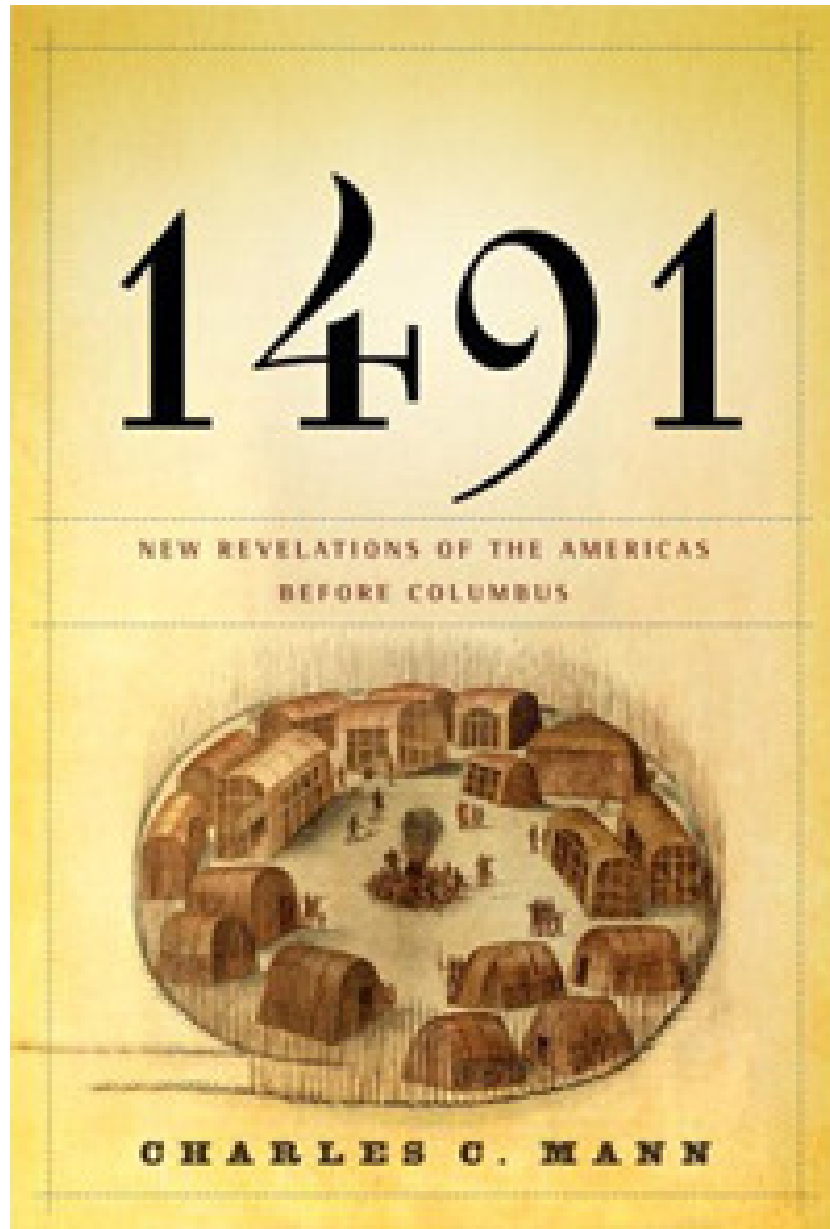


# 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus Book PDF Download



By:  
**Charles C. Mann**

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### Brendan

The survey of current thinking on the population of the americas via that Beringia land bridge and the subsequent summary of the evolutions of early american society is interesting.

