



1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created

By Charles C. Mann

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A deeply engaging new history of how European settlements in the post-Colombian Americas shaped the world, from the bestselling author of *1491*. Presenting the latest research by biologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians, Mann shows how the post-Columbian network of ecological and economic exchange fostered the rise of Europe, devastated imperial China, convulsed Africa, and for two centuries made Mexico City—where Asia, Europe, and the new frontier of the Americas dynamically interacted—the center of the world. In this history, Mann uncovers the germ of today's fiercest political disputes, from immigration to trade policy to culture wars. In *1493*, Mann has again given readers an eye-opening scientific interpretation of our past, unequaled in its authority and fascination.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Guest Reviewer: Nathaniel Philbrick on 1493 by Charles C. Mann



Nathaniel Philbrick is the author of the New York Times bestsellers *The Last Stand*; *In the Heart of the Sea*, which won the National Book Award; *Sea of Glory*, winner of the Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt Naval History Prize; and *Mayflower*, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in history and one of the New York Times' ten best books of the year. He has lived on Nantucket since 1986.

I'm a big fan of Charles Mann's previous book *1491*, in which he provides a sweeping and provocative examination of North and South America prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus. It's exhaustively researched but so wonderfully written that it's anything but exhausting to read.

With his follow-up, *1493*, Mann has taken it to a new, truly global level. Building on the groundbreaking work of Alfred Crosby (author of *The Columbian Exchange* and, I'm proud to say, a fellow Nantucketer), Mann has written nothing less than the story of our world: how a planet of what were once several autonomous continents is quickly becoming a single, "globalized" entity.

Mann not only talked to countless scientists and researchers; he visited the places he writes about, and as a consequence, the book has a marvelously wide-ranging yet personal feel as we follow Mann from one far-flung corner of the world to the next. And always, the prose is masterful. In telling the improbable story of how Spanish and Chinese cultures collided in the Philippines in the sixteenth century, he takes us to the island of Mindoro whose "southern coast consists of a number of small bays, one next to another like tooth marks in an apple."

We learn how the spread of malaria, the potato, tobacco, guano, rubber plants, and sugar cane have disrupted and convulsed the planet and will continue to do so until we are finally living on one integrated or at least close-to-integrated Earth. Whether or not the human instigators of all this remarkable change will survive the

process they helped to initiate more than five hundred years ago remains, Mann suggests in this monumental and revelatory book, an open question.

A Letter from Charles C. Mann



It looked an ice cream cone. But when I came closer, I realized that the boy was eating a raw sweet potato. His father had whittled at the top to expose the orange flesh, which the boy was licking; the unpeeled bottom of the sweet potato served as a handle.

This was at a farm about 300 miles northwest of Shanghai. Sweet potatoes are often eaten raw in rural China--a curiosity to Westerners like me. I didn't realize that I had been staring until the boy ran to seek the protection of his father, who was hoeing a row of sweet potatoes. The father glared at me as I waved an apology. Because I don't speak Chinese, I couldn't tell him that I had been staring not at his son, but at the sweet potato in his hand. Nor could I say that I was staring because the sweet potato was an emblem of four hundred years of convulsive global change.

Sweet potatoes are native to Central America. Spanish ships carried them to Manila in the 1570s, and then a Chinese ship captain smuggled the vines past Spanish customs by wrapping them around ropes and coiling the ropes in a basket. He took the contraband plants to Fujian, in southeast China, across from Taiwan. It was a time of famine in China. The captain's son took the sweet potatoes to the governor of Fujian, who in turn ordered farmers to plant the fanshu (foreign tubers). The famine ended. Other regions took up sweet potatoes to solve their food problems. Millions of lives were saved. For three centuries the food of the Chinese poor was not rice but sweet potato.

How did that Chinese kid get his sweet potato? Christopher Columbus. Scientists view Columbus as the man who inadvertently began an explosive global biological swap. After he established contact between the eastern and western hemisphere, thousands of plant and animal species ricocheted around the continents. It was the biggest event in the history of life since the death of the dinosaurs. The Columbian Exchange, as historians call it, is why there are tomatoes in Italy, oranges in the United States, potatoes in Ireland, chili peppers in Thailand--and sweet potatoes in China.

