeding sentence, to "a Portuguese named Roque Martin, who had the quarters of Indians hanging on a porch to feed his dogs with, as if they were wild beasts."

Despite all the savage face-to-face cruelties, however, it was enslavement on the Spaniards' plantations and in their silver mines, in addition to the introduced diseases and starvation, that killed the most Indians directly. Immediately upon entering this region, the conquistadors laid waste the Incas' roads and bridges, agricultural terraces, and canals. They looted heavily stocked storehouses and granaries, and gratuitously slaughtered llamas by the thousands. "It is said," wrote one later Spanish official, "that [the soldiers] killed great numbers of llamas simply to eat the marrow-fat, and the rest [of the meat] was wasted." Others described the Spaniards' almost unbelievable destruction of agriculture and animal life, and "in this way," wrote one, "all the food, the vegetables, llamas and alpacas that were in that valley and district were totally consumed." Added Pascual de Andagoya as early as 1539: "The Indians are being totally destroyed and lost. . . . They [beg] with a cross to be given food for the love of God. . . . [The soldiers are] killing all the llamas they want for no greater need than to make tallow candles. . . . The Indians are left with nothing to plant, and since they have no cattle and can never obtain any, they cannot fail to die of hunger."[107]

Believing that El Dorados existed in the Amazon, the conquistadors drove thousands of natives before them in their desperate searches for gold mines in the jungles. "Some two or three hundred Spaniards go on these expeditions," wrote Domingo de Santo Tomas, but "they take two or three thousand Indians to serve them and carry their food and fodder. . . . Few or no Indians survive, because of lack of food, the immense hardships of the long journeys through wastelands, and from the loads themselves." Added Diego de Almagro—in an account that was typical of countless others—Hernando Pizarro would "take Indians in chains to carry what [the conquistadors] had pillaged. . . . When the Indians grew exhausted, they cut off their heads without untying them from the chains, leaving the roads full of dead bodies, with the utmost cruelty." Entire towns and provinces were wiped out by these and similar practices.[108]

Those who did survive the Spanish gifts of plague and famine and massacre, and who were not force-marched into jungles as the conquistadors' enslaved beasts of burden, were subject to being herded together and driven from their highland residences in the Andes to coca plantations on the sweltering peripheries of low-lying tropical rain forests. There, their lungs—long adapted to the cool, thin air of mountain altitudes—were assaulted by a barrage of still more strange, debilitating, and murderous diseases, including uta or *mal de los Andes*, which ate away at noses, mouths, and throats before bringing on terrifyingly painful death. So many were succumbing at such a rapid rate, in fact, that even the Spanish Crown began worrying about the long-term success of their enterprise should too many Indians be destroyed. Because "an infinite number of Indians perish," observed King Philip himself in a belated imperial decree, "and others emerge so sick and weak that they never recuperate," the coca trade, he urged, must be moderated or discouraged. The Spanish on the scene, trying for more precision than their king regarding the matter of Indian mortality, estimated that "between a third and half of the annual quota of coca workers died as a result of their five month service" in the fields. And those who did survive, and the fewer still who lived out the remainder of the year, had only the next round of lethal work to face in the coming season ahead. Still, despite the urgings of the Crown, the trade in coca grew—because, as Hernando de Santillan put it, "down there [in the coca plantations] there is one disease worse than all the rest: the unrestrained greed of the Spaniards."[109]

Work in the silver mines, if anything, was worse. Dropped down a shaft bored as far as 750 feet into the earth, taking with them only "some bags of roasted maize for their sustenance," observed Rodrigo de Loaisa, the miners remained below ground for a week at a time. There, in addition to the dangers of falling rocks, poor ventilation, and the violence of brutal overseers, as the Indian laborers chipped away at the rock faces of the mines they released and inhaled the poisonous vapors of cinnabar, arsenic, arsenic anhydride, and mercury. "If twenty healthy Indians enter [a mine] on Monday," wrote Loaisa, "half may emerge crippled on Saturday." Crippled, if they were lucky. To enter a mine, wrote Santo Tomás, was to enter "a mouth of hell."[110]

