

CURRENTS

Volume 7, No. 3

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

Price \$7.00

URB0010
1901.C00026

display only



AFTER COLUMBUS:
RACE RELATIONS
IN THE AMERICAS
SINCE 1492

FOR DISPLAY ONLY

also

Columbian Quincentenary Events:
Commemoration, Not Celebration

Published by THE URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

Executive Editor
Tim Rees

**Guest Editor
and Translator**
Asselin Charles

**Assistant to the Editor/
Production Manager**
Fazela Haniff

Illustrations
Wallace Edwards

**Chairperson,
Publication Committee**
Gerald Rose

CURRENTS: Readings in Race Relations is the quarterly magazine of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations, formed in July 1975 to promote a stable and healthy multiracial environment in the community, is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers from all sectors of the community.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for visible minorities. It works towards encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multiracial population through programs of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It focuses its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies, and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

The work of the organization is carried out through committees such as:
Education; Employment; Media; and Judicial.

All correspondence, including letters to the editor, subscription requests, and changes of address should be addressed to:

CURRENTS
675 King St. West, Suite 203
Toronto, Ontario
M5V 1M9
Telephone: (416) 363-2607
Fax: (416) 363-0415

Membership fees to join the Urban Alliance on Race Relations are:

Students and Seniors	\$25.00
General Membership	\$45.00
Sustaining Membership	\$100.00
Benefactor Membership	\$200.00
Life Membership	\$700.00

All memberships include a subscription to **CURRENTS**

Material from **CURRENTS** may be reproduced if permission is obtained from the Editor.

Table of Contents

Editorial

*Five-Hundred Years Later:
Still Searching for a New World*
by Asselin Charles 1

Perspectives

Columbus and the New World Order
by Cynthia Hamilton 2

Images of Race Relations in New World Literature
by Earl Fitz 4

*Mending Our Cups: Women Culture and
Survival in the Americas*
by Joy Gleason Carew 7

1992 — The Year of the Indigenous Peoples
by Odessa Ramirez 10

Jonestown Revisited
by Jan Carew 12

Diversity and Meaning: A Conversation
by Ron Hamm and Jim Norwine 15

Agenda

*Columbian Quincentenary Events:
Commemoration not Celebration*
by Odessa Ramirez 18

Readings

A New World Bibliography 19

Reports and Studies

Recent Publications 20

The views expressed in **CURRENTS** are not necessarily those of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

Articles offered for publication are welcome. It is preferred that articles be submitted both on DOS compatible computer disk and typewritten copy, double-spaced, with adequate margins for notation.

All enquiries about advertising should be directed to the Editor.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations wishes to acknowledge the financial support of Multiculturalism Canada.

ISSN 0715-7045

2nd Class Mail Registration Number 5972

Return Postage Guaranteed

October 1991

Layout by Through the Looking Glass

EDITORIAL

Five-Hundred Years Later: Still Searching For A New World

Next year, high above the martial din of the music of the parades and the festive crackling of the fireworks, a chorus of somber voices will be raised in dissent. To the Natives of the Americas and the descendants of the African slaves, 1992, the quincentenary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the Europeans on this continent, does not call for celebrations but, rather, for sober reflection.

This most significant anniversary is indeed an eminently opportune occasion for assessing the American experience and gauging the import of the momentous historic event that gave birth to the typically multiracial and multicultural societies of the New World. Such a demarche is particularly pertinent now as friction between Blacks and Whites increasingly perturbs the North American social landscape and indigenous peoples from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego wage the last battles for their survival as communities.

So what hath Columbus wrought? What kinds of human societies have emerged on this continent since the caravels sighted Guanahani? What is the legacy of the history that has unfolded since that fateful day in 1492?

