

An Examination of the Classical Origins of Modern Racial Thought

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Abstract

Race in the ancient sense is not fully understood, but classical sources have been used for centuries to further racial agendas. Classical scholars in the past forty years have begun to analyze the effects of such uses, and theories of race and race relations perpetrated by the field. This project seeks to analyze the influence of classical works, specifically Homer's *Odyssey* and Herodotus' *Histories*, on exploration era travel narratives, especially the journal of Christopher Columbus (1492-1493) and letters of Amerigo Vespucci (1503 and 1504). It analyzes episodic parallels between the *Odyssey* and both Columbus and Vespucci which use a "civilizational framework" to describe indigenous Americans. This framework defines indigenous persons as either "civilized" or "uncivilized," following classical categories for civilization, described by Redfield as "soft" and "hard" peoples.¹ This is problematic, as the examples Columbus and Vespucci often refer to are mythical; Additionally, the people they describe are denied agency, and the exploration narratives are used to justify the subjugation of indigenous peoples.

¹ Redfield 1985, 109-110

Introduction

Modern Americans are uncomfortable discussing race and ethnicity, but we² continue to profit from structures created around the beliefs essential to racial divisions.³ White privilege, profiting off of another race's disadvantage or disparagement, found its roots in the exploration era, when Europeans began interacting with new groups of people at higher rates than ever before. There is no legitimate basis for the belief that non-white peoples are inherently inferior to Europeans;⁴ however, through pseudo-science and historical texts, Europeans embedded their system of discrimination in so-called facts. We can trace this ideology to "foundational" texts such as the Columbus journal and Vespucci letters, which were influenced by the interpretation of ancient ideals of cultural superiority, especially those of the Greeks and Romans.

The ongoing goal of this project is to examine the influence of Greco-Roman texts⁵ through close reading of exploration-era travel narratives and the ancient texts they resemble rhetorically and narratively. For the purposes of this thesis, the project is currently limited to the journal of Christopher Columbus and letters of Amerigo Vespucci on the "modern" end, as Columbus and Vespucci were two of the first Europeans⁶ to visit and write about the Americas. It is also limited to Herodotus' *Histories* and Homer's *Odyssey* on the ancient end, as the

² White people, especially those of Western European descent.

³ For example, black people are incarcerated at a staggering rate higher than whites for the same crimes (NAACP); Only one president in the entirety of United States history has been non-white (Barack Obama, who is half-white); In March 2019, Facebook released a statement concerning their role in racial discrimination in housing advertisements.

⁴ Mainly Blacks (people of African descent, no matter where they live) and Native Americans.

⁵ Known as classical texts.

⁶ Western Europeans; it is a generally accepted fact that the Vikings reached the northeast coast of North America, around Newfoundland, Canada.

influence of Herodotus on Columbus has previously been recorded,⁷ while in my readings, I found heretofore unnoticed parallels between the *Odyssey* and both Columbus and Vespucci.

I came upon this research through a combination of two courses, one about Ancient Greek Identity and works used in the creation of identity, the other about Latin American Anthropology, a more general course that discussed the treatment of Latin America⁸ by the Western world⁹ from exploration to the present day. While reading early works concerning Latin America, I began noticing parallels in rhetoric of “otherness” and scenes between these and several of the classical works I had read, several of which are detailed in Chapters Two and Three.

I will begin with a Literature Review briefly summarizing arguments regarding race in anthropological and classical debates. In Chapter One, I will contextualize the lives and journeys of Columbus and Vespucci. I will also explain the “civilization model,” a framework used in categorizing societies in a hierarchical manner, which I found most noticeable across the texts; I will finally discuss problematic terminology utilized in Columbus and Vespucci and will explain the *Odyssey*’s relevancy to this project. In Chapter Two, I will discuss several episodes of the *Odyssey* which are paralleled in Columbus and Vespucci which discuss the Other as “civilized,” and how they relate to the previously-mentioned “civilization model.” In Chapter Three, I will

⁷ Ferdman 1994; Redfield 1985

⁸ Central and South America, from Mexico further south; also including the Caribbean, especially in exploration and colonial discussions.

⁹ Typically defined as Europe (esp. Western Europe and the United Kingdom), the United States, etc. (i.e. Canada, Australia, New Zealand).

discuss episodes which discuss the