

Crazy Soup

JOHNNY GOOD-LOOKING

In the 1520s a solitary man constructed a small chapel on the western highway out of Mexico City, just beyond the causeway that led to the city's western gate. No description of the chapel survives, but it was probably just two whitewashed adobe rooms: one for the shrine itself, with an altar and cross; one for the man who built and maintained it. Nearby were a few small fields on which he grew crops. The structure was known as the Chapel of the Martyrs or, more impressively, the Chapel of the Eleven Thousand Martyrs. It may have been the first Christian church in mainland America.

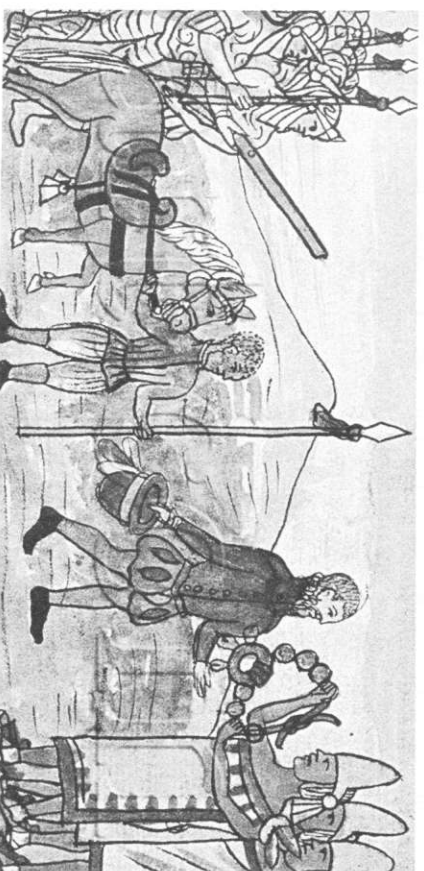
The man in the chapel was named Juan Garrido. Little is known about his childhood except that he was not named Juan Garrido. According to his biographer, Ricardo E. Alegría, an anthropologist in Puerto Rico, he was born in West Africa, probably in the 1480s. His rich, powerful family desired to grow richer and more powerful by selling slaves to Europeans. Alegría suggests that Garrido's family sent the youth to Lisbon as an agent. Matthew Restall, a Pennsylvania State University historian who has also studied Garrido's life, is skeptical of this idea—very few Africans, he says, came voluntarily to Europe. Almost certainly Garrido arrived as a slave, Restall believes, one of the tens of thousands of African captives then in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

Whether Garrido came in chains or as a representative of his family, he refused to follow anyone else's plan. Rather than remaining in Portugal, he crossed the Spanish border and went to Seville. He spent seven years there, giving himself a European name along the way. Something of his personality is hinted at by the name he chose: Juan Garrido, which means, more or less, Johnny Good-looking.

Johnny Good-looking crossed the Atlantic early in the sixteenth century, landing in Hispaniola. As aggressive and ambitious as any other conquistador, a young man with his blood aboil, he quickly attached himself to a local sub-governor, Juan Ponce de León y Figueroa, accompanying him on a mission to take over the island of Puerto Rico. When Ponce de León sank his fortune into an off-kilter hunt for the Fountain of Youth, Garrido joined the futile quest. (Along the way, they became the first people from the opposite shore of the Atlantic to touch down on Florida.) When Spain launched punitive expeditions against Caribe Indians on half a dozen Caribbean islands, Garrido brought his gun. And when Hernán Cortés seized the Triple Alliance, Johnny Good-looking was at his side.

The alliance is more commonly known as the Aztec empire, but the term is a nineteenth-century invention, and historians increasingly avoid it. It was a consortium of three militarized city-states in the middle of Mexico: Texcoco, Tlacopan, and Tenochtitlan, the last by far the most powerful partner. When the Spaniards arrived, this Triple Alliance ruled central Mexico from ocean to ocean and Tenochtitlan was bigger and richer than any city in Spain.

As canny a politician as he was a fighter, Cortés was able to foment an assault on the empire by its many enemies and place himself at its head. But despite taking the Triple Alliance emperor hostage in his own palace—a paralyzing surprise to the enemy—the initial assault failed calamitously. Indeed, the Spaniards barely escaped from Tenochtitlan. When all seemed lost,



An African man, very possibly Juan Garrido, holds Hernán Cortés's horse as the conquistador, feathered hat in hand, approaches Motecuhzoma, paramount leader of the Triple Alliance. The drawing is from Diego Durán's renowned account of the conquest of Mexico, *The History of the Indies of New Spain* (c. 1581).

Cortés had a stroke of luck: the accidental introduction of the smallpox virus. Never before seen in the Americas, transmittable with horrific ease, the virus swept through densely packed central Mexico, killing a third or more of its population in a few months.*

As the Triple Alliance reeled from the epidemic, the Spanish-Indian army attacked the capital a second time in May 1521, with as many as 200,000 troops. Tenochtitlan occupied a Venice-like clump of islands, many of them human-made, on the west side of an eighty-mile-long, artificially reconnected lake. Spiderwebbing from the metropolis was an intricate network of causeways, dikes, dams, baffles, and channels that both kept back floods during the wet season and funneled water around the city during the dry season.

Cortés's strategy was in part to avoid the heavily defended causeways into the city by draining and filling the moat-like channels around them, thus creating dry land from which he could assault less-protected areas of the perimeter. During the siege, the attackers repeatedly tore out dikes and piled up stones and earth during the day, and the Triple Alliance repeatedly reassembled the dikes and reflooded the channels at night. On June 30, the Alliance set a trap at the shore entrance to Tenochtitlan's western causeway, undermining a bridge that crossed a shallow, reed-thick waterway. When the attackers charged across the bridge, wrote the sixteenth-century chronicler Diego Durán, "the entire thing collapsed, together with the Spaniards and Indians who stood upon it." From hiding places in the reeds shot canoes loaded with men wielding bows, spears, and stolen Spanish swords. Flailing in the brackish water, the Spaniards and their horses were easy prey; Cortés himself was wounded and almost captured.

As the surviving attackers fled to safety, they heard the boom of an enormous drum—"so vast in its dimensions," the conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo later recalled, "that it could be heard from eight to twelve miles distance." The Spaniards spun on their heels. Across the water they could see Triple Alliance soldiers dragging Spanish prisoners, still dripping from the watery ambush, to the summit of a great, pyramidal temple. In an act meant to terrify and demoralize, Alliance soldiers and priests ripped open the captives' chests, tore out their hearts, and kicked the bodies down the temple steps. The next morning they marched another prisoner—"a handsome Sevilian," Durán wrote—to the edge of the channel and in full view of his

* This direst instance of the Columbian Exchange is often said to have been introduced in the body of an African slave named Francisco de Eguía or Baguía. Other reports contend that the carriers were Cuban Indians brought as auxiliaries by the Spaniards. Retall suspects that "granting the role of patient zero" to Africans or Indians is "classic Spanish scapegoating." So horrific was the epidemic, he suggests, that Spaniards did not want to be seen as the cause.

stable, auctioneer, executioner, piper, master of weights [responsible for assaying silver and gold], and doorkeeper or guard." As Iaguiappe, Garrido accompanied Cortés in 1535 on the latter's ill-fated attempt to cross Mexico and sail to China—the ultimate goal of Spanish adventurers.

Garrido's biggest contribution occurred after Cortés found three kernels of bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) in a sack of rice that had been sent from Spain. The conqueror asked his go-to man to plant them in a plot near the chapel that served as a kind of experimental farm. "Two of them grew," the historian Francisco López de Gomara reported in 1552,

and one of them produced 180 kernels. They later turned around and planted those kernels, and little by little there was boundless wheat: one [kernel] yields a hundred, three hundred, and even more with irrigation and sowing by hand. . . . To a black man and slave is owed so much benefit!