The history of the Americas is the history of the conquest, ethnocide, and displacement of the "witness peoples," as Brazilian historian Darcy Ribeiro calls the original inhabitants of the land. The history of the Americas is the history of the enslavement of millions of Africans brought to the New World to produce wealth for the Old World and the European diaspora. The continent hosts some thirty national entities of unequal social, economic, and technological development, presenting a disquieting contrast between

a rich, powerful, overwhelmingly "white" North and a much poorer, backward even, overwhelmingly "colored" South. And within the borders of these nations, disconcerting patterns of inequality persist along racial, ethnic, and cultural lines.

Yet, throughout this horrific history the Americas have always held and still hold the promise of something better. The continent has long loomed large in the European imagination as Eldorado, the land of untold riches, of spices and gold.

To millions of immigrants from around the world, the continent still represents the hope for a better material life. But the Americas also stand for a more transcendent promise, the promise of Thomas More's Utopia, the promise of a society of free men and women living in harmony and equality.

How has the promise fared? Certainly between the dream and reality the gap remains large, larger in some societies than in others. In the Americas, racial tolerance and respect of the other are not yet universal virtues, political freedom is not necessarily an inalienable right, and economic justice is not a sacred principle. Still, there is hope in

the continuing, relentless struggle of millions of men and women, North and South, to make the dream of a new and better world come true. There is hope in the fact that the ideal is ensconced in the laws and constitutions of so many different countries. There is hope in the incessant efforts of so many dedicated souls to reduce the gap between the ideal and the actual.

The late Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier has defined the Americas as a unique continent with a singular historical vocation. Standing at the crossroads of the world, the Americas have been and still are the meeting place of all the races of the world, of all the civilizations ever created by humanity. As such, the continent is pregnant with possibilities. Out of the fruitful encounter between East and West, North and South, brought about by what is after all a fluke of history, through the unfathomable sufferings and occasional triumphs of individuals and collectivities, may we continue to strive to create in the Americas not Utopia perhaps, but a new, more humane, more human, *oecumene*.

Asselin Charles

PERSPECTIVES

COLUMBUS AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

by Cynthia Hamilton

It is more than ironic that we are faced with the ominous possibilities of an American-designed "New World Order" as Europe and America prepare to celebrate 1492 and the ushering in of the old world order which brought us slavery, colonialism, imperialism and genocide. On one level there has been little change in the approach to foreign policy: relations between European and non European countries are still understood by the former in terms of superiority and inferiority.

After 500 years there is still no acknowledgement by Europeans of the disruptive character of their encounters with people of color. Instead we are flooded with rationalizations, justifications, excuses, all of which double as explanations or reasons for consequent death and destruction.