It also is a big part of the reason why the British lost the Revolutionary War, why Mexico City became the world's first truly international city, and why millions of African slaves were transported unwillingly across the Atlantic. Indeed, these are among the subjects of my book, which is largely about the Columbian Exchange.

The sweet potato--along with another American import, corn--did help save China from the calamity of famine. But they also caused another calamity. Traditional Chinese agriculture focused on rice, which had to be grown in wet river valleys. Sweet potatoes and corn could be grown in China's dry highlands. Armies of farmers went out and cleared the forests on these highlands. The result was catastrophic erosion. Silt filled the Yangzi and Huang He (Yellow) rivers, setting off huge floods that killed millions of people. It was like one Katrina after another, a Chinese scientist told me. Beset by disaster, China fell behind in the race for global supremacy.

All of this history was encapsulated in the boy and his sweet potato, though he didn't know it. To him, it was just a snack. When I took out my camera, the boy's father rolled his eyes in disbelief. But I was taking a picture of centuries of global turbulence. The boy pouted; I clicked the shutter.

Timeline for 1493

200,000,000 B.C.: Geological forces begin to break up the world's single giant continent, Pangaea, forever separating the hemispheres. After this, Eurasia and the Americas develop completely different suites of plants and animals. **1493 A.D.:** Columbus sails on second voyage, establishing the first consequential European settlement in the Americas. Without intending to, he ends the long separation of the hemispheres—and sets off the ecological convulsion known as the Columbian Exchange. **1518:** In the first environmental calamity of the modern era, accidentally imported African scale insects in Hispaniola lead to an explosion of fire ants. Spaniards flee the ant-infested island in droves; colonists in Santo Domingo hold procession in honor of St. Saturninus, praying for his aid against the insect plague. **1545:** Spaniards discover the world's biggest silver strike in Bolivia. In the next century, the world's supply of this precious metal will more than double, giving Europe an economic edge that will help it colonize Africa, Asia and the Americas. **1549:** Initial appearance of tobacco—the addictive American drug that becomes the first global commodity craze—in China. That same year, Hernán Cortés inaugurates the human part of the Columbian Exchange by signing the first contract to import large numbers of Africans to the American mainland. **1571:** Miguel López de Legazpi colonizes Manila and establishes continual trade with China—Columbus's life-long, never-fulfilled dream. Knitting the entire inhabited planet into a single web of trade, Legazpi's actions are the beginning of today's economic globalization. **~1615:** Earthworms come to northern North America in English ship ballast. During the next three centuries, they will re-engineer forests from Ohio Valley to Hudson Bay. **1630-60:** The gush of American silver finally causes its price to collapse, setting off a the world's first global economic calamity. **1644:** Collapse of Ming dynasty. Long struggle between remaining Ming in south and incoming Qing dynasty in north leads the latter to forcibly evacuate most of the southern coast; millions of dispossessed people pour into the mountains, where they grow maize and sweet potatoes, American crops first smuggled into China from Manila and other European bases. **1775:** France's Flour War, set off by high bread prices, persuades King Louis XVI to allow the pioneering nutritional chemist Antoine-Augustin Parmentier to stage a series of publicity stunts to persuade farmers to grow potatoes, a distrusted foreign species from Peru. Parmentier's PR is so successful that broad swathes of northern Europe are soon covered with a monoculture of potatoes. **1781:** Britain's "southern strategy" pushes Gen. Cornwallis's army into North America's malaria zone, an area dominated by malaria parasites introduced from Europe and Africa. Defeated by malaria, the British army surrenders to a general it never fought: George Washington. This ends the Revolutionary War. **1845:** Europe's potato monoculture, which is unlike anything ever seen in Peru, turns out to be especially vulnerable to another Peruvian import, the potato