Wheat was not only desired by roll-eating, cake-munching, beer-guzzling conquistadors, it was a necessity for the politically powerful clergy, who needed bread to celebrate Mass properly. Repeatedly Spaniards had tried to grow *T. aestivum* in Hispaniola, and repeatedly it had failed in the hot, humid climate. Garrido's wheat was greeted with joy—in a strange land, it was the taste of home. Soon the golden herringbone tassels of wheat spikelets waved across central Mexico, replacing thousands of acres of maize and woodland. More than that, Mexican smallholders say, Spaniards carried Garrido's *T. aestivum* to Texas, from where it spread up the Mississippi. If this is accurate, much or most of the wheat that by the nineteenth century had transformed the Midwest into an agricultural powerhouse came from an African roadside chapel in Mexico City.

In planting Cortés's wheat, Garrido was acting as an agent of the Columbian Exchange. More important, though, he himself was part of the exchange, as were Cortés and the other foreigners.

Previously in this book, I described researchers' evolving view of the Columbian Exchange. I first looked at the Atlantic (Chapters 2 and 3), where the most important effects were caused by microscopic imports to the Americas (initially the diseases that depopulated Indian societies, then malaria and yellow fever, which encouraged plantation slavery). Next I treated the Pacific (Chapters 4 and 5), where the major introductions were American food crops, which both helped sustain a population boom and led indirectly to massive environmental problems. In the next section (Chapters 6 and 7), I showed how environmental historians have increasingly come to believe that



Tenochtitlan, seen in a present-day artist's reconstruction, dazzled the Spaniards when they saw it—the city was grander than any in Spain. Protecting the city was an irregular, ten-mile-long dike (far right in image) that separated the brackish water of the main lake from a new, human-made freshwater lake that surrounded the city and provided water for a network of artificial wetland farms known as *chinampas*.

friends "ripped him to bits then and there." When Tenochtitlan fell, Cortés had his revenge. He stood by as his troops and their native allies despoiled the shattered city, slaughtering the men and raping the women.

Juan Garrido may have been at the ambush or known the sacrificed Spaniards or both. In any case, he was asked by Cortés to build the Chapel of the Martyrs, a monument and graveyard for fallen conquistadors, on the spot where the ambush took place. The assignment was but one of many, for Garrido soon became one of the conqueror's go-to men as he erected Spanish Mexico City literally atop the wreckage of Indian Tenochtitlan. Johnny Good-looking became a kind of majordomo for the new municipal government, protector of the trees that shaded the highways into town (the records give no reason for the position, but one can guess the trees were being cut for fuel); guardian of the main city water supply (Tenochtitlan, which had no water of its own, was supplied via aqueduct from mountain springs); and town crier—a position, Restall says, that could include the duties of a "con-

the Columbian Exchange played a role in the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century and the industrial revolution of the nineteenth. Both occurred first in Europe, and so this ecological phenomenon had large-scale political and economic implications—it fostered the rise of the West. In all this discussion, I have acted as if humankind were in the director's chair, distributing other species at will, sometimes being surprised by the results. But to biologists *Homo sapiens* is a species that like any other has its own distribution and range. Not only did human beings cause the Columbian Exchange, they were buffered by its currents—a convulsion within our own species that is the subject of this section of the book.

For millennia, almost all Europeans were found in Europe, few Africans existed outside Africa, and Asians lived, nearly without exception, in Asia alone. No one in the Eastern Hemisphere in 1492, so far as is known, had ever seen an American native. (Some researchers believe that English fishing vessels crossed the Atlantic a few decades before Colón, but the principle holds—one didn't find communities of Europeans or Africans in Asia or the Americas.) Colón's voyages inaugurated an unprecedented reshuffling of *Homo sapiens*: the human wing of the Columbian Exchange. People shot around the world like dice flung on a gaming table. Europeans became the majority in Argentina and Australia, Africans were found from São Paulo to Seattle, and Chinatowns sprang up all over the globe.

The movement was dominated by the African slave trade—dominated by Garrido, so to speak, rather than by Cortés. For a long time the scale of slavery in the Americas was not fully grasped. The first systematic attempt at a count, Philip Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, did not appear until 1969, more than a century after its subject's extirpation. Partly stimulated by Curtin's study, David Eltis and Martin Halbert of Emory University, in Atlanta, led a remarkable effort in which scholars from a dozen nations pooled their work to create an online database of records from almost 35,000 separate slave voyages. Its most recent iteration, released in 2009, estimates that between 1500 and 1840, the heyday of the slave trade, 11.7 million captive Africans left for the Americas—a massive transfer of human flesh unlike anything before it. In that period, perhaps 3.4 million Europeans emigrated. Roughly speaking, for every European who came to the Americas, three Africans made the trip.

The implications of these figures are as staggering as their size. Textbooks commonly present American history in terms of Europeans moving into a lightly settled hemisphere. In fact, the hemisphere was full of Indians—tens of millions of them. And most of the movement into the Americas was by Africans, who soon became the majority population in

almost every place that wasn't controlled by Indians. Demographically speaking, Eltis has written, "America was an extension of Africa rather than Europe until late in the nineteenth century."^{*}

In the three centuries after Colón, migrants from across the Atlantic created new cities and filled them with houses, churches, taverns, warehouses, and stables. They cleared forests, planted fields, laid out roads, and tended horses, cattle, and sheep—animals that had not walked the Americas before. They stripped forests to build boats and powered mills with rivers and waged war on other newcomers. Along the way, they collectively reworked and reshaped the American landscape, creating a new world that was an ecological and cultural mix of old and new and something else besides.

This great transformation, a turning point in the story of our species, was wrought largely by African hands. The crowds thronging the streets in the new cities were mainly African crowds. The farmers growing rice and wheat in the new farms were mainly African farmers. The people rowing boats on rivers, then the most important highways, were mainly African people. The men and women on the ships and in the battles and around the mills were mainly African men and women. Slavery was the foundational institution of the modern Americas.

The nineteenth century saw another, even larger, wave of migration, this one dominated by Europeans. It changed the demographic balance a second time, so that descendants of Europeans became the majority in most of the hemisphere. Surrounded by people like themselves, this second group of immigrants was rarely aware that it was following trails that had been set for more than three hundred years by Africans.

Two migrations from Africa were turning points in the spread of *Homo sapiens* around the globe. The first was humankind's original departure, seventy thousand years ago or more, from its homeland in Africa's eastern plains. The second was the transatlantic slave trade, the main focus of this section of the book. The first wave of the human Columbian Exchange, the slave trade was the biggest impetus to the migratory flood that broke through the long-standing geographic barriers that kept apart Africans, Americans, Asians, and Europeans. In this chapter, I focus on two related topics: first, the rise of plantation slavery, which largely drove the forced migration of Africans; and second, the extraordinary cultural mix that slavery inadvertently promoted. The next chapter focuses on the interactions of

^{*} New England was an exception, but it was only a small fraction of English migration—the colonies to its south were much bigger. Until the end of the eighteenth century, African slaves outnumbered Europeans in England's American holdings by about two to one.

what became the Americas' two biggest populations, Indian and African. Largely conducted out of sight of Europeans, the meeting of red and black centered on their common resistance to the European presence in their lives—a rebellion that simmered across the hemisphere, and that had consequences that are felt to this day.

Johnny Good-looking lived with his family in the center of the whirlpool: teeming, polyethnic Mexico City. A giddy buzz and snarl of African slaves, Asian shopkeepers, Indian farmers and laborers, and European clerics, mercenaries, and second-tier aristocrats, it was a city of exiles and travelers, the first urban complex in which a majority of the inhabitants had their ancestry across an ocean. This was the social world created by the human wing of the Columbian Exchange; Garrido, an African turned European turned American, was a prototypical citizen.