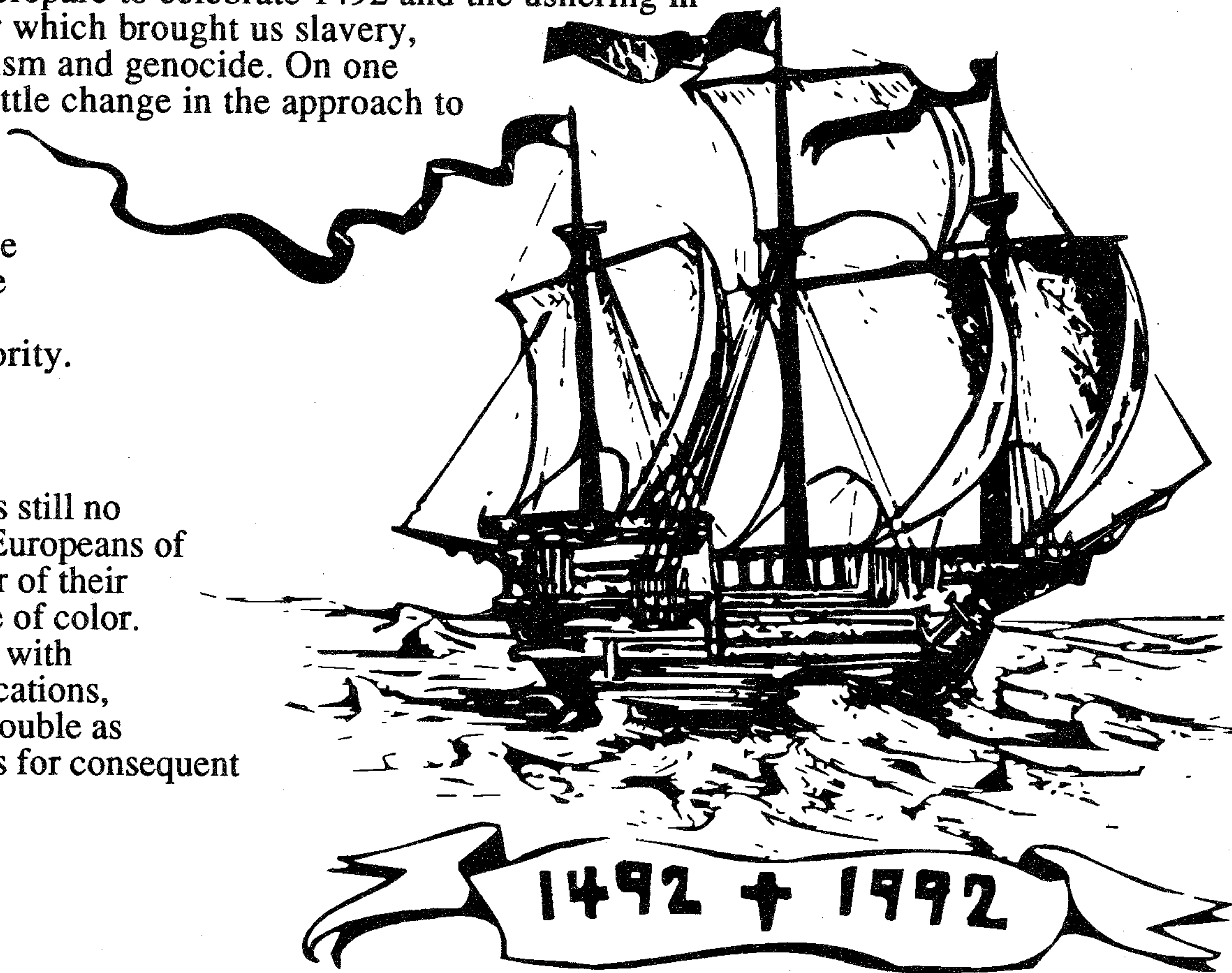
The Old World Order and the New World

The mere mention of a "new world order" demands that we take stock of the "old world order." What better place to begin than the Columbus voyage? The mythology of discovery, conquest, and civilization has been the basis of all modern European history. The "discovery" was coupled with slavery - the introduction of bondage as a means of civilization for Indians and Africans alike. The European created an identity and meaning for

himself as conqueror, triumphant in his "manifest destiny" over infidels and inferiors, protector of the new found subjects, graciously assuming the "white man's burden." The idea of America as global policeman is really an old idea, an adaptation of the

European equivalent which was introduced with travel to the New World.

Europe's economy desperately needed the new resources, markets and labor which "the conquest" produced. Today's conquest must be understood in the context of new realities; the



world's largest military power is also the world's largest debtor nation, but military power will ensure a place for the U.S. alongside countries like Germany and Japan which are ascending economically but still militarily dependent; land and resources are being rapidly depleted in the U.S. and Europe as a consequence of industrial abuse; poisoned water, polluted land and air, destruction of species of plants and animals make the lands of the Third World more valuable. There is no clearer example than the National Wilderness Federation's "debt for nature" program, in which Third World countries with large debts are invited to sign over unspoiled lands (for safekeeping) in exchange for renegotiated terms of repayment. Ironically, the "new world order" may help to circumvent the battles over global spoils which plagued European powers in earlier centuries by granting U.S. hegemony by fiat.