For as long as there appeared to be an unending supply of brute labor it was cheaper to work an Indian to death, and then replace him or her with another native, than it was to feed and care for either of them properly. It is probable, in fact, that the life expectancy of an Indian engaged in forced labor in a mine or on a plantation during these early years of Spanish terror in Peru was not much more than three or four months—about the same as that of someone working at slave labor in the synthetic rubber manufacturing plant at Auschwitz in the 1940s.[111]

So immense was the indigenous population of the Andes that the Span-

ish seemed to think at first that the supply of labor was infinite and inexhaustible. Whole valleys, once filled with thriving villages and hundreds of thousands of native people, were picked clean of human life. But at last the friars and some settlers began writing to their king in Spain, asking him to use his influence to moderate the holocaust, lest the absence of any Indians—a prospect that was beginning to seem imminent—serve to shut their enterprises down.[112]

The Crown consented. On Christmas Day in 1551, the king decreed that henceforth all Indian labor in the mines must be voluntary. The mine owners countered by using forced Indian laborers to carry supplies to the remote and isolated mining regions (that form of involuntary servitude was unaffected by the king's decree) and then trying to coax those laborers into working "voluntarily" in the mines. Others "rented out" Indian workers from Spanish labor overlords. But still the supply of workers, along with all the native people, continued to disappear.

Finally, in the 1560s, the Spanish viceroy on the scene countermanded the royal decree and declared that "for the good of the realm" one-seventh of the native tributary population living within approximately 150 miles of a mine would be drafted to labor in the mine pits. After four months that group would be replaced by another collection of conscripts from the same area. Although such draftees were treated better than the earlier slaves, and were allowed to spend each night above ground rather than in the mines—they were, after all, now a much scarcer and thus more valuable commodity—conditions during the day below ground were as bad as they had always been. Indeed, even the trek up the mountains to reach the mines remained a murderous journey. One Spaniard described a march he witnessed of "more than seven thousand souls" from the province of Chuquito to the "silver mountain" of Potosí. It covered a "distance of about one hundred leagues [and] takes two months" he wrote, because the cattle which were driven up the mountain alongside the people "cannot travel quicker, nor [can] their children of five and six years whom they take with them." He continues:

> Of all this mankind and common wealth which they take away from Chuquito, no more than two thousand souls ever return, and the remainder, about five thousand, in part, they die, and in part they remain in Potosí. . . . And for this, and the work, so excessive that, of six months, four in the mines, working twelve hours a day, going down four hundred and twenty and at times seven hundred feet, down to where night is perpetual, for it is always necessary to work by candlelight, the air thick and ill-smelling being enclosed in the entrails of the earth, the going up and down most dangerous, for they come up loaded with their small sack of metal tied up to their backs, taking quite four to five hours, step by step, and if they make the slightest false step they may fall seven hundred feet; and when they arrive at the top out of breath, find as shelter a mineowner who scolds them because they did

not come quickly enough or because they did not bring enough load, and for the slightest reason makes them go down again.[113]

These were the "improved" conditions in the Spaniards' Andean silver mines, where still two-thirds of those who ascended the mountains soon died or withered away. Even the initial survivors' lives were brief, however, since most of them soon developed *mal de la mina*, or mine sickness, which—before it killed—began with ulcers on the gums and soon progressed to rotting and destruction of the mouth and jaw, while its victims coughed up sputum mixed with mercury and blood. Understandably, before too long, likely draftees started moving out of the conscription zones around the mining regions, which only heightened the Spaniards' need for more recruits—recruits whose terms of labor then also necessarily grew longer, which in turn drove still more of them to migrate from the area. As Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala explained:

Some absent themselves from their communities to avoid going to the mines where they would suffer agony and martyrdom, and in order to avoid experiencing such hell, hardship and torment of the devils, others flee the mines, and still others take to the roads to avoid the mines and would rather chance dying suddenly than to suffer a slow death. They say that they reach such a state because contracting mercury sickness one dries up as a stick and has asthma, and cannot live day or night. It goes on in this manner a year or two and they die.[114]

But by moving away from the reach of the Spanish mine recruiters, Indians had to break up their families and communities and move down to the lowlands where the Europeans' epidemic diseases—such as measles, mumps, typhus, influenza, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and hemorrhagic smallpox, to mention only those diseases that are known to have broken out here during these years—spread more easily in the warm and muggy air. The would-be conscripts, therefore, were trapped: they could either be drafted and destroyed in the torture of the mines, or they could move down to a hot and humid seething pesthouse—where, recent research has shown, the population was disintegrating at about twice the speed that it was even in the mining regions.[115]

Whether or not to migrate from the highland regions, then, was an agonizing individual and family decision. For Andean society as a whole, however, no alternatives were afforded. Within a century following their first encounter with the Spanish, 94 to 96 percent of their once-enormous population had been exterminated; along their 2000 miles of coastline, where once 6,500,000 people had lived, everyone was dead.