But the repeated comparisons between american society and eurasian society are really fraught and often belabored. The comparisons between the two hemisphere's agriculture and domesticable animals are fine, but the assertion that Aztec (apparently it's more politically correct to call them Mexica) philosophy was as ri

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But the repeated comparisons between american society and eurasian society are really fraught and often belabored. The comparisons between the two hemisphere's agriculture and domesticable animals are fine, but the assertion that Aztec (apparently it's more politically correct to call them Mexica) philosophy was as rich as medieval europe's is ludicrous, especially given that such a huge volume of Aztec codices have been preserved and deciphered. The Aztecs did some respectable philosophical work, but Mann's exaggerations aside, they didn't come close to rivaling the work done in ancient Greece, to say nothing of the subsequent 2,000 years of philosophy in Europe (with a nod towards Middle Eastern contributions as well) that took place between the death of Aristotle and the discovery of the new world. Today, it may be possible to take a mesoamerican philosophy course in some university departments, but there are very few (if any) lasting or novel contributions to the the broader discipline of philosophy to be found in Aztec (or Mayan, or Incan) philosophy. There's no shame in that: it has been said that all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato. So why feel the need to exaggerate and mislead readers by making politically correct assertions that have no basis in reality?

Also, the distinction the author draws between guilt and responsibility (i.e. 'we' should not feel guilty that Cortes introduced smallpox and wiped out 95% of american indians, but 'we' have some responsibility for this) is way too underdeveloped to be taken seriously. I don't necessarily think that the discussion is even necessary, but it is not an uncommon discussion in US politics, and Mann consciously decides to wade into these waters. First, he never defines 'we,' though it seems he means whites of european descent residing in the new world (and maybe Europeans back in Europe who benefitted from mercantilism/colonialism? It's not clear). And then he never explains how responsibility can be justly divided among descendants; how someone of, say, direct Cortez lineage might have a different level of 'responsibility' than a descendant of an Irish family with no seafaring ancestors and no pedigree in the New World until the late 19th century. And if they have the same 'responsibility,' then does a modern day Chinese or Indian immigrant to the new world also

have some responsibility? All unclear, and the absence of even any contemplation of these points leaves the book's attempts at constructing a morality of European/American Indian interaction disappointingly hollow. Mann decided the topic was worthy enough to merit some discussion; it is unfortunate he failed to do the topic any justice.

## Jason Koivu

This was like a coloring book of pre-Pilgrim North America for me in that it filled in a lot of unanswered questions and brilliantly illuminated some areas of my knowledge that were mere outlines. It stays within the lines and makes my early attempts at coloring in the past look like spidery, seizure-induced scrawlings.

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Being originally from New England, I'm well aware that there were inhabitants here long before the Europeans arrived. Early on in school we were inundated with stories of Samoset and Squanto, the first Native Americans to make contact with the Plymouth Colony pilgrims, and how in 1621 they strolled into the transplanted Englishmen's village and a big party broke out, thus began the tradition of Thanksgiving. I was (mis)taught in a Massachusetts classroom where heritage and history are king, so much was made of this. We were led to believe the story by elementary schoolteachers who probably wholeheartedly believed it themselves. What about the Virginia Colony of 1607 and their contact with the native inhabitants? It failed, so sweep it under the rug. Something tells me this version of America's founding by Europeans was not the one being taught in Virginia at the time...

Never was explained how the two natives could speak English (from Englishmen fishing off of the Maine coast and, in Squanto's case, from abduction and internment for seven years in England) or anything that happened in the Americas prior to the pilgrims landing. Oh sure there was talk of Incas and Mayans and their all important maize. But the extent, the sheer size of the native tribes, clans, and cosmopolitan societies of the Americas, north and south, and how Europe brought it all down upon their heads, none of this was discussed. Why? Because even during the late 1970s and early 80s when the movement to turn the Native Americans into mystical caretakers of Mother Earth, there was still a prejudicial sense of 'white is right' prevalent, at least in the neighborhood I grew up in. The other reason is a plain lack of knowledge. My simple teachers simply did not know. They can't wholly be blamed. The information wasn't readily available or flat-out

available. School books were traditional and outdated. The grey-area material was swept under the rug. Now there is less grey-area material - advances in technology and archaeological practices have greatly advanced our knowledge of the past in just a few short decades - but there's still plenty of unknown patches of time in the western hemisphere. In

Mann does not shy away from them.

Having said that, it should be noted that this is not just about North America. No, in fact more time is spent on everything below it. Through discovered texts and deciphered inscriptions there's just more known about Mesoamerica than the other areas, so yes, there are pages upon pages about those Incas and Mayans.

