

1492 Review

A review of Marvin Lunenfeld's "1492: Discovery, Invasion, Encounter; Sources and Interpretations," D.C. Heath and Company, Lexington, MA, 1991, 355 pages, \$15.00.

Not "Just Another Reader"

Nor is Marvin Lunenfeld's timely anthology, "1492: Discovery, Invasion, Encounter; Sources and Interpretations," simply a compendium of articles. Rather, it is a thoughtful compilation of excerpts from primary source material as well as contemporary scholarship. The mixing of excerpts from letters and documents with recent articles by notable writers is a welcomed relief from the traditional "all contemporary" or "all primary" readers. "1492" is now available from the publisher, but don't expect it to last very long once it reaches the bookstores. For those of you who teach courses on the Age of Discovery, you will find this book to be extremely useful if not absolutely indispensable. I, for one, will use "1492" as a reader in an upper-level, cross-cultural Perspectives course in January, 1991 and beyond. And for the general reader and amateur historian who is interested in a survey of the literature of the Age of Discovery, "1492" should do more than just hold your attention; it is a delight to read. To use an old cliché, in reviewing the book, I found it impossible to put down.

In one volume are located sources of information which normally would take a researcher days, if not months, to compile--that is, if all the information were available in one place. The book is divided into three parts. "Discovery" contains chapters on Iberian Initiatives, Motivating Factors, The Short Route to Asia, The First Crossing, and Assessing Columbus and his Achievement. "Invasion" includes chapters on Initial Impressions in the Caribbean, The Use of Force, The Justification for Conquest, The "Black Legend" of Spain, Spanish Debate over the Justice of the Conquest, and Other Colonizers. The last part, "Encounter," covers Amerindians View the Whites, Whites View the Amerindians, Cultural Conditioning, Exchanging Diseases, Demographic Shifts, and Flora and Fauna. In turn, each chapter is divided into source material and interpretation. While coverage is excellent in these sections, it is difficult to understand why there is only scarce mention of Africa, e.g., impact of the Age of Discovery on Africa and the role of Africans in the formation of the New World societies. In light of the fact that the European Age of Discovery brought Africa within the realm of the commercial and religious interests of Europe in the fifteenth century, the omission of references to the impact of Europeans on Africa is the major weakness of the book.

In the category of "What-I-would-have-done-differently-if-this-had-been-my-book," I would have made it longer and sturdier. Since "1492" is destined to become a standard reference book, a hard cover and longer passages from the original source material would have made the book more durable and functional. Yet, despite these criticisms, the propitious appearance of the book, its lively and engaging readings, the juxtaposition of sources and interpretations, and the succinct but perspicacious comments by the author make this a very desirable reader. Dr. Lunenfeld is a person who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Clearly, participation in the 1987 Newberry Library's Summer Institute Transatlantic Encounters and subsequent associations with a variety of learned associations gave Dr. Lunenfeld the insight and inspiration needed to compile this volume. It should also be mentioned that the author was assisted by editors for acquisitions, production and text permissions, a designer, and a production coordinator.

Finally, in what may be a veritable inundation of books commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus' first voyage of discovery to the New World, if you have not chosen a reader, make "1492" your first choice.

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