And then there was Brazil. Here, the Englishman Anthony Knivet once had said, you could travel from the Atlantic coast across the continent to Po-

tosí in the Andes "and all the way as you go, you shall have great townes of Indians. . . . You shall have five hundred of these Indians by the way as you travell readie with Nets [hammocks] to carry you." So thick with a vast variety of cultures and peoples were Brazil's coastal and riverine areas that the first Portuguese governor of the region, Tomé de Sousa, declared that it was impossible for there ever to be a lack of natives, "even if we were to cut them up in slaughterhouses."[116] It was one of those rare statements that was both prescient and wrong: the effect of European conquest in Brazil was indeed as damaging as if the people had been cut up in slaughterhouses; but the number of natives was not inexhaustible.

The Portuguese governorship of Brazil was established with Sousa's arrival in the Bay of Bahia in March of 1549. Within just twenty years—when, in 1570, King Sebastião emptily declared that natives should not be enslaved unless they were captured in "just wars"—the native peoples of Brazil already were well along the road to extinction. From the first days of the colony, in 1549 and on into the 1550s, as Pero de Magalhães Gandavo wrote at the time, "the governors and captains of the land destroyed [the natives] little by little and killed many, and others fled into the interior." In 1552, and again in 1554, and again in 1556, and again in 1559 through 1561, epidemic diseases brought by the Europeans swept the coasts and countryside, preying heavily on the weakened bodies of enslaved Indians whose ancestors had never encountered such pestilences. In 1552, wrote Francisco Pires, of those natives who came down with the fever "almost none of these has survived." In 1554 an epidemic of "bloody fluxes," reported Simão de Vasconcellos, "struck with such violence that as soon as it appeared it laid them low, unconscious, and within three or four days it carried them to the grave." In 1556 another epidemic destroyed "an infinite number of savages," recalled André Thevet. And for two years, from 1559 to 1561, horrifying hemorrhagic fevers, dysentery, and influenza or whooping cough, raked the populace that remained. The natives everywhere "were terrified and almost stunned by what was happening to them," wrote António Blásques: "They no longer performed their songs and dances. Everything was grief. . . . there was nothing to be heard but weeping and groaning by the dying."[117]

In the midst of all this the enslavement and forced labor continued. King João III had earlier divided the 2500 miles of the Indians' Brazilian coastline into fourteen so-called "captaincies," or private grants of land, each one extending inland from a coastal strip that might be anywhere from 100 to 400 miles long.[118] In the captaincy with the best existing records, the Bahia captaincy, at least 40,000 Indians toiled in forced plantation labor as the decade of the 1560s began. Other captaincies had similar numbers of Indian slaves.

Meanwhile, in Europe, bubonic plague and smallpox both were raging once again. With case mortality rates as high as 60 percent and more for

either of the scourges by itself—and with most deaths occurring within a week of first infection, even among people with centuries of exposure and thus a measure of resistance—the Continent was reeling.[119] About 40,000 people died in Lisbon alone from this single epidemic. People with no history of the maladies, of course, would succumb at an even greater rate. The 100,000 natives who had died in the Rio de la Plata two years earlier were mute testament to that. And so, in January of 1563, the plague and smallpox left a ship that was anchored off the coast and accompanied their human hosts onto the mainland of Brazil.

