

Mann, Charles. 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus. Knopf: NY, 2005.

❁ APPENDIX A ❁

*Loaded Words*

Anyone who attempts to write or even speak about the original inhabitants of the Americas quickly runs into terminological quicksand. And the attempt to extricate writer and reader by being logical and sensitive often ends with both parties sucked deeper into the mire. The difficulties fall into two broad categories: names for individual groups of Indians, and names for social categories used to classify those groups. Most well known among the former is "Indian," a term so long recognized as absurd that in the 1960s and 1970s social scientists moved to change it to "Native American" or, sometimes, "Amerindian."

The change was well meaning, but not entirely successful. On a literal level, the replacement name is as problematic as the original. "Native American" is intended to refer to the peoples who inhabited the Americas before Columbus arrived and their descendants today. Literally, though, it means something else: as the activist Russell Means has complained, "Anyone born in the western hemisphere is a Native American." Worse, the term introduces an entirely new set of confusions. "Indian" does not refer to the Inuit, Aleut, and other peoples of the far north, whose cultures, languages, and even physical appearance are so different from their neighbors to the south that researchers generally argue they must have come to the Americas in a separate, much later wave of migration (though still many centuries ahead of Columbus). But all of them are Native Americans, which eliminates a distinction found useful by both scholars and indigenous peoples themselves.

In conversation, every native person whom I have met (I think without exception) has used "Indian" rather than "Native American." One day I said "Native American" when speaking to a Bolivian graduate student of indigenous descent. She shook her head dismissively at the phrase. "Aquí somos indios," she explained. "Los 'americanos nativos' viven solamente en los Estados Unidos." *We are Indians here. "Native Americans" live only in the United States.* "I abhor the term Native American," Means declared in 1998. Matching his actions to his words, Means had joined and become prominent in an

indigenous-rights group called the American Indian Movement. "We were enslaved as American Indians," he wrote, "we were colonized as American Indians, and we will gain our freedom as American Indians, and then we will call ourselves any damn thing we choose." (At the same time, the common British usage of "Red Indian" to distinguish American natives from "East Indians" is unwelcome.)

Historically speaking, both "Indian" and "Native American" are remote from the way America's first peoples thought about themselves. Much as the inhabitants of the tenth-century Carolingian Empire did not describe themselves as "Europeans," a name coined in the seventeenth century, the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere in that same era did not think in terms of "Indians," "Native Americans," or any other collective hemispheric entity. Instead they regarded themselves as belonging to their immediate group—the Patuxet village in the Wampanoag confederation, for instance.

To a considerable extent, the same holds true today. When Russell Thornton, the UCLA anthropologist, kindly sent me some copies of his work, he enclosed his curriculum vitae, which identified him as a "registered member of the Cherokee Nation," not as an Indian, Native American, Amerindian, or indigenous person. When I mentioned this to Thornton, he responded that only one experience united the diverse peoples of the Americas: being flattened by European incursions. "'Indians' or 'Native Americans' as a category both owe their existence to Europe," he said.

For all these reasons, this book uses "Indian" and "Native American" interchangeably, with the latter serving mainly to avoid repetition.

Note, though, that I use these terms as cultural and geographical categories, not racial ones. "Indian" is the Western Hemisphere's equivalent to "European," not to "white" or "Caucasian." Racial categories are inevitably problematic, because they are ostensibly biological—that is, they are supposed to be based on heritable physical characteristics like skin color—but in fact are heavily cultural, as demonstrated by the infamous "one drop" rule in the nineteenth-century southern United States, which proclaimed that men and women were Negroes, even when they could not be distinguished by whites from appearance, if any of their ancestors, no matter how remote, were African. Avoiding such inconsistency and ambiguity is easier if one eschews categorizing by race, which I have tried to do, except for the occasional rhetorical flourish.

In referring to particular groups of Indians—the Wampanoag or the Maya—I use a simple rule of thumb: I try to call groups by the name preferred by their members. This approach, which seems only courteous, is sometimes attacked as condescending. After all, the argument runs, people in the United States use the English labels "French" and "German" rather than *français* and

*Deutsch*. To insist on using "proper" names for Indians is thus to place them in a special category of fragility. But this objection is not well thought out. Although English-speakers do speak of "Germans" rather than *Deutscher*, "French people" rather than *les français*, they tend to avoid insulting terms like "Kraut" and "Frog." Many common names for Indian groups are equally insulting, or descended from such insults. Unsurprisingly, they are slowly being changed.

My "simple" rule of thumb to call people by the name they prefer is more complex than it may seem. The far north, for example, is home to a constellation of related societies generally known as "Eskimo," but in the 1980s this term was replaced by "Inuit" in Canada, where most of these groups live, after complaints that "Eskimo" came from a pejorative term in Algonquian language that meant "eater of raw flesh." Why this would be bothersome seems unclear, because raw meat is a preferred part of northerners' diet, much as sushi is favored by the Japanese. In any case, linguists believe that "Eskimo" actually stems from the Algonquian terms for "snowshoe netter" or "people who speak a different language," neither of which seems especially derogatory. Worse for contemporary purposes, "Inuit" is also the name of a specific subgroup of Arctic societies, to which such northern indigenous peoples as the Aleutiq in the Aleutian Islands and Innu in Labrador do not belong. If that weren't enough, the Inupiat in Alaska, who belong to the Inuit subgroup but speak a different language than their cousins in Canada, have generally resisted the term "Inuit" in favor of "Alaska Native" or, sometimes, "Eskimo."