He had a wife, surely native, surely converted (more or less willingly) to Christianity, and three children, a home in the rich inner city, and the knowledge that he had participated in a pivotal moment in history. Nonetheless, he was a disappointed, unsatisfied man. In 1538, when he was probably in his fifties, he petitioned the court, begging the king to "recompense me for my services and for the little favor your governors have done me, having served as I have served." His plea apparently went unheard. It says something about that chaotic time and place that this remarkable figure—a slave-turned-conquistador, an African who became a confidant of Cortés, a Muslim-born Christian who married an indigenous-born Christian—should be able to drop from sight. After the petition, no trace of his life has been found. According to Alegria, Garrido's biographer, he probably died in the next decade, forgotten in the hubbub and tumult of the new world he had helped to bring into existence.

BAD BEGINNINGS

It seems fair to observe that the planners of the war did not prepare for its consequences. Scholars argue over its origins, but the goal of the war as fought was to eject a Middle Eastern dictator whom many Western leaders viewed as a threat to civilization. After impassioned speeches, they formed a multinational coalition that marched toward the ancient city that was their central objective. After a surprisingly brief battle the allied forces seized control. Unfortunately, they had made no plans for what to do next. The coalition's military leadership simply declared the mission accomplished and left for home. Only a skeleton military crew was left to face a growing Muslim insurgency in the countryside.

This was in 1096 A.D., during the First Crusade. Godfrey of Bouillon, appointed to rule newly conquered Jerusalem, had to find some way to support his remaining army, the swarm of monks, priests, deacons, and bishops who had accompanied it, the pilgrims/cannon fodder who had accompanied the religious leaders, and the Venetian merchants who had provided invaluable logistical support. An obvious answer, from the Crusaders' point of view, was to seize Muslim property. European entities took ownership of entire urban neighborhoods and even cities; Venice fastened onto the port of Tyre, for example, and the Knights of Malta (as they are now known) acquired as much as a fifth of Jerusalem. In the countryside, Crusaders ultimately assembled more than two hundred grand estates, growing olives, wine, oranges, dates, figs, wheat, and barley. Most important in the long run, though, was a sticky, grainy product that the farms' new masters had never before encountered: *al-zuqar*, as the locals called it, or sugar.

Sugarcane was initially domesticated in New Guinea about ten thousand years ago. As much as half of the plant by weight consists of sucrose, a white, powdery substance known to ordinary people as "table sugar" and to scientists as $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. In a chemist's lexicon, "sugar" refers to a few dozen types of carbohydrate with similar chemical structures and properties. Sucrose is among the simpler members of the group: one molecule of glucose (the type of sugar that provides energy for most animal bodies) joined to one molecule of fructose (the main sugar in honey and fruit juice). Culturally, historically, psychologically, and perhaps even genetically, though, sucrose is anything but simple. A sweet tooth, unlike a taste for salt or spice, seems to be present in all cultures and places, as fundamental a part of the human condition as the search for love or spiritual transcendence. Scientists debate among themselves whether $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$ is actually an addictive substance, or if people just act like it is. Either way, it has been an amazingly powerful force in human affairs.

Sugarcane is easy to grow in tropical places but hard to transport far because the stalks ferment rapidly, turning into a smelly brown mass. People who wanted something sweet thus had to grow it themselves. The crop marched steadily north and west, infiltrating China and India. *Crops*, rather—the sugarcane in farm fields is a hodgepodge of hybrids from two species in the grass genus *Saccharum*. The spoilage problem was solved in India around 500 B.C. when unknown innovators discovered how to use simple horse- or cattle-powered mills to extract the juice from the stalks, then boil down the juice to produce a hard golden-brown cake of relatively pure $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. In cake form, sugar could be stored in warehouses, shipped in chests and jars, and sold in faraway places. An industry of sweetness was born.

Almost all of the Middle East is too dry to grow sugarcane. Nonetheless,

people figured out how to do it anyway, irrigating river valleys in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. By about 800 A.D. cane had become particularly common on the Mediterranean coast of what are now Lebanon and Israel, which is where the Crusaders for the first time encountered "reeds filled with a kind of honey known as *Zucar*"—the description comes from the twelfth-century chronicler Albert of Aachen.

The writer Michael Pollan has recounted his son's inaugural experience of sugar: the icing on his first birthday cake.

[H]e was beside himself with the pleasure of it, no longer here with me in space and time in quite the same way he had been just a moment before. Between bites Isaac gazed up at me in amazement (he was on my lap, and I was delivering the ambrosial forkfuls to his gaping mouth) as if to exclaim, "Your world contains *this*? From this day forward I shall dedicate my life to it."

Much the same thing happened to the Crusaders' army in Lebanon. Clerics, knights, and common soldiers alike drank *al-zucar* juice "with extreme pleasure," Albert of Aachen reported; the chance to sample sugar was, in and of itself, "some compensation for the sufferings they had endured." As with Polan's son, a single, heavenly taste was enough to ensure a lifelong craving: "the pilgrims could not get enough of its sweetness."

In their new sugar estates the Crusaders saw an opportunity: exporting to Europe large quantities of $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$ —"a most precious product," said the archbishop of Tyre, the new rulers' first sugar center, "very necessary for the use and health of mankind." Sugar was then a rarity in Europe; regarded as an exotic Asian spice like pepper or ginger, it was found only in the kitchens of a few princes and nobles. The Crusaders proceeded to stoke a hunger for sweetness in the continent's wealthy, and to make money by temporarily satisfying it.

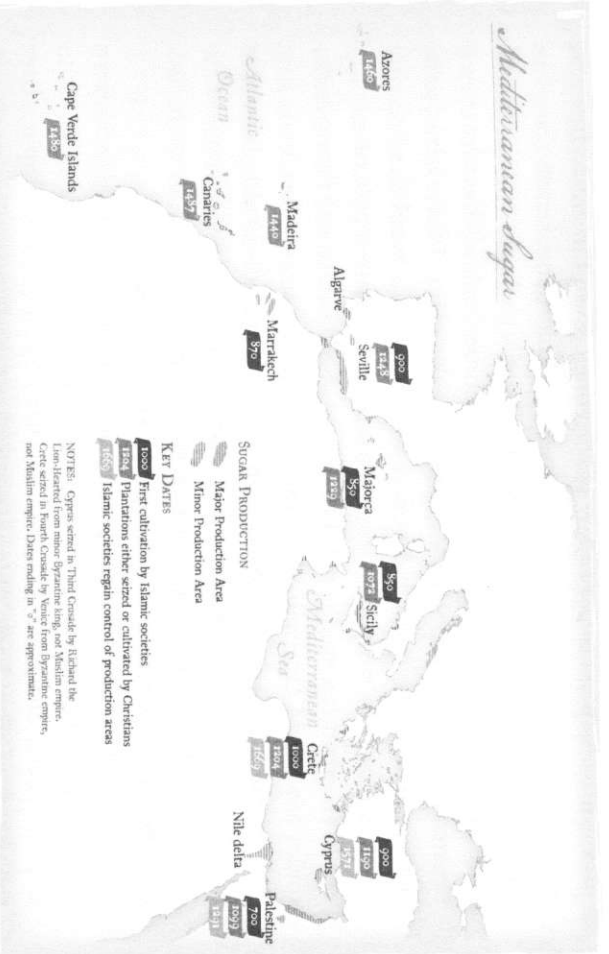
As important as sugar itself was its manner of production: plantation agriculture. A plantation is a big farm that sells its harvest in faraway places. To maximize output, plantations usually plant a single crop on big expanses of land. The big expense requires a big labor force, especially during planting and harvesting. Because agricultural products spoil, plantations typically ship their crops in processed form: cured tobacco, pressed olive oil, heat-solidified latex rubber, fermented tea, and dried coffee. They must also have some way to transport their products. Thus plantations as a rule consist of a lot of land near a port or highway with an attached industrial facility and a pool of laborers.

