

Goodbye, Columbus; Hello, Gandhi!

As every schoolchild knows, when Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in 1492 he wasn't looking for America—he was trying to provide Italians with a meaningful secular holiday to occupy the second Monday of October. In this, he failed miserably. I think we can all agree that crass commercialism and corporate greed have usurped what is indisputably the true meaning of Columbus Day: a celebration of the astrolabe. You may also have heard of other earth-shattering consequences of this Genoa's epic journey, such as the introduction to Europe of the jicama, a root whose revolutionary crunchy texture and bland taste led directly to the Reformation. Columbus encountered many native peoples as well, such as the Arawaks. Mistaking Hispaniola for the mythical land of Indianapolis, he erroneously called them "Indians."

Fast forward several centuries. Settlers in the Old West have allowed Columbus's misnomer to live on, referring to the natives as Indians, instead of the more correct "redskins" or "white-baby eaters." Little do they know of the linguistic collision course they have embarked upon. The saga began when Wilmer Chubb, a branch manager of the Union Pacific railroad, was informed that the latest boatload of Chinamen had negligently blown themselves up while dynamiting a tunnel in Colorado. While this incident could have gone down as merely another proof of the obvious inferiority of the colored races, Chubb was no ordinary racist—he was a visionary racist. What if, Wilmer thought, Union Pacific got rid of the inscrutable Chinese, the drunken Irish, and the miserly Jews and tapped a heretofore unexploited ethnic group: the seething masses of British Hindoostan, the (original) Indians?

Two months later, Sunjay Vajpayee and Ranjit Kapur were the first of seventy-five able-bodied Indian men to step off the boat in San Francisco. Upon reaching the railroad, Union Pacific tried to segregate their

new workers from the populace, but unfortunately the seeds of confusion had already been sown. Despite the scrupulous efforts of railroad officials to refer to the Asians as "Indian Indians from India," the local townfolk were left scratching their heads. The historical record is scanty on this pivotal chapter of American history, but a few primary documents remain. Josiah

"Life was more fun when punctuated by improbably occurring dance numbers. Now it is punctuated by lashings. And that is not fun."

Simpson, a professional scallywag and part-time rabble-rouser, wrote before his public hanging that "a Band of young Blades and I heard that the Red man had an Encampment to the North of the Big Bend River. Yet upon preparing to Massacre their Squaws and Papooses, we encountered a Party of Men neither Injun nor Negro nor Heathen Chinees, and Departed in much Consternation."

If the whites were confused, the letters from the laborers back to their native land express a comparable bewilderment on the part of the Asians. Pinak Dravid wrote: "Life was more fun when punctuated by improbably occurring dance numbers. Now it is punctuated by lashings. And that is not fun." Another expressed puzzlement with Christianity, noting that "this Jesus fellow would be more approachable if he had four arms and the head of an elephant." Perhaps the most poignant statement was the short declaration: "I miss my subcontinent like a Bengal tiger misses the lifeblood of a hapless goatherd."

The third player in this racial triangle

NIOXIN
RESEARCH LABORATORIES, INC.

Growing Stronger
A natural solution for fine and thin-looking hair.

Rimage[®]
Hair - Nails - Cosmetics -
Facials - Tanning -
Massage Therapy
Mon. - Sat. 9-5:30
Wed. - Fri. Eves.

Rimage Salon & Spa
1210 Chapel St, New Haven
776-4248 or 562-4247
www.RimageSalon.com



were the American Indians, who initially snubbed the South Asians, despite their links of brotherhood through shared nomenclature. Apparently, certain tribes worried that the Asian Indians would also get tobacco concessions, thus driving their tax-free smoke shops out of business. But when it was clear that they had nothing to fear from this ethnic minority, most of the natives changed their tune. Chief Yellowcake of the Platte Indians reached between rounds of scalping missionaries and, painting with all the colors of the wind, commented that “we of the copper skin reach out to our brothers from across the Great Water. We invite them to smoke the pipe of peace with us...and spend some wampum at our new riverboat casino! Thursday is

Ladies’ Night; penny drinks with valid ID.”

Sadly, this great experiment was not destined to succeed. Frustrated by the lack of herbs and spices necessary to cook a proper lamb pasanda and saddened by the dearth of local elephants, approximately half of the original Indians deserted and returned via steamer to Calcutta. A series of mine collapses, cholera epidemics, and tainted vegetable chili wiped out most of the remaining population. It is rumored that one Indian took to the hills as a notorious outlaw known as “Brahma Madhva Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya the Kid,” but this is a matter of pure speculation and hearsay—and not something for a serious history to concern itself with. ☺



shop online



for gifts with

school spirit

Find collegiate gifts and clothing from your Alma Mater at www.yalebookstore.com!

Whether you’re looking for the perfect gift for a fellow alumnus, or a keepsake to call your own, the bookstore’s website has a great selection of gifts with you in mind.

THE YALE BOOKSTORE

A BARNES & NOBLE COLLEGE STORE

**77 Broadway at York Square
New Haven, CT 06511**

1.888.730.YALE
203.777.8440

STORE HOURS

Monday–Thursday: 9am–9pm
Friday–Saturday: 9am–10pm
Sunday: 12pm–6pm

www.yalebookstore.com