The Gulf War left us with a new lexicon for international relations. The war, after all, was designed to consolidate the "new world order." Therefore what could have been dismissed as yet another example of overzealous use of military force by the U.S. became an international, United Nation sponsored campaign. But this campaign and subsequent "new world order" conceived to ensure "a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations" is not designed in the interest of Africans or Latin Americans or even residents of the Middle East. This "new world order" is being created at their expense as the struggle for control in the post-Cold War era proceeds. Much like the world

decrees of centuries past, the Papal Bulls of 1493 which divided the world for Spain and Portugal, the Berlin Conference which gave secular meaning to the division by redrawing the map of the African continent, current European summits and agendas reflect a similar intent, and have proceeded by excluding participation and consideration of "the South." The proposed "commemoration" of the Columbus voyage, popularly known as the "discovery of America," by European nations and the U.S. underscores the disregard for the peoples of the Third World. We cannot afford to wait 500 years to deconstruct the "new world order." We can learn from analyses of the past. Many writers have pointed out that America was not discovered, rather it was "invented to meet the psychological and commercial needs of an expanding Europe." The "new world order" is a similar construction, a psychological response to the objective limitations which have been reached by European commercial interests.

The New World and the New World Order

Like the "new world" created 500 years ago President Bush's "new world order" also rests on conquest. European systems disrupted social and economic life 500 years ago. Today as struggles emerge internationally to reintroduce more indigenous and harmonious ways of life, the response has been increased militarism. "Desert Storm" was preceded by "Operation Just Cause" in Panama the "invasion by invitation" of Grenada, and the creation and financing of Contra op-

eration around the world (starting with UNITA in Angola in 1975).

As the Europeans invented America they reinvented its inhabitants by turning them into Indians and Negroes. The "new world order" has invented its "other" as well. When *glasnost* eliminated the old communist bogey, America reinvented another enemy, this time in the Third World — terrorists and drug cartels. As media attention becomes focused on these new targets the United States began to reorient its defense initiatives. As negotiations proceeded to withdraw troops and weapons from Europe, the U. S. began to redeploy them in the Third World. In 1988 the Commission on Integrated Long Term Strategy released its report "Discriminate Deterrence" to the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The report addressed new concerns in the Third World and the need for a long term military strategy which includes destabilization in the form of support for anti-Communist insurgencies.

1992 must not be allowed to pass without response. The "new world order" must be challenged as a resurrection of the old. People of color must use this 500th year to reflect and shed all of the trappings which resulted from conquest. We must develop new meaning through a revived consideration of history, stripped of mythology.

Cynthia Hamilton is Professor of Pan-African Studies at California State University (Los Angeles).

IMAGES OF RACE RELATIONS IN NEW WORLD LITERATURE

by Earl Fitz

Racially oriented issues have, from the outset, been a constant feature of New World literature. Given the nature of the European conquest of the Americas, it could hardly have been otherwise. Integrally related to the issue of race relations, however, inter-racial sexual activity also began early on to further complicate what was already a divisive matter. Given the problematic place sex has had within Western culture, it comes as no surprise that, reinforced by legalistic, socio-political, and moralistic hypocrisies, the twin maladies of sexism and racism have been with us in the Americas from at least 1492 onward. As the imaginative record not only of how our societies are but of how they might be, New World literature has thus provided us with a steady stream of novels, poems, and dramas that focus, directly or indirectly, on the always volatile subject of race relations, a subject inextricably bound up in problems of class, gender, and human sexuality.

But while the issue of race cannot be considered at all unique to the New World, a closely related issue — miscegenation — can be. Indeed, one can argue that racial mixing is so pandemic to the literature of Canada (English and French), the United States, Spanish America, and Brazil that it can be regarded as a defining characteristic. Spanish American literature, for example, is often said to have begun with the work of a mestizo, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of a Spanish Conquistador and an Incan princess. In his masterpiece, *The Royal Commentaries* (Vol. I, 1609; Vol. II, 1617), Inca Garcilaso takes pains to praise both his Incan and his Spanish heritage. Such a positive approach to the issue, sadly, would come to be more the exception than the rule.