In general what I love about

is that it doesn't take the Indians' side or the Europeans'. It doesn't try to cast a glowing angelic light upon the native inhabitants to transform them into woodland spirits whose only concern was the preservation of the trees and the birds, etc blah blah blah (Earth Day is quaint and misguided, but I digress...), nor does Mann attempt to attack or defend the actions of the Europeans. All is more of a statement of fact or, if lacking concrete evidence, a statement of possibility based on sound theory.

## **Douglas Hunter**

As someone who writes professionally in this area (unabashed plug: watch for God's Mercies, Doubleday Canada, in October 07) I have high praise for this title, a long-overdue assessment of native culture and civilization before (and at) contact with Europeans. I'm still reading it, but I've been impressed so far.[I've now finished, see below.] Anyone who enjoyed it should also consider Elaine Dewar's Bones, which explores the archaeological controversy of how long people have been in the New Wor

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My only critique of 1491, and it is minor, is that the author I feel overstates the case that Europeans (mainly English) did not enjoy a military superiority over the natives, that their powder weapons were ineffective. This is a rather generous reading of native military capability. The English army did away with the longbow in 1598, and for all their problems, powder weapons were a clear advantage. Frenchman Samuel de Champlain used just three harquebus to devastating effect against the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) in 1609, and in his trade and colonization monopoly, secured in 1612 under the Prince de Condé, the terms specifically forbid anyone to trade powder weapons with the natives, under penalty of a 10,000 livre fine and corporal punishment. One of the key factors in European inability not to immediately conquer or eradicate native populations by force was the sheer lack of firepower. (They also needed them as trade partners.) These commercial ventures (English and French in particular) didn't have the full might of their states behind them in the early contact period. Had England or France made up their mind to truly "conquer" these shores and their peoples, they would have marched through them much like de Soto did in the southeastern US in the mid 16th century, for good or for ill (pretty well for ill). But an idea the author does well to advance is the fact that coastal nations or tribes that made contact with the newcomers often came to decide that they should secure a strategic advantage and enlist the newcomers' aid in fighting their own enemies. It was a complicated time, and 1491 is a worthy overview.

Having now finished, I'll still recommend it. For those interested in precontact cultures north of 49 (as in half of North America) the lack of material about French Canada is a little disappointing. There's nothing about the much-debated vanishing of the Iroquoian-speaking residents of the St. Lawrence (at Hochelaga and Stadacona) who were there in large numbers in palisade villages when Cartier first visited in the 1530s, but had vanished utterly by the time Champlain showed up in 1603. But that's nitpicky, considering the enormous scope of this work.

## Jason

Very well written, a good mixture of factual evidence and narrative. The main take home point here should be known to everyone, especially Americans. There is a reason why there was a period of 128 years between Columbus' landing and a permanent European settlement in North America. Namely, there were millions of Native Americans there who thought Europeans were dirty, amusing creatures who had interesting objects but were not fit for being neighbors. Attempted European settlers were continuousl

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Oh yeah, and concerning South America, there is evidence that much, possibly 70-80%, of the Amazon forest is man-made.

This is definitely a well researched & eye opening book that will challenge the idea that Native Americans were a sparse people who had no effect on their environment and let things be on their own. The only reason people think that most Native Americans were purely nomadic hunters was because the smallpox had killed off most of the 'urbanized' settlements that required agriculture.



## Felicia

Fascinating exploration of what we know of the "New World" before Columbus arrived. I knew pretty much nothing about the Incas, the Mayans, the Aztecs, and all the other societies that actually were possibly BIGGER than Europe in 1492, and dwarfed it in centuries before. It's also an interesting survey of these societies and their environments, of how the Indians and the "pristine" environments are a bit of a myth. The scope of the book covers so many different culture, puts everything into a co

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The author obviously loves what he does, and relishes research and it definitely makes potentially dry material come to life. Opened my eyes to a subject I knew nothing about, so I highly recommend!!!!