Sugar is the plantation product *par excellence*. Even the most sugar-mad grower cannot consume the entire harvest at home; some must always be sold off the farm. Once refined, sugar can be easily packaged and shipped for long distances. And there is always a market abroad: nobody has ever overestimated humankind's appetite for sweetness. The main pitfall is labor: without workers, fields, mills, and boilers will sit idle. To avoid this calamity, plantation owners must take steps to ensure an adequate supply of employees. In an exhaustive study published in 2008, the University of Provence historian Mohamed Oueffelli has shown that Islamic sugar plantations kept their workers by paying relatively high wages. European-owned plantations initially adopted the same strategy—in Sicily, Oueffelli showed, people actually migrated from other parts of Europe to work on sugar plantations. But over the course of time Europe's sugar producers reconsidered.

After the First Crusade, European Catholics in later anti-Muslim missions seized sugar plantations from their Muslim and Byzantine creators in Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, Majorca, and southern Spain (Islamic empires later took some of them back). But no matter how much sugar they produced, Europeans wanted more. Eventually they ran out of areas warm and wet enough to grow sugar in the Mediterranean. Portugal looked overseas, to the Atlantic island chains: Madeira, the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé (St. Thomas) and Príncipe. Spain went to another set, the Canary Islands.

Madiera was first and in some ways most important. It set precedents and established patterns. Located about six hundred miles off the Moroccan coast, the archipelago consists of more than a dozen islands, of which two are by far the largest: Porto Santo and Madeira itself. Both are the summits of extinct volcanoes, but Porto Santo is low and partly tinged by beaches whereas Madeira is high and bristles with cliffs.

Both islands were uninhabited until 1420, when they were visited by an expedition led by two squires in the Portuguese court and a Genoese navigator resident in Lisbon, Bartolomeu Perestrelo. Two decades after his death, Perestrelo became a footnote to history: his daughter married Colón, who may have lived on the islands and inherited his private navigational charts. While Perestrelo was alive, he was best known as the man who brought rabbits to Madeira—or, more precisely, to Porto Santo, where the party initially disembarked. In Perestrelo's luggage was a pregnant rabbit, which gave birth aboard ship. Upon arrival he released mother and offspring, presumably intending to hunt them later for stew. To the colonists' horror the animals "multiplied so much as to overspread the land," Gomes Eanes de Zurara, Portugal's royal archivist, recounted in 1453. Being rabbits, they ate every-



thing in sight, including the colonists' gardens. The Portuguese "killed a very great quantity of these rabbits," Zurara reported, but "there yet remained no lack of them . . . our men could sow nothing that was not destroyed by them." Starved out of Porto Santo by its own fecklessness, the expedition retreated to Madeira island.

So delicious is this ecological parable that one naturally doubts its veracity. But Zurara, generally regarded as a careful writer, had visited the island; rabbits still plagued it at the time he wrote. Adding to the plausibility of the tale, much the same occurred after Spain took the Canary Islands. Colonists brought donkeys to Fuerteventura, the chain's second-biggest island. Inevitably, the animals escaped. So many bands of donkeys rampaged through grain fields, reported a historian who lived there at the time, that the government "assemble[d] all the inhabitants and dogs in the island, to endeavor to destroy them." An orgy of asinine slaughter ensued.

Even if the Portuguese did not cause rabbit chaos on Porto Santo, they wreaked still worse ecological mayhem on Madeira. The island, unlike relatively open Porto Santo, was covered with deep forest (its name is the Portuguese word for "wood"). To plant crops, some portion of that forest had to be removed. The settlers chose the simplest method: fire. Predictably, the burn escaped control and engulfed much of the island. The settlers fled into the sea, where they stayed for two days in neck-deep water as flames roared overhead. Supposedly the fire continued, burning in roots underground, for

seven years. The settlers planted wheat on the burned land, exporting the harvest to Portugal. Not until the 1440s did they learn that the island's warm climate was better suited to another, more profitable crop: sugarcane.

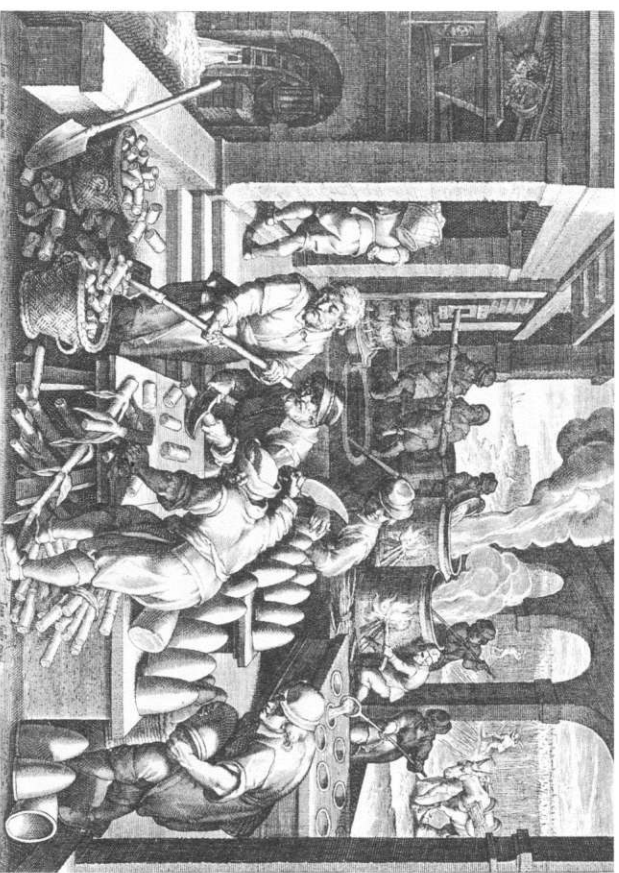
Meteorologically, Madeira was a fine place to grow sugar. Geographically, it was a challenge. The island has little land level enough for agriculture, and most of that little is on three high, inaccessible "shoulders" around the island's two main volcanic peaks, the tallest more than six thousand feet. Elsewhere the terrain is so steep that in some parts cattle are kept in small, shed-like byres for their entire lives for fear they will tumble fatally down the slopes. (Tourist guides extol Madeira as "the island of sad cows.")

The first settlers parceled out most of the land among themselves. Late arrivals either had to lease fields as sharecroppers or hack terraces from unused land. In either case, they had to channel water from the wet peaks to their plots, which involved creating an octopoid network of tunnels and conduits that twisted every which way through the stony hills. Despite the obstacles, sugar boomed. According to Alberto Vieira, the islands' most prominent contemporary historian, between 1472 and 1493 production grew by a factor of more than a thousand. Prices fell, as one would expect. Planters who had been making huge profits suddenly saw those profits threatened. The only way to keep the money rolling in was to ramp up production: build new terraces, carve out new waterways, and construct new mills. They clamored for workers—wanted them *now*—to slash cane, extract juice, boil down sugar, and ship the crystallized results. With little evident reflection, some colonists made a fateful decision: they bought slaves.

In some sense this was nothing new; slavery had existed in the Iberian peninsula since at least Roman times. At first many slaves had been taken from Slavic countries (the origin of the word "slave") but in the intervening centuries the main source of bondsmen had become captured Muslim soldiers. As a rule, they worked as domestic servants and were treated in much the same way as other domestic servants: their main purpose, according to Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, a historian at the University of Granada, was to serve as "sumptuary articles"—status symbols. Slaves were living, breathing testaments to the wealth and rank of their owners. Being able to summon a captive Muslim or African to pour wine was proof that one was important enough to possess an exotic foreign human being. The system was not benevolent, but it had escape hatches big enough to avoid murder, insurrection, mutiny, and the other problems with slave labor identified by Adam Smith. Slaves often were allowed to earn their own money, for instance, with which they could rent their freedom on a monthly basis. Often enough, this led to emancipation. Domínguez Ortiz has speculated that Iberian slavery,

left to itself, would have evolved into a system in which owners had the right to extract money from slaves, rather than labor, and only for designated periods of time.