In works as distant in time and place as Georges Bugnet's *Nipsya* (1924), Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884), Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*

(1973), Darcy Ribeiro's *Maira* (1978), John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), and Esteban Echeverría's "La Cautiva" (1837), however, the figure of the Indian comes in for diverse treatments. In "La Cautiva," and *Wacousta*, for example, the Native American is cast as a blood-thirsty savage while in *Ramona*, a novel that its author hoped would win sympathy for the Indian's plight in the same way that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had won sympathy for the abolitionist cause, a thoroughly admirable Indian boy (but one disdained, exploited, and eventually murdered by white privateers), falls in love with a young woman, Ramona, who is herself of racially mixed (Indian and white) blood. An interesting twist to *Ramona*'s plot structure is that Ramona's

step-mother, a Mexican woman who is herself the object of racial prejudice and economic exploitation, views Ramona's Indian heritage with loathing and disgust.

This pattern has a parallel in French Canada with Bugnet's *Nipsya*, a novel in which the main character (Nipsya) is, like Ramona, a young woman of Indian and white heritage. Representing the tradition of the Métis in Canada, Nipsya (who feels herself somehow "tainted" by what white society makes her believe is her "illicit" engendering) eventually marries neither her full-blooded Indian suitor (who desires her in a powerfully sexual way) nor the white Hudson's Bay man, but a Métis like herself.



The Noble Savage and the Bad Indian

Because of the interest generated in the Americas by such eighteenth and nineteenth century French writers as Chateaubriand (who, in 1791, came to experience the New World first-hand) and Rousseau (whose concept of the "Bon Sauvage" would be tremendously influential in both North and South America), the figure of the Indian, portrayed both positively and negatively, became a virtual fixture in much nineteenth century literature. Five works that typify the radically different American approaches to the idea of the "Noble Savage" are Major John Richardson's *Wacousta*, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), José de Alencar's *O Guarani* (1857; *The Guarani*) and *Iracema* (1865), and Juan León de Mera's *Cumandá* (1879). Probably the best known of this group, Cooper's romance, *The Last of the Mohicans*, present, in Chingachgook and his son, Uncas, the epitomes of the "Bon Sauvage." And while there is no problem with the close friendship and comradeship that bind these two utterly "noble savages" to the intrepid white scout, Hawkeye, there is a problem — as the text suggests — in the more than platonic interest that Uncas comes to show for Cora, one of the daughters of the English officer, Colonel Munro. Although Cooper apparently wanted to titillate his reader with the rather thinly veiled prospect of a budding inter-racial love affair between Cora and Uncas, in the end he could not bring himself to countenance such a union. He has both Cora and Uncas die, dispatched — in stark contrast to the idealized Uncas — by utterly "savage" Indian warriors. Cooper's final pronouncement on this issue comes in the concluding chapter when Hawkeye, who upholds the attitudes and mores of his time (and of Cooper's class), surmises that it is better to have Uncas and Cora die before they could consummate their love,

which, he feels, would have been a terrible sin. That a leading U.S. writer would thus suggest that it is better to be knifed to death than to engage in an inter-racial love affair indeed speaks volumes about the state of racial and sexual attitudes in the nineteenth-century United States.

Often compared to Cooper's Leatherstocking saga, Richardson's *Wacousta*, a compelling (if, at times, awkwardly written) gothic romance set in the time of Pontiac's 1763 rebel-

While the issue of race cannot be considered at all unique to the New World, a closely related issue — miscegenation — is.

lion, structures itself around the wilderness (filled with frightful savages) and civilization, symbolized by the English fort. Although the novel's main character (*Wacousta* is actually an Englishman, Sir Reginald Morton, who has "gone Indian" because of a wrong done to him in Europe by the very man, Charles de Haldimar, who is now the garrison commander) is, in some ways, a kind of tainted "Noble Savage," the remainder of the Indians in *Wacousta* are more terrifyingly real than the idealized types Cooper presents in his work. Richardson's treatment of the Indian as a literary figure is thus considerably more complex than Cooper's typically is, and the difference makes for more interesting reading.