blight. Ravaging the continent from Russia to Ireland, the blight causes a famine that kills an estimated two million people, half of them in Ireland. **~1867:** Léopold Trouvelot, French amateur entomologist, smuggles gypsy moths to Medford, Mass., hoping to breed them with native silk-producing moths to produce a more robust silk-producer. Their almost immediate escape sets off an invasion that continues today. Trouvelot hurriedly returns to France before the dimensions of the problem can be known. **1880-1912:** Industrializing nations, desperate for the elastic belts, pliable gaskets and the absorbent tires needed by steam engines and vehicles, buy every scrap of rubber they can get from the Amazon's rubber trees, the sole source of high-quality latex. The ensuing rubber boom collapses after an Englishman smuggles rubber trees out of Brazil. Soon much of southeast Asia is covered with this foreign tree. **1979:** The golden apple snail is sent from Brazil to Taiwan to launch an escargot industry there. It escapes, proliferates, and becomes a major menace to the island's rice crop.

Review

A *New York Times* Notable Book
A *TIME* Magazine Best Book of the Year
A *Washington Post* Notable Book

"Fascinating. . . . Lively. . . . A convincing explanation of why our world is the way it is."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Even the wisest readers will find many surprises here. . . . Like *1491*, Mann's sequel will change worldviews."

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Exemplary in its union of meaningful fact with good storytelling, *1493* ranges across continents and centuries to explain how the world we inhabit came to be."

—*The Washington Post*

"Engaging. . . . Mann deftly illuminates contradictions on a human scale: the blind violence and terror at Jamestown, the cruel exploitation of labor in the silver mines of Bolivia, the awe felt by Europeans upon first seeing a rubber ball bounce."

—*The New Yorker*

"Revelatory."
—Lev Grossman, *Time Magazine*

"Compelling and eye-opening."
—*Publishers Weekly* Top 100 Books of 2011

"A book to celebrate. . . . A bracingly persuasive counternarrative to the prevailing mythology about the historical significance of the 'discovery' of America. . . . *1493* is rich in detail, analytically expansive and impossible to summarize. . . . [Mann's book] deserves a prominent place among that very rare class of books that can make a difference in how we see the world, although it is neither a polemic nor a work of advocacy. Thoughtful, learned and respectful of its subject matter, *1493* is a splendid achievement."

—*The Oregonian*

"Despite his scope, Mann remains grounded in fascinating details. . . . Such technical insights enhance a very

human story, told in lively and accessible prose.”

—*Cleveland Plain-Dealer*

“Mann’s excitement never flags as he tells his breathtaking story. . . There is grandeur in this view of the past that looks afresh at the different parts of the world and the parts each played in shaping it.”

—*Financial Times*

“A muscular, densely documented follow-up [to Mann’s *1491*]. . . Like its predecessor, *1493* runs to more than 400 pages, but it moves at a gallop. . . As a historian Mann should be admired not just for his broad scope and restless intelligence but for his biological sensitivity. At every point of his tale he keeps foremost in his mind the effect of humans’ activities on the broader environment they inhabit.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Evenhandedness, a sense of wonder, the gift of turning a phrase. . . Mann loves the world and adopts it as his own.”

—*Science*

“Charles C. Mann glories in reality, immersing his reader in complexity. . . . The worn clichés crumble as readers gain introductions to the freshest of the systems of analysis gendered in the first post-Columbian millennium.”

—Alfred W. Crosby, author of *The Columbian Exchange*

“In the wake of his groundbreaking book *1491* Charles Mann has once again produced a brilliant and riveting work that will forever change the way we see the world. Mann shows how the ecological collision of Europe and the Americas transformed virtually every aspect of human history. Beautifully written, and packed with startling research, *1493* is a monumental achievement.”

—David Grann, author of *The Lost City of Z*

“[*1493*] is readable and well-written, based on his usual broad research, travels and interviews. A fascinating and important topic, admirably told.”