In Madeira, Iberian slavery was transformed. True, most of the Europeans there had only a little land and couldn't afford bondsmen. And even those who did buy slaves rarely had more than two or three, and often they didn't grow sugarcane. Initially the slaves themselves were not from the Gulf of Guinea, the great indentation along the west-central African coast that was the origin of the great majority of slaves in the Americas. Instead the first captive workers were a luckless, scattershot collection of convicts, Guanches (the original inhabitants of the Canary Islands), Berbers (the people of northwest Africa, long-term adversaries of the Portuguese), and, probably, conversos (Iberian Jews and Muslims who had been more or less forcibly converted to Christianity—many Portuguese and Spaniards viewed them as potential traitors). Nevertheless Madeira was where plantation agriculture was joined, however shakily, to African slavery. In time, Vieira says, the convicts, Guanches, Berbers, and conversos were replaced by west-central Africans. Africans grew and processed sugar, and their numbers rose and fell



Sugar mills were smoky, steamy places that required many workers, as shown in this engraving of a Sicilian mill around 1600 (it is based on a painting by Jan Van der Straet, a Flemish artist active in Florence).

with the fortunes of the sugar industry. The world of plantation slavery was coming, terribly, into existence. And Madeira was, in Vieira's phrase, its "social, political and economic starting point."

Two key elements, though, were missing: the organisms responsible for malaria and yellow fever. Both were abundant in São Tomé and Príncipe, two islands in the Gulf of Guinea that Portugal took over in 1486. Like Madeira, they were uninhabited, thickly forested places with a warm climate, good volcanic soil, and plenty of water—perfect for producing $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. Like Madeira, they were settled by entrepreneurially minded petty nobles who hoped to cash in on Europe's sweet tooth. Unlike Madeira, though, São Tomé and Príncipe swarmed with *Anopheles gambiae*, Africa's worst malaria carrier; and *Aedes aegypti*, which transmits yellow fever. It was a bit like a natural scientific experiment: change one variable and see what happens.

The first two, small movements into São Tomé failed—killed off by disease. A third, larger attempt in 1493 succeeded, partly because it was accompanied by a mass of slave labor: convicts and undesirables, notable among the latter some two thousand Jewish children who had been taken forcibly from their parents. Sugar planters and sugar processors, criminals and children—all died in droves. After six years, only six hundred of the children were alive. Nonetheless the colony somehow kept going. A Dutch force landed in 1599 on Príncipe, the second island, intending to transform it, too, into a sugar center; the invaders departed after just four months, leaving more than 80 percent of their men beneath the ground. A year later the Dutch tried a different tactic: occupying São Tomé itself. Two weeks and 1,200 dead Dutchmen later, they bolted. Europeans perished with such routine dispatch on the islands that the Portuguese government took to exiling troublesome priests there, thus ensuring their deaths while technically avoiding the Vatican's ban on executing its functionaries. In 1554, six decades after colonization began, São Tomé had but 1,200 Europeans. By 1600 the figure had shrunk to about two hundred—slaves outnumbered masters by more than a hundred to one. In 1785 an official report claimed that just four people—four people!—of pure European stock lived on the island. Trying to build up the colonial population, the monarchy ordered that female African slaves be awarded to every new male European arrival, along with exhortations to breed. The ploy failed to boost the number of migrants—the risk was not worth it. Even the bishops the Vatican appointed to the island refused to come. After the post had been vacant for forty-three years, a new bishop finally had the courage to land in São Tomé in 1675. He was dead in two months. "In São Tomé, there's a door to come in," the Portuguese sang, "but there's no door to go out."

Despite the lack of colonists the colony flourished—for a while. At the height of the boom São Tomé exported four times as much sugar as Madeira. About a third of the island's surface had been converted to sugarcane; much of the forest had vanished to fuel sugar mills. Because few Europeans ventured there, the land was not sliced into small parcels, like Madeira. Instead São Tomé was divided into a few dozen big plantations, each with several hundred slaves. From a distance, the plantations looked like tiny cities, with the slave huts clustering like suburbs around the high-timbered "big house" for the plantation manager and his family, many of whom were the mixed-race results of the free-concubine system (the owners themselves remained in Portugal if they could). With their tiny, fever-ridden European populations brutally overseeing thousands of enchained workers, São Tomé and Príncipe were the progenitors of the extractive state.

An onslaught of sugar from big new plantations in Brazil knocked both Madeira and São Tomé out of the sugar market in the 1560s and 1570s. But what happened to the two islands was entirely different. Madeira's lack of malaria and yellow fever had long been noted, though only in the last century did scientists discover the cause: the island does not host the mosquito vectors for the diseases. In the absence of disease, wealthy Europeans, many of them not Portuguese, had moved to the warm island. Around their manors and palaces they erected cathedrals, hospitals, convents, schools, and customs houses—tourist attractions today, valuable investments then. And the farms themselves weren't monocultures, entirely devoted to a single crop, because they had to feed their owners and their owners' neighbors. When the sugar market crashed, sugar squires were reluctant to abandon the homes, fields, and neighborhoods into which they had sunk so much effort. Instead they switched to a newly invented product: the fortified, heat-treated wine today called Madeira.

Wine making, which typically emphasizes quality rather than quantity, is not well suited to plantation slavery. In 1552, the apex of the island's sugar era, three out of ten of its inhabitants were slaves; four decades later, with Brazilian sugar washing across the Atlantic like a white tide, the figure was one out of twenty. By and large, Madeirans freed their slaves; because they weren't working sugarcane anymore, it was cheaper than feeding them. The ex-slaves, having no way off the island, became tenant farmers and sharecroppers for their former masters, who were now building wine presses and cellars. Constantly eyeing famine, the freed slaves survived, like shack people in the Chinese mountains half a world away, mainly on sweet potatoes. But they did survive; Madeira remained a crowded place. At the end of the nineteenth century the island became a tourist destination, touted in guidebooks

as a mecca "for those convalescent and requiring rest after dangerous illnesses, malarial fever, etc."

No one has ever advertised São Tomé as a place to rest and recuperate from malaria. Its economy, too, crashed before the onslaught of Brazilian sugar. But São Tomé, unlike Madeira, did not adapt and recover—it simply marched on, though in ever-more-degraded form. Not having neighborhoods to protect, many of the island's offshore landowners contented themselves with watching from afar as their Afro-European managers in their rotting haciendas half-heartedly tried to continue operations by growing food to provision European slave ships. Other planters simply transferred their interests to Brazil, walking away from their property in São Tomé. Some former overseers acquired their own land and bought slaves to tend it. So did some former slaves. By the mid-eighteenth century, São Tomé's colonial masters had been replaced by a new elite of "Creoles" who traced their ancestry (or said they did) to the mixed-race children of the Portuguese and the first emancipated slaves. But the new management changed nothing about the plantations themselves. Even though there was little to sell and few customers, these zombie enterprises struggled on, slaves planting under the lash as the forest overran former sugar fields and colonial buildings crumbled into the harbor.

Resistance was a constant presence. It didn't matter to slaves whether they were owned by Portuguese, Afro-Portuguese, or Africans; they escaped when they could. Runaways joined together to form armed bands in the forest. To guard against their attacks, landowners built wooden forts staffed by gun-toting slaves. Judging by the frequency of successful assaults, the guards were rarely diligent. In a revolt in 1595 as many as five thousand slaves destroyed thirty sugar mills. The destruction was as understandable as it was pointless; the mills were going silent anyway. In a violent stasis, guerrilla warfare between plantations and runaways continued for almost two hundred years.