Two other New World writers who took very different approaches to this issue are Brazil's José de Alencar and, also from the United States, Lydia Maria Child, whose 1824 novel, *Hobomok*, with its feminist approach to the miscegenation theme, may have actually inspired Cooper to write his work as he did. It is Alencar, however,

who provides us with a truly unique handling of this theme. Brazil, a society renowned for its cultural flexibility and for its history of racial and cultural mixing, was, in the early nineteenth century, also a nation that was coming, literarily at least, to revere its Indian populations. Widely celebrated in poems, narratives and dramas of the time, Brazil's native peoples were given permanent mythic status by Alencar in his two most famous works, *The Guarani*, the tale of a "noble savage" who first saves a white woman from destruction and then seems poised to become her lover, and *Iracema*, a mythopoetic tale that, reversing the sex roles (an Indian princess — Iracema — and a Portuguese soldier), actually sees a child born, a child who, through his mixed Indian/white heritage, symbolizes the newly emergent Brazilian race.

Juan Leon de Mera's *Cumanda*, by way of contrast, is closer to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* than to either of Alencar's works (or to Child's *Hobomok*) since the main character, *Cumanda* (a beautiful half-Indian, half-white girl reminiscent of Nipsya) dies tragically, a victim of hypocrisies and moral double-standards beyond her control.

Black-White Relations

If the nineteenth century was, in terms of racially oriented literature, dominated by images of whites and Indians, the twentieth century has seen a great variety of race related images, prominent among which, however, is the issue of black-white relations. In Spanish America (with writers like Alejo Carpentier, Nicolás Guillén, Luis Palés Matos and Candelario Obeso), in Brazil (with writers like Solano Trindade, Abdias do Nascimento, João da Cruz e Sousa, and Jorge Amado), in the Caribbean (with V. S. Naipaul, and Aimé Césaire) and in the United States (with writers like Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Eldridge Cleaver, Alice Walker,

and Toni Morrison), but in Canada, too, with writers like Morley Callaghan, Sonny Ladoo, Dionne Brand, Alix Renaud, Dany Laferrière, and Bharati Mukherjee, the complexities, tensions, and conflicts of black-white race relations have been dealt with by a great many writers. And although outsiders do not automatically think of Black Canadian writers and poetics, we should, this being a point Harold Head elaborates on in his *Canada in Us Now*.

An interesting 1950s work that deals with black-white relations in English Canada (and a work by a major English Canadian novelist) is Callaghan's *The Loved and the Lost*, a 1951 novel that tells the tragic story of one Peggy Sanderson, a mysterious and Eurydice-like young white woman who, after becoming enthralled with Montreal's black community, ends up a victim, rejected as a turncoat by her white culture but never really accepted by her black culture either. Her eventual rape and murder (the perpetrator's identity is withheld from the reader) would seem to suggest that the black and white communities of 1951 Montreal were sharply segregated (by economics and class as much as by race, however), and prone to hatred and violence. The novel thus portends an ominous future for Canada's racial situation.