The resulting carnage beggared all description. The plague was first. It seemed as though everyone was infected. At least everyone who was a native. As is common when a contagion invades a people with no previous exposure to it, the first generation of symptoms are like nothing anyone, even anyone with long experience with the infection, has ever seen: "The disease began with serious pains inside the intestines," wrote Simão de Vasconcellos, "which made the liver and the lungs rot. It then turned into pox that were so rotten and poisonous that the flesh fell off them in pieces full of evil-smelling beasties." Thousands died in a matter of days, at least 30,000 within three months. Then, among the plague's survivors, the smallpox was discovered. Wrote Leonardo do Vale:

> When this tribulation was past and they wanted to raise their heads a little, another illness engulfed them, far worse than the other. This was a form of smallpox or pox so loathsome and evil-smelling that none could stand the great stench that emerged from them. For this reason many died untended, consumed by the worms that grew in the wounds of the pox and were engendered in their bodies in such abundance and of such great size that they caused horror and shock to any who saw them.[120]

As had been the case in the Caribbean and Mexico and Central America and Peru before, the secondary consequences of the epidemic were as bad or worse than the monstrous diseases themselves. With no one healthy enough to prepare food or to draw water or even to comfort the others, multitudes starved to death, died of dehydration, or of outright despair, even before the infection could run its deadly course. Children were the worst afflicted. "In the end," recalled Vale, "the thing grew so bad that there was no one to make graves and some were buried in dunghills and around the huts, but so badly that the pigs routed them up."[121]

If enslavement had weakened the Indians, increasing their susceptibility to the fatal microbes, the destruction of their ways of life by armadas of disease in turn made them more susceptible to enslavement. For many, whose crops now were gone, because there was no one strong enough to tend them while the epidemic raged, giving themselves over to servitude became the only way they could even hope to eat. They approached plan-

tation masters and begged to be taken in. "There are some who were not even wanted as slaves," wrote Vale, so they "had themselves shackled so that they would be taken: it seemed less likely that they would be rejected if already in irons." Added Vasconcellos: "One man surrendered his liberty for only one gourd of flour to save his life. Others hired themselves out to work all or part of their lives, others sold their own children." Within three decades at least 90 percent of the region's native people had been destroyed.[122]

This was, of course, far from the last of it. An unending rhythm of attack from slaving parties, punctuated by furious epidemic disease episodes brought by those same slavers, as well as by missionaries, and then military assault again, became the norm of Brazilian Indian life for most of the next two centuries. Even when nominally free, the natives were being systematically destroyed. Thus, for example, by the 1630s those Indians still living in the municipal council of Salvador who were able to work for wages earned on average between one-eighth and one-sixteenth of what black slaves were paid—and often such "wages" were doled out in flour, cloth, and alcohol, if they were paid at all. Frequently they were not. Even if paid, however, and paid in hard currency, such earnings were far from sufficient for survival.[123] If there is anything that now seems surprising in light of all this, it is the extraordinary level of resistance the natives continued to mount even as they watched their own populations falling rapidly toward non-existence. The story of Ajuricaba, heroic eighteenth-century chief of the powerful Manau tribe, who fought ferociously to preserve his people from abduction and enslavement—and who leapt to his own death rather than be captured—is still remembered today among Brazilians who care about such things. But, in fact, Ajuricaba was only one of many.

From the very beginning—from at least that day in 1493 when a "very beautiful Carib woman" fought off the violent advances of Michele de Cuneo, before being thrashed with a rope and then raped by him—the people of the Americas resisted. None did so more successfully than the Maya, who combined retreats into the deep jungle cover of the Yucatán lowlands—where, as one historian puts it, the pursuing conquistadors "soon found themselves adrift in a green expanse of forest without food to eat, souls to convert, or labor to exploit"—with relentless military counterattacks that finally led to temporary expulsion of the Spanish in 1638.[124] And neither did any people resist with more symbolism than the Maya, who made a practice of destroying not only Spanish soldiers but whatever foreign things the Spanish had brought with them—horses, cattle, cats, dogs, trees, and plants.[125] In the end, however, the Maya too lost 95 of every 100 of their people—a price for their resistance that most outsiders, if they know of it, can hardly hope to comprehend.[126]

By the time the sixteenth century had ended perhaps 200,000 Spaniards had moved their lives to the Indies, to Mexico, to Central America, and points further to the south. In contrast, by that time, somewhere between 60,000,000 and 80,000,000 natives from those lands were dead. Even then, the carnage was not over.[127]

This page intentionally left blank