São Tomé's plantations eventually did switch to other crops: cocoa (from Brazil) and coffee (from the other side of Africa). These became profitable enough to lure back several hundred Portuguese, who disposed of the Creoles, taking their land and slaves. Cocoa and coffee covered almost every square inch of arable land by the beginning of the twentieth century. Slavery had long been abolished legally, but Portugal kept it going as a practical matter by instituting special taxes in its African colonies. People unable to pay the levies were shipped to São Tomé to work off their debts, *de facto* slaves locked at night into dilapidated barracks on the plantation. As other nations joined the chocolate industry and improved manufacturing methods, the

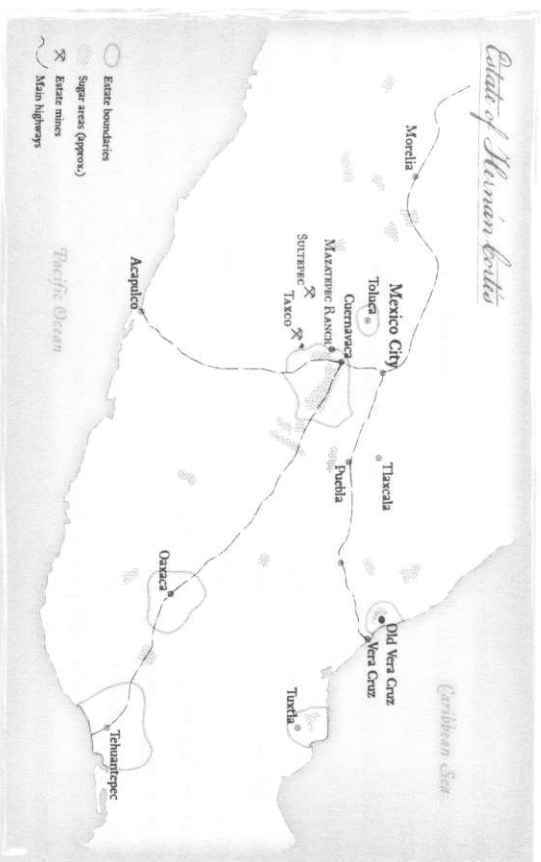
island's antique cocoa plantations became less and less viable. An independence movement sprang up in the 1950s, its primary goal to end the plantation system. When Portugal left in 1975, the country was one of the poorest on earth. The new government nationalized the plantations. It combined them into fifteen super-plantations, then ran them almost exactly as before.

This was the system that crossed the Atlantic to the Americas.

NEW WORLD BORN

Like Juan Garrido, Hernán Cortés died a disappointed man. After subjugating the Triple Alliance, he was awarded a title—Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca—and given his choice of real estate in the lands he had conquered. He chose six spreads in central and southern Mexico: 7,700 square miles in total, an expanse the size of Israel. The biggest chunk, 2,200 square miles of temperate plains south of Mexico City, was where he built his thick-walled, castle-like home. An opulent place, it had no less than twenty-two tapestries, each at least fifteen feet wide; the conqueror, something of a dandy, liked to roam about his tapestries in brocade velvet jackets and pearl-studded dressing gowns.

Having acquired his property, Cortés threw himself with characteristic energy into a series of entrepreneurial ventures: digging silver mines; establishing cattle ranches and hog farms; panning for gold; opening a shipyard on the Pacific coast; creating a kind of shopping mall in central Mexico City;



growing maize, beans, and Garrido's wheat; lending money, goods, livestock, and slaves to entrepreneurs and adventurers in return for a share of the profits; importing silkworms (and mulberry trees to feed them); and raising big stone structures as monuments to himself. Sugarcane, which he began growing in 1523, was high on his list.

Cortés might have succeeded at these enterprises if he had paid attention to them. Instead he kept looking for new kingdoms to vanquish. He marched into Guatemala. He schemed to send ships to Peru. He went to the Pacific and nearly killed himself looking for a route to China. All the while, he flagrantly disobeyed orders. Eventually he ran out of his own money and other people's patience. He returned to Spain in 1540, hoping to obtain more royal favors and positions for himself and his friends. Cortés followed the king from place to place, seeking an audience. Carlos V refused to see him. The heartbroken conquistador was unable to fathom why the sovereign might worry about creating a powerful new aristocracy of unreliable, impulsive men of action. The story, told by Voltaire but surely apocryphal, is that at one point Cortés bullied his way onto the emperor's carriage. Carlos V, annoyed, asked who he was. "It is he," Cortés supposedly said, "who has given you more states than your ancestors left you cities."

His timing was dreadful. As he followed the court, the king was talking with Bartolomé de las Casas, a fiery Dominican priest who had just completed *Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, an indictment of Spanish conduct that remains a landmark both in the history of human-rights activism and in the literature of sustained invective. Reading his first draft before the shocked court, Las Casas branded the conquest of Mexico as "the climax of injustice and violence and tyranny committed against the Indians." He denounced Indian slavery as "torments even harder to endure and longer lasting than the torments of those who are put to the sword." Troubled by Las Casas's lurid descriptions of cruelties committed in the name of Spain, Carlos V had asked his council of advisors to investigate the nation's policies toward Indians.

As the king surely knew, the Spanish monarchy had been struggling to define its Indian policy since before he was born. His grandparents, King Fernando and Queen Isabel, had been stunned when Colón informed them that they now ruled over multitudes of people whose very existence had been previously unsuspected. The monarchs, devout Christians, worried that the conquest could not be justified in the eyes of God. Colón's new lands had the potential of enriching Spain, an outcome they of course viewed as highly desirable. But obtaining the wealth of the Americas would involve subjugating people who had committed no offense against Spain.

As Fernando and Isabel saw it, Indian lands were not like the Islamic

empires whom they and their royal ancestors had fought for centuries. Muslim troops, in their view, could be legitimately enslaved—they had conquered most of Spain, exploited Spanish people, and, by embracing Islam, rejected Christianity. (For similar reasons, the Islamic empires freely enslaved Spanish POWs.) Most Indians, by contrast, had done no wrong to Spaniards. Because American natives had never heard of Christianity, they could not have turned away from it. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI resolved this dilemma of conscience. He awarded the sovereigns “full, free and complete power, authority, and jurisdiction” over the Taino of Hispaniola if they sent “prudent and God-fearing men, learned, skilled, and proven, to instruct [them] in the Catholic faith.” Conquest was acceptable if done for the purpose of bringing the conquered to salvation.

The Spaniards who actually went to the new lands, though, had little interest in evangelization. Although often personally pious, they were more concerned with Indian labor than Indian souls. Colón was an example. Despite being fervently, passionately devout, he had appalled Isabel in 1495 by sending 550 captured Taino to Spain to sell as galley slaves. (Galleys were still common on the Mediterranean.) Colón argued that enslaving prisoners of war was justified—he was treating the Indians who had attacked La Isabela as Spaniards had long treated their military enemies. In addition, he said, the Indians’ fate would deter further rebellions. Isabel didn’t agree. Slowly growing angry, she watched shackled Taino trickle into the slave markets of Seville. In an outburst of fury in 1499 she ordered all Spaniards who had acquired Indians to send them back to the Americas. Death was the penalty for noncompliance.

The queen seems mainly to have been outraged by the presumption of the colonists—they were disobeying instructions and enslaving the wrong people. But she also must have known that the monarchs hadn’t addressed the fundamental problem. On the one hand, the pope had justified Spain’s conquest because it would allow missionaries to convert the Indians—a goal unlikely to be accomplished if they were enslaved in large numbers. On the other hand, the colonies were supposed to contribute to the glory of Spain, a task that could not be accomplished without acquiring a labor force. Spain, unlike England, did not have a well-developed system of indentured servitude. And unlike England it did not have mobs of unemployed to lure over the ocean. To profit from its colonies, the monarchs believed, Spain would have to rely on Indian labor.

In 1503 the monarchs provided their answer to the dilemma: the *encomienda* system. Individual Spaniards became trustees of indigenous groups, promising to ensure their safety, freedom, and religious instruction. In fine protection-racket style, Indians paid for Spanish “security” with their

labor. The *encomienda* can be thought of as an attempt to answer the objections to slavery raised by Adam Smith. By restricting the demands on Indians, the monarchs sought to reduce the incentive for revolt—a benefit to the Spaniards who employed them.