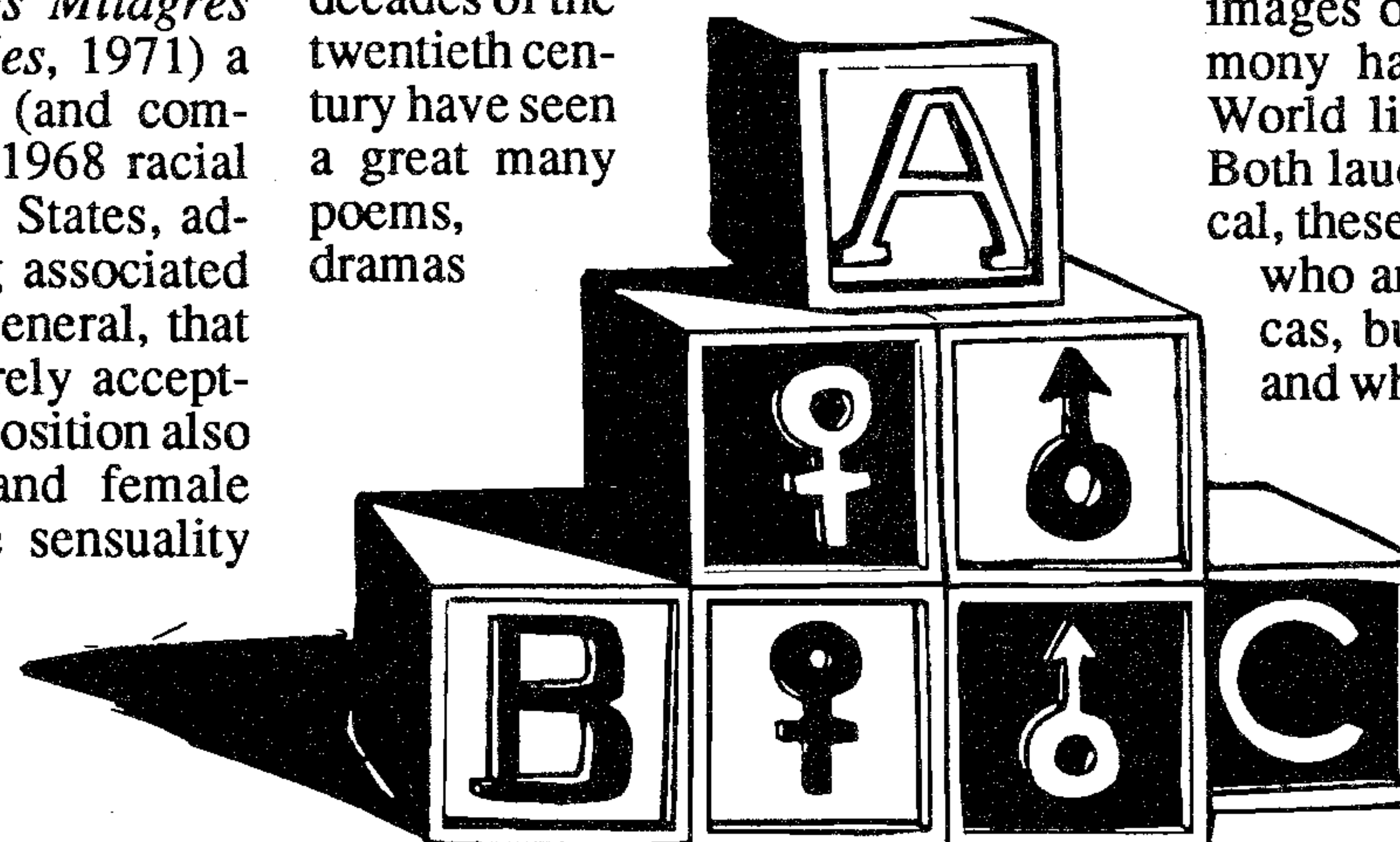
A work that might be taken as the antithesis of *The Loved and the Lost* is Jorge Amado's *Tenda dos Milagres* (1969; *The Tent of Miracles*, 1971) a thesis novel that, closely (and comparatively) attuned to the 1968 racial disturbances in the United States, advances the argument, long associated with Brazilian culture in general, that racial mixing was not merely acceptable but desirable. Such a position also seemed, for both male and female characters, to endorse the sensuality that Brazilian culture (which has recently given us the "Lambada") has

become famous for. Though recalling *Hobomok* in certain ways, *Tent of Miracles* stands alone in the Americas as the most unmitigated proponent of racial harmony achieved through racial mixing.