An additional source of confusion occurs when indigenous languages have different romanization schemes. Runa Simi (Quechua), the group of languages spoken in the former Inka empire, has several; I have tried to follow the one promulgated by the Peruvian Academia Mayor de la Lengua Quechua in 1995, which seems to be slowly gaining popularity. The choice is more difficult for the three dozen languages grouped as "Maya." As an example, the name of the ruler slain at the beginning of Chapter 8 has been rendered as, among other things, Toh-Chak-Ich'ak, Chak Toh Ich'ak, and Chak Tok Ich'aak; his title, "lord," has been romanized as *ahau*, *ahaw*, *ajau*, *ajaw*, and even *axaw*. In 1989 the Ministry of Culture and Sports in Guatemala published a standardized orthography for Maya. Unfortunately, Mexico has a different one. Indeed, it has *several*. Various Mexican agencies have issued putatively official orthographies, most based on Alfredo Barrera Vásquez's classic *Diccionario Maya Cordemex*, all intended to "help save these languages from extinction." In this book, I throw up my hands and spell Maya names as they appear in the most authoritative recent source I have come across: *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, by the epigraphers Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube. (None of this is to say that I have not made mistakes or sometimes

failed to follow my own rules. I'm sure I have done exactly that, though I tried not to.)

The second type of problem, that of categorization, is equally knotty. Take the word "civilization"—"a saltpeter of a word, often triggering explosive arguments," Alfred Crosby has written. The arguments occur when cultures are deemed not to be civilizations; are they therefore "uncivilized"? Archaeologists and anthropologists have proposed dozens of definitions and argue about whether the existence of a written language is essential. If it is, there may have been no Indian civilizations outside Mesoamerica. Yet other parts of the Americas are filled with ruins (Tiwanaku, Marajó, Cahokia) that would be described as the product of a civilization if they were anywhere else in the world. The distinction seems to me unhelpful. Like Crosby, I use the word "not in moral comment, but simply in reference to peoples settled in cities, villages, hamlets, and to the kinds of political, economic, social, and military structures associated with such populations."

Sometimes researchers attempt to avoid the whole debate by substituting the term "complex society." Not much is gained thereby, because it implies that hunters and gatherers have simple lives. A century ago, anthropologist Franz Boas demonstrated the contrary as he struggled to fathom the mind-bogglingly elaborate patterns of Northwest Coast Indian life. Still, the term has some resonance. As societies grow larger, their members become more encrusted by manufactured goods, both standardized for the mass consumer and custom-made for the elite. Along with this growth comes a growth in the size and variety of the technological infrastructure. It is in this material sense that I use the words "complex" and "sophisticated."

In this book I tend to marshal terms like "king" and "nation" rather than "chief" and "tribe." Supposedly the latter refer mainly to kin-based societies whereas the former are for bigger societies based on a shared group identity. In practice, though, "chief" and "tribe" have historically been used to refer disparagingly to frontier cultures conquered by larger societies. In textbooks the Roman emperors, heroic custodians of Greco-Roman civilization, are always fighting off the "barbarian chiefs" of the "Germanic tribes." But these "tribes" had rulers who lived in big palaces, held sway over sizable domains, and had to abide by written codes of law. The Burgundian "tribe" even conquered Rome and set up its own puppet Roman emperor in the fifth century. (He was killed by another "tribe," which installed its own emperor.)

Maps of fifth- and sixth-century Europe usually depict the "Celtic kingdoms," "Kingdom of the Lombards," and so on, their borders marked by the solid lines we associate with national frontiers. But entities of equal or greater size and technological sophistication in the Western Hemisphere are routinely called "chiefdoms" and "tribes," implying they are somehow different

and of smaller scale. And fuzzy lines mark their borders, as if to indicate the looseness with which they were organized and defined. "'Tribe' and 'chiefdom' are not neutral scientific terms," archaeologist Alice Beck Kehoe has declared. "They are politically loaded." I have mostly avoided them.

In general, I have tried to use the terms that historians of Europe or Asia would use to describe social and political entities of similar size and complexity. This approach risks obliterating the real differences between, to cite one example, the court in Qosqo and the court in Madrid. But it supports one of the larger aims of this book: to explain in lay terms researchers' increasing recognition that the Western Hemisphere played a role in the human story just as interesting and important as that of the Eastern Hemisphere.

A final note: throughout the text, I use the European terminology of B.C. and A.D. Many researchers object to them as ethnically bound. In truth, it is a little odd to be talking about "years before Christ" in reference to people whose cultural traditions have nothing to do with Christianity. But no plausible substitutes are available. Some historians use B.C.E. to mean "before the Christian era," but this still places past events in reference to Christianity, the main objection. Besides, in some parts of South America and Mesoamerica there never *has* been a Christian era. One could switch to a neutral calendar like the Julian calendar used by astronomers (the latter at least doesn't get tripped up by zero—it is the first European calendar as sophisticated as the Mesoamerican Long Count). This doesn't seem useful; to discharge their informational content, readers will have to translate Julian dates back into what they know, the familiar A.D. and B.C. It seems only kind to save them the bother.