It didn’t work. Both Indians and conquistadors disliked the *encomienda* system. Legally, Hispaniola’s Indians were free people, their towns and villages still governed by their native leaders. In practice the rulers had little power and workers were often treated as slaves. *Encomenderos* (trustees) loathed negotiating with Taino leaders, which required more tact and delicacy than they typically wished to muster. When native workers didn’t feel like showing up—why *would* they, if they could avoid it?—they vanished into the countryside, where their whereabouts were concealed by relatives, friends, and sympathetic Indian leaders. For their part, the Taino came to view the system as little but a legal justification for slavery. Under the law, Indian Christians were entitled after baptism to be treated exactly like Spanish Christians, who could not be enslaved. But colonists argued the contrary; Indians were, in effect, less human than Europeans, and thus could be forced to work even after they converted.

Cortés, conqueror of Mexico, may have had more unfree Indians than anyone else in the world. In addition to owning three thousand or more indigenous slaves outright, his estate forced as many as twenty-four thousand laborers a year to work as tribute (they were sent by their home villages for a week at a time). Indian hands had unwillingly planted thousands of acres of sugarcane on his land and cut wood for the great boilers that crystallized the sugar in his cane juice and constructed his water-driven sugar mill, a two-story edifice made of stone and adobe bricks mortared with sand and lime. Always keenly aware of political currents, Cortés surely would have been following the regal hand-wringing over Indian policy. The council of deputies issued a memorandum in April 1542 begging Carlos V “to remedy the cruelties that are happening to the Indians in the Indies.” Seven months later, the king responded: he issued the so-called New Laws, which banned Indian slavery.

The New Laws had big loopholes. Indians still could be enslaved if they were captured while resisting Spanish authority. Because one could always claim that a given person or group was resisting authority, the loophole amounted to a license to enslave. Nonetheless the New Laws so angered the conquistadors that they decapitated the new viceroy of Peru when he tried to enforce them. The viceroy of New Spain (the empire’s holdings north of Panama) prudently suspended the laws before they came into effect. Nonetheless, the trend was clear: it was going to be harder for people like Cortés to force Indians to work for them.

A few weeks after the deputies' memorandum, the conqueror cut a deal with two Genoese merchants to bring in five hundred African slaves—the first big contract for Africans on the mainland, and one of the biggest to date. Two years later the initial shipment of a hundred captives arrived at Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico. It marked the arrival of the Atlantic slave trade.

Africans had been trickling into the Americas almost as long as Europeans. A U.S.-Mexican archaeological team announced in 2009 that three men in La Isabela's cemetery were probably of African descent (their teeth had the biochemical signatures of a diet rich in African plants). By 1501, seven years after La Isabela's founding, so many Africans had come to Hispaniola that the alarmed Spanish king and queen instructed the island's governor not to allow any more to land. (Also on the no-entry list: Jews and Jews who had converted to Christianity, "heretics" and heretics who had converted to orthodox Christianity.) The instructions made an exception for people of African descent born in Christendom. Slavers claimed their "pieces" were Spanish or Portuguese and sent them over anyway. Within a few months the governor was begging the king and queen to ban all Africans of any sort from Hispaniola. "They flee to the Indians, and they learn bad customs from them, and they cannot be captured." Nobody listened. The colonists saw that Africans appeared immune to disease, didn't have local social networks that would help them escape, and possessed useful skills—many African societies were well known for their ironworking and horsemanship. Slave ships belled up to the docks of Santo Domingo in ever-greater numbers.

The slaves were not as easily controlled as the colonists had hoped. Exactly as Adam Smith would have predicted, they were dreadful employees. Faking sickness, working with deliberate lassitude, losing supplies, sabotaging equipment, pilfering valuables, maiming the animals that hauled the cane, purposefully ruining the finished sugar—all were part of the furniture of plantation slavery. "Weapons of the weak," political scientist James Scott called them in a classic study of the same name. The slaves were not so weak when they escaped to the heights. Hidden by the forest from European eyes, they made it their business to wreck the industry that had enchained them. For more than a century, African irregulars ranged unhindered over most of Hispaniola, funding their activities by covertly exchanging gold panned from mountain rivers with Spanish merchants for clothing, liquor, and iron (ex-slave blacksmiths made arrow points and swords). Little wonder that the island's sugar producers moved to the mainland! Not only did Mexico have more land and lots of Indian labor, it was not plagued by thousands of anti-sugar guerrillas. (I will further discuss slave rebellions in the next chapter.)

Among the sugar men who relocated was Hernán Cortés, who as a

teenage newcomer to Hispaniola had watched the industry rise in the settlement of Azúa de Compostela. Sugar mills were a primary focus at his new estates in Mexico, though his penchant for adventuring delayed their completion for a decade. Other mills at other *encomiendas* came online too, as sugar plantations spread along the Gulf coast, clustering around the warm, wet port of Veracruz.

Between 1550 and 1600, production soared even as the price tripled. Economists would say this phenomenon—rising prices despite increasing supplies—indicates surging demand. They would be correct. Spain's conquest of the Triple Alliance had introduced its citizens to the delights of $C_{12}H_{22}O_{11}$. Like Europeans, the peoples of central Mexico turned out to have an insatiable yen for sweetness. "It is a crazy thing how much sugar and con-serves are consumed in the Indies," marveled historian José de Acosta in the 1580s.

No longer were Africans slipped into the Americas by the handful. The rise of sugar production in Mexico and the concurrent rise in Brazil opened the floodgates. Between 1550 and 1650—the century after Cortés's contract, roughly speaking—slave ships ferried across about 650,000 Africans, with the total split more or less equally between Spanish and Portuguese America. (England, France, and other European nations as yet played little role in the slave trade.) In these places, the number of African immigrants outnumbered European immigrants by more than two to one. Everywhere Spaniards and Portuguese went, Africans accompanied them. Soon they were more ubiquitous in the Americas than Europeans, with results the latter never expected.

Africans walked with Spanish conquistadors—some as soldiers, some as servants and slaves—as they assailed Guatemala and Panama. They poured by the thousands into Peru and Ecuador—Francisco Pizarro, conqueror of the Inka, and his family received more than 250 licenses to import slaves in the first years of conquest. On the Rio Grande, Africans assimilated into Indian groups, even participating in attacks on their former masters. Luring them to native life, according to one appalled report, was peyote, "which stirs up the reason in the manner of drunkenness." (Some Spaniards joined the Indians, too.) Juan Valente, born in Africa, enslaved in Mexico, joined conquistador Pedro de Valdivia's foray into Chile in 1540 as a full partner and was rewarded after its success with an estate and his own Indian slaves. He was in the midst of buying his freedom from his owner in Mexico when he died alongside Valdivia in the native uprising of 1553. African slaves were part of the first European colony in what is now the United States, San Miguel de Gualdape, established by Spain in 1526, probably on the coast of Georgia.

First colony, first slaves—San Miguel de Gualdape was also the site of the first slave revolt north of the Rio Grande. The insurrection burned down the colony within a few months of its founding, putting it to an end. It is widely thought that the slaves ran away and made their homes with the local Guale Indians. If so, they were the first long-term residents of North America from across the Atlantic since the Vikings.

By the seventeenth century, Africans were everywhere in the Spanish world. Six companies in Argentina were sending slaves up to the Andean silver town of Potosí; slightly more than half of the people in Lima, Peru, were African or of African descent; and African slaves were building boats on the Pacific coast of Panama. All the while more Africans were pouring into Cartagena, in what is now Colombia—ten to twelve thousand a year, the Jesuit Josef Fernández claimed in 1633. At the time the city held fewer than two thousand Europeans. Most of those people's livelihood depended on the slave trade. Bribes paid to land Africans illegally were a major source of income. Portuguese Brazil turned to Africans more slowly. Indians were so plentiful there that slaves weren't imported in any number until the end of the sixteenth century and slowly for a few decades after that. The colony's powerful Jesuit priests were partly responsible for the turn to Africans; enslaving Indians was a sin, they explained, whereas Africans were fair game. (The Jesuits practiced what they preached: in their sugar mills, Africans alone were in bondage.)

