

Representations

Within a year after the initial appearance of Columbus's letter on his first voyage, illustrations of New World peoples slowly began to appear in print. As noted above, it was the second edition of Columbus's letter that contained the first portrait of the peoples whom the Admiral encountered. There, a naïve woodblock entitled "Insula hispana" shows two small groups of naked Indians looking at each other as well as at the approaching Europeans in wonderment and apprehension. Two Europeans in a small boat row to the shore, while the caravel (resembling more Noah's ark than a fifteenth-century sailing ship) sits in the water with its oars up. The artist's choice of scene and scenery are important: the moment before an exchange of gifts while the scenery resembles a generic European pastoral. Both would have been familiar to readers. While the ritual of gift giving might have suggested an eerie sort of mutuality—brothers, we come in peace—it also placed the notion of exchange at the very center of the encounter (and of the woodcut): each side was giving, each was getting. Much of the subsequent history of the New World is strikingly telescoped into a single, primitive image.

Early illustrations of the Indians reflect the same narrow range of models as do prose descriptions. Almost always nude or partially clothed, the indigenous peoples are variously childlike and harmless, savage and wild, or stately and composed. In their various states of undress or underdress they are—quite literally—modeled on classical precedents from the Mediterranean world. They become set pieces, familiar in themselves and presumably to the readers who were their intended audiences. By the middle of the sixteenth-century, Indians begin appearing as iconographic accompaniment in representations of processions, in murals, and on maps as cartouches, as well as in travel and conquest literature. They are both exotic and familiar, threatening and reassuring.

Theodor de Bry (1528-98).
*Admiranda narratio fida tamen, de
commodis et incolarum ritibus Virginiae.*
Frankfurt, 1590.

Theodor de Bry.
*Narratio eorum quae in Floridae Americae
provincia Gallis acciderunt.*
Frankfurt, 1591.

Of all the early illustrations of the peoples of the New World, none were more famous or more widely copied than those produced by the engraver Theodor de Bry. Beginning in 1590 and continuing posthumously, De Bry and his sons brought out a series of translations of accounts of the New World from Spanish, French, English, Italian, and Dutch sources. However, what endures in the thirteen-part series are not the translations but the engravings. These became a sort of *locus classicus* for representations of the Indians; they were frequently copied and reproduced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

De Bry himself was not the source of the illustrations. In both of the volumes in the Kislak Collection, De Bry engraved paintings produced by travelers on the scene. In the case of the volume on Virginia, the artist was Captain John White, whose exquisite drawings De Bry may have seen in London. Similarly, for Florida he relied on the drawings of Jacques Le Moyne, a member of the short-lived French colony there.



Admiranda narratio fida tamen, de commodis et incolarum ritibus Virginiae.



Narratio eorum quae in Floridae Americae provincia Gallis acciderunt.

De Bry was a good Protestant, and his choice of sources reflects that confessional allegiance. White and Le Moyne were also Protestants, as was Thomas Hariot, whose narrative De Bry linked to White's drawings. The sixteenth century was probably the high water mark of confessional strife, and De Bry chose his sources with a view to scoring points against the Catholic powers. It is not clear, though, that the illustrations reflect a parallel dynamic. Le Moyne's scenes as rendered by De Bry depict a noble, statuesque, industrious people, primarily engaged in a variety of quotidian activities. Of course they are idolaters, and they do have some unpleasant ways of dealing with their enemies, but their flaws are, on the whole, less impressive than their imposing bodily presences. If there is a propagandistic aspect to the illustrations it is their determination to present the French and the Indians as working harmoniously together. Unlike the Spanish, De Bry seems to say, the French came in friendship. They stand or sit silently in the portraits as peers intently observing their exotic fellows.

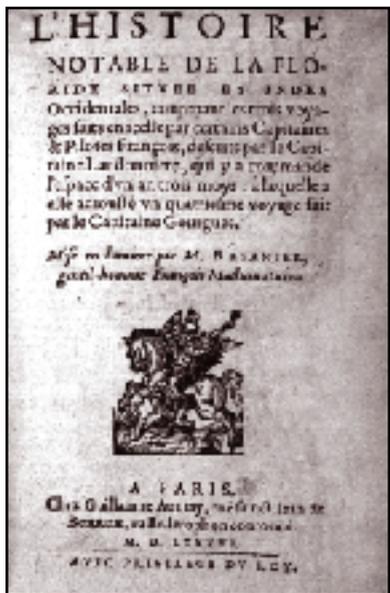
More remarkable still are the watercolors by John White which De Bry engraved for his initial offering in the series on the Americas. While Le Moyne's illustrations do not survive, White's have. White was part of the ill-fated Roanoke colony that Sir Walter Raleigh had outfitted to claim Virginia for the English. Fortunately for him and for us, White survived the colony, and De Bry's engravings made his images commonplaces across Europe. White's Indians as interpreted by De Bry are notable for their careful and studied poses; they are like figures from a ballet. They are thoroughly classized images in much the same way as Vesalius's famous drawings of anatomy figures.