Another of the New World's most powerful literary accomplishments, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), also treats the issue of race relations, this time, as with *Nipsya*, in terms of the Métis, the people of French and Indian ancestry whose place in Canadian history is inextricably linked to the charismatic figure of Louis Riel. More adroitly than most of the other works that deal with the issue of race relations, *The Diviners*, a superbly crafted novel, shows the natural connection between this always volatile issue and the larger theme of identity, which can be taken as the most fundamental of all New World literary themes. By allowing the problems of the Métis to attain truly universal proportions, Laurence succeeds, in *The Diviners*, in creating a work of art that speaks eloquently and movingly to people everywhere who desire a social order based on principles of love, honesty, equality and harmony.

A Literary Mosaic

But in addition to the many works that have treated black-white race relations, the later decades of the twentieth century have seen a great many poems, dramas



and narratives that deal with other, sometimes numerically smaller, ethnic minorities. Works like Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* deals with the vicissitudes of being Chinese-American while writers like Joy Kogawa (Canada), Wakako Yamuachi (the United States), and Eiko Suzuki (Brazil) transform Japanese ancestry into other New World identities. Additional cultural minorities are being heard from as well, including Jewish-American (Mordecai Richler in Canada, Saul Bellow in the United States, Clarice Lispector in Brazil, and Jacobo Timmerman in Spanish America, for example), Ukrainian (especially important in Canada), Hispanic-Americans (like Lorna Dee Cervantes, Richard Rodriguez, and Luis Valdez), and Native Americans (like Canada's Pauline Johnson, Grey Owl, and Yves Thériault — who is of Montagnais ancestry — and Carter Revard, Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, and Leslie Marmon Silko, from the United States).

Given the violent clash of cultures that characterized the invasion of the New World by the Old in 1492, and considering the continuing flow of immigrants to the New World, it seems safe to say that race relations will remain a basic feature of Inter-American literature for generations to come. Closely linked to questions of social, political, and economic opportunity — and therefore to the larger theme of identity (both public and private) — images of racial harmony and disharmony have been prominent in New World literature from the beginning. Both laudatory and (more often) critical, these images remind us not only of who and what we are in the Americas, but, more importantly, or who and what we should want to become.

Earl Fitz is Professor of Comparative Literature at the Pennsylvania State University.

MENDING OUR CUPS: WOMEN, CULTURE AND SURVIVAL IN THE AMERICAS

by Joy Gleason Carew, Ph.D

“All peoples have the right to share the waters from the river of life and to drink from their own cups, but our cups have been broken,” lamented an anonymous AfroCarib woman. She speaks for the dispossessed in our Hemisphere — the poor, the victims of racism, sexism and cultural chauvinism. The fiction of the “discovery” that is about to be celebrated with vast national resources expended in fleeting displays has deliberately omitted a chronicle of genocide, slavery and religious persecution.

And what exactly will the governments of these Americas be celebrating? We cannot celebrate the genocide which Columbus unleashed in the first twenty years of the Columbian era because this would mean celebrating the death of between 12 and 20 million people. And we cannot celebrate the enslavement of African and Native Americans which Columbus himself initiated, inaugurating, through the Atlantic slave trade, a new day of race relations. Indeed, differently from the Portuguese, who had been involved in an African slave trade for over 40 years prior to 1492, Columbus decided that the enslavement of both men and women made the whole process more manageable and profitable. What we should celebrate, then, is the survival of those who fought and those who gave their lives to affirm their humanity and the humanity of all peoples.

Women in Europe and in Moorish Spain

The conventional history books cite Columbus's voyages to this Hemisphere as the event that gave momentum to the Renaissance. It would be well to remember, however, that the Renaissance was, in fact, a

time of growth and enlightenment for European men, driven by a lust for gold and self-aggrandizement. As the European manhood expanded out to discover their new worlds, women became increasingly glorified chattels and romanticized untouchables.

Eight hundred years of Moorish rule ended on January 2, 1492 and then, ten months later, the Columbian era began. With the fall of Granada, the Reconquista was completed and the Moorish enlightenment ended. The Moors, who had successfully ruled