Cortés established what may have been the first cattle ranch in Mexico. To tend the animals, he did not select native workers—they had no experience with cows or horses. Africa has been a center of cattle-herding and horse-riding for thousands of years. Cortés's first ranch hand, possibly the first cowboy in the mainland Americas, was an African slave. Thousands of others followed. In Argentina Africans fled the restrictions of the cities and plantations to the grasslands of the pampas. Driving herds of stolen cattle with stolen horses, these roaming vagabonds reproduced a pastoral way of life that was familiar in the West African plains—"liv[ing] free / and without depending on anyone," as the classic Argentine poem *Martin Fierro* put it in the 1870s. Later called *gauchos*, they became symbols of Argentina in much the same way that North American cowboys became symbols of the U.S. West.

The paradigmatic example of the African diaspora may be the man known variously as Esteban, Estevan, Estevanico, or Estebanico de Dorantes, an Arabic-speaking Muslim/Christian raised in Azemmour, Morocco. Plagued by drought and civil war in the sixteenth century, Moroccans fled by the desperate tens of thousand to the Iberian Peninsula, glumly accepting slavery and Christianity as the price of survival. Many came from Azem-

mour, which Portugal, taking advantage of the region's instability, occupied during Esteban's childhood. He was bought, probably in Lisbon, by a minor Spanish noble named Andrés Dorantes de Carranza. Dreaming of repeating Cortés's feats of conquest, Dorantes, with Esteban in tow, joined an overseas expedition led by Pánfilo de Narváez, a fiercely ambitious Castilian duke with every quality required of a leader except good judgment and good luck.

More than four hundred men, an unknown number of them African, landed under Narváez's command in southern Florida on April 14, 1528. One catastrophe followed another as they moved up Florida's Gulf coast in search of gold. Narváez vanished at sea; Indians, disease, and starvation picked off most of the rest. After about a year, the survivors built ragtag boats and tried to escape for Hispaniola. They ran aground off the coast of Texas, losing most of their remaining supplies. Of the original four hundred men, just fourteen were still alive. Soon the tally was down to four, one of whom was Esteban. Another was Esteban's owner, Dorantes.

The four men trekked west, toward Mexico, in a passage of stunning hardship. They ate spiders, ant eggs, and prickly pear. They lost all their possessions and walked naked. They were enslaved and tortured and humiliated. As they passed from one Indian realm to the next, they began to be taken for spirit healers—as if native people believed their horrific journey of itself must have brought these strange, naked, bearded people close to the numinous. Perhaps the Indians were right, for Esteban and the Spaniards began curing diseases by chant and the sign of the cross. One of the Spaniards brought back a man from the dead, or said he did. They wore shells on their arms and feathers on their legs and carried flint scalpels. As wandering healers they acquired an entourage of followers, hundreds strong. Grateful patients handed them gifts: bountiful meals, precious stones, six hundred dried deer hearts.

Esteban was the scout and ambassador, the front man who contacted each new culture in turn as they walked thousands of miles across the Southwest, along the Gulf of California and into the mountains of central Mexico. By some measures, Esteban was the leader of the group. He certainly held the Spaniards' lives in his hands every time he encountered a new group and, rattling his shaman's gourd, explained who they were.

Eight years after their departure, the four Narváez survivors entered Mexico City. The three Spaniards were feted and honored. Esteban was re-enslaved and sold. His new owner was Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy of New Spain. Mendoza soon assigned him as the guide to a reconnaissance party going north—Esteban was back on the road. The party was searching for the Seven Cities of Gold. Supposedly these had been established in the eighth century by Portuguese clerics escaping from Muslim invasions. For decades,

people from Spain and Portugal had been hunting for them—the Seven Cities were an Iberian version of the Sasquatch or Yeti. Why anyone should imagine these cities were in the U.S. Southwest is unexplained and perhaps unexplainable. Somehow the tales of the Narváez survivors reignited this passion, and Mendoza had succumbed.

Leading the expedition was Marcos de Niza, a Franciscan missionary who has never been charged with insufficient zeal. Mendoza's instructions took pains to command Esteban to obey him. But Esteban had no interest in following orders. As they moved north he encountered Indians who recalled him from his previous journey. He shed his Spanish garb, wore bells, feathers, and chunks of turquoise, and shook a rattle in a spiritual fashion. He again acquired several hundred followers. He ignored Niza's demand that he stop performing ritual cures and refuse his patients' gifts of alcohol and women.

In a decision that the missionary claimed was his own, Esteban and his followers went ahead of the rest of the party after crossing what is now the U.S. border. Quickly they gained a lead of many miles. Once again, Esteban was moving into an area never before seen by someone from across the ocean. Days after the separation, Niza encountered some of Esteban's entourage, wounded and bleeding. In the mountains at the Arizona-New Mexico border, they told him, the group had come across the Zuni town of Hawikuh, a collection of two- and three-story sandstone homes that climbed like white steps up a hill. Its ruler angrily refused entrance. They barricaded Esteban and his cohort into a big hut outside town without food or water. Esteban was slain when he tried to escape Hawikuh the next day, along with most of the people accompanying him.

The Zuni themselves have a different story—*stories*, I should say, because many have been recounted. In one version told to me, Esteban is not refused entry, but welcomed into Hawikuh. The people have heard of this man and his extraordinary journey. They want to keep him there—want this very badly, at least in the story. He is a man like no other they have encountered, an incredible physical specimen with his skin and hair, a man whose spirit holds a great wealth of knowledge and perhaps more, a valuable possession they have no desire to lose.

To prevent his departure, they cut off his lower legs, lay him gently on his back, and bathe themselves in his supernatural presence. Esteban lives in this way for many years, the story goes, always treated with the respect due to such uncommon figures, always on his back, legs stretched out, with the wrappings on his stumps carefully tended.

All versions of his end are based on stories that people have told to themselves. His actual fate may never be known with certainty. What seems clear is that in the end this man who crossed so many bridges fell into the same

delusion that possessed so many Spaniards. He thought that he understood the shook-up world he was creating and that he was in control. He forgot that under bridges is only air.

FAMILY VALUES

Tenochtitlan fell on August 13, 1521, in a welter of massacre and chaos. In the waterways outside the disintegrating city Spanish troops discovered a small flotilla of canoes. Spanish writings say their occupants were hiding in the reeds and found only by determined search. Native accounts say they sought out the invaders to surrender. Historians today tend toward the latter interpretation. In the tumult of the disintegrating city, concealment would have been so easy that it seems likely that the people in the canoes were not even trying to avoid discovery.

In one boat was Cuauhtemoc, last leader of the Triple Alliance; others contained his wife and family. Tenochtitlan rulers, like their European counterparts, had long consolidated power by marrying within a select group of other elite families. As in Europe, men in authority had children by multiple women. The imperial family tree hence was complicated. It was about to become even more complicated.

Cuauhtemoc, then in his early twenties, was the nephew of Motecuhzoma II, the famous "Montezuma," who had been held hostage by Cortés in his own palace during the Spaniards' first assault on the capital city. Motecuhzoma was killed—exactly how is in dispute—during the counterattack that drove Cortés's force from the city. His successor reigned for barely two months before dying of smallpox. To bolster his legitimacy, the successor had married Motecuhzoma's daughter, Tecuichpotzin, who had been widowed during the first assault. The successor died as the Spanish-Indian alliance began its second assault on Tenochtitlan. Cuauhtemoc, then eighteen, took the throne. He quickly married Tecuichpotzin for the same reason as his predecessor: She was in the canoes with him.

As a captive, Motecuhzoma had asked Cortés to protect his family. This was a big job: the emperor had nineteen children. The conquistador failed—smallpox and war killed all but three of the nineteen. One of the survivors was Tecuichpotzin. (The Spaniards gave her a European name that they could pronounce: Isabel.) Tecuichpotzin was the daughter of the emperor's principal wife, whereas the other two surviving children were from wives of lesser value. All were then adolescents. Tecuichpotzin, twice a widow, was about twelve.

Cortés regarded them as the legitimate rulers of the Triple Alliance,