Of the thirteen volumes issued by the De Bry family, the two on exhibit here are by far the most important. Not only did they share with a larger reading public sets of images that might not otherwise have been known, but they made available a sort of primary visual documentation that is extremely rare in chronicles and travel literature.



Narratio eorum quae in Floridae Americae provincia Gallis acciderunt.

René de Laudonnière (fl. 1562-1582).
L'Histoire notable de la Florida.
 Paris: Auvray, 1586.



The text that De Bry paired with Le Moyne's illustrations was Laudonnière's *Histoire*, shown here in its first edition. Fellow Huguenot, Admiral Coligny sent Laudonnière to Florida in 1564 to help realize the French dream of establishing a presence in the New World that would make them competitive with the Spanish. The attempt was unsuccessful, and the fruitless adventure might well have been forgotten had not Laudonnière decided to bring out this memoir in 1586. Short, dramatic, engaging, and appropriately anti-Spanish, the text caught the attention of the Protestant community. Richard Hakluyt included it in his anthology, a fact which no doubt played a role in De Bry's decision to feature it early on in his series.

The *Histoire* opens with a brief account of "les sauvages." It is clipped and flat-footed: notes rather than thoughts. "The men are olive colored, very tall, handsome, and well-proportioned without any deformity.... They are great liars and traitors but they are physically courageous and fight very well." This is the only editorial swipe the author takes at the Indians, and it reflects more than anything else the intrinsic uncertainties of the context. Liars and traitors is a trope in travel literature: the response of a newly minted alien in foreign terrain. Otherwise, what seems to impress the Frenchman is the physical prowess and ability of the Indians: a perspective reflected in De Bry's engravings.

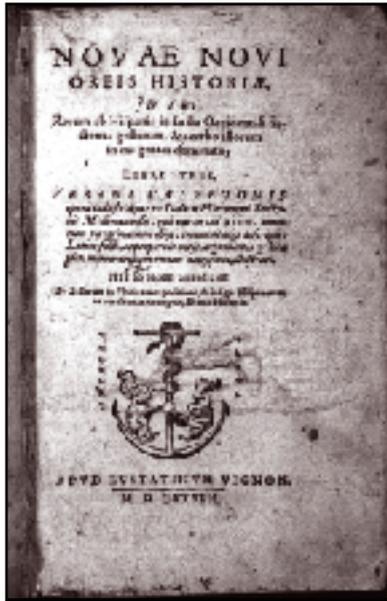
Giralomo Benzoni (1520-?).
Novae Novi Orbis historiae . . .
 Geneva, 1578.

Courtesy of the Jean and
 Jay I. Kislak Collection

Giralomo Benzoni.
Histoire nouvelle du Nouveau Monde . . .
 Geneva, 1579.

Another of De Bry's sources was the account by Giralomo Benzoni, an Italian who journeyed to the New World in 1541 and toured the Spanish possessions for some fourteen years before returning to Italy. In 1565 he brought out his version of the history of the Spanish in the New World, incorporating his own experiences into the narrative. The Italian original was quickly translated into German, Latin, French, and Dutch, and De Bry published his version in three installments, from 1594-96.

Benzoni's history is freely adapted from a variety of previous accounts, and it contains little that is new about Columbus, Cortés, Pizarro, and their exploits. Nor does it have much to add to earlier histories in the way of commentary on the peoples of the islands, Mexico, and Peru. What it quickly became notorious for, however, were its numerous, often gruesome contributions to the Black Legend: a powerful and lasting indictment of Spanish behavior in the New World begun by Bartolomé de Las Casas, in the early sixteenth-century. At the core of the Black Legend are two parasitic stereotypes: that of the peaceable, childlike, innocent Indian and that of the cruel, rapacious, self-serving Spaniard. The Black Legend reversed the relationship between savage and civilized, and it problematized the nature of the Spanish mission in the New World. For Protestants, Las Casas's condemnation of his own people and catalogue of



Novae Novi Orbis historiae . . .

Antonio de Mendoza (1492?-1552).
 Manuscript: “Relacion de las
 ceremonias... de los Indios de la
 Provenia de Mechoacan.”
 Mid-eighteenth-century? 560 pp.



their manifest injustices was too good to be true: they could quote the devil against his cohorts. This is exactly what De Bry did with particular zeal in his illustrations to Benzoni's history. The Italian brought to the record new examples of Spanish cruelty, some so wretched they can scarcely be believed, and the good Protestant De Bry gave them shocking prominence. Through De Bry and Benzoni, Europeans got a substantial dose of the Black Legend and its rootedness in the early colonial experience. Europeans were now able to contemplate the other side of empire: the massive accretion of injustice and violence that undergirded it.

This is an eighteenth-century copy of an earlier (perhaps sixteenth-century) work. The author's purpose, he tells us, is to investigate the nature of the beliefs, customs, and government of the Indians. The text contains numerous watercolors depicting village life, religious ceremonies, warfare, and even scenes of cannibalism. Although some ritual cannibalism did exist in Mexico during the Pre-Columbian period, it was much exaggerated by early chroniclers. In the present work, the author relied on oral accounts of Indians who had lived prior to the coming of the Spanish to Mexico.