—John Hemming, author of *Tree of Rivers*

“Fascinating. . . Convincing. . . A spellbinding account of how an unplanned collision of unfamiliar animals, vegetables, minerals and diseases produced unforeseen wealth, misery, social upheaval and the modern world.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“A fascinating survey. . . A lucid historical panorama that’s studded with entertaining studies of Chinese pirate fleets, courtly tobacco rituals, and the bloody feud between Jamestown colonists and the Indians who fed and fought them, to name a few. Brilliantly assembling colorful details into big-picture insights, Mann’s fresh challenge to Eurocentric histories puts interdependence at the origin of modernity.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“Charles Mann expertly shows how the complex, interconnected ecological and economic consequences of the European discovery of the Americas shaped many unexpected aspects of the modern world. This is an example of the best kind of history book: one that changes the way you look at the world, even as it informs and entertains.”

—Tom Standage, author of *A History of the World in Six Glasses*

“A landmark book. . . Entrancingly provocative, *1493* bristles with illuminations, insights and surprises.”
—*Shelf Awareness*

“Fascinating. . . Engaging and well-written. . . Information and insight abound on every page. This dazzling display of erudition, theory and insight will help readers to view history in a fresh way.”
—*BookPage*

“Spirited. . . One thing is indisputable: Mann is definitely global in his outlook and tribal in his thinking. . . Mann’s taxonomy of the ecological, political, religious, economic, anthropological and mystical melds together in an intriguing whole cloth.”

—*The Star-Ledger*

“Mann has managed the difficult trick of telling a complicated story in engaging and clear prose while refusing to reduce its ambiguities to slogans. He is not a professional historian, but most professionals could learn a lot from the deft way he does this. . . *1493* is thoroughly researched and up-to-date, combining scholarship from fields as varied as world history, immunology, and economics, but Mann wears his learning lightly. He serves up one arresting detail after another, always in vivid language. Most impressive of all, he manages to turn plants, germs, insects and excrement into the lead actors in his drama while still parading before us an unforgettable cast of human characters. He makes even the most unpromising-sounding subjects fascinating. I, for one, will never look at a piece of rubber in quite the same way now. . . The Columbian Exchange has shaped everything about the modern world. It brought us the plants we tend in our gardens and the pests that eat them. And as it accelerates in the 21st century, it may take both away again. If you want to understand why, read *1493*.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Mann is trying to do much more than punch holes in conventional wisdom; he’s trying to piece together an elaborate, alternative history that describes profound changes in the world since the original voyage of Columbus. What’s most surprising is that he manages to do this in such an engaging way. He writes with an incredibly dry wit.”

—*Austin American-Statesman*

“Mann’s book is jammed with facts and factoids, trivia and moments of great insight that take on power as they accumulate.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Although many have written about the impact of Europeans on the New World, few have told the worldwide story in a manner accessible to lay readers as effectively as Mann does here.”

—*Library Journal*

“The chief strength of Mann’s richly associative books lies in their ability to reveal new patterns among seemingly disparate pieces of accepted knowledge. They’re stuffed with forehead-slapping ‘aha’ moments. . . If Mann were to work his way methodically through the odd-numbered years of history, he could be expected to publish a book about the global impact of the Great Recession sometime in the middle of the next millennium. If it’s as good as *1493*, it would be worth the wait.”

—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“None of us could travel with Columbus in 1492. But that’s OK, because in *1493* we can take an even more exhilarating ride. This powerful rethinking of the origins and consequences of globalization is so illuminating, it’s scary.”

—Carl Safina, author of *A Sea In Flames* and *The View From Lazy Point*

“Almost mind-boggling in its scope, enthusiasm and erudition. . . Almost every page of *1493* contains some extraordinarily provocative argument or arrestingly bizarre detail. . . Ranging freely across time and space, Mann’s book is full of compelling stories. . . A tremendously provocative, learned and surprising read.”

—*The Times of London*

About the Author

Charles C. Mann, a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, *Science*, and *Wired*, has written for *Fortune*, *The New York Times*, *Smithsonian*, *Technology Review*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The Washington Post*, as well as for the TV network HBO and the series *Law & Order*. A three-time National Magazine Award finalist, he is the recipient of writing awards from the American Bar Association, the American Institute of Physics, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the Lannan Foundation. His *1491* won the National Academies Communication Award for the best book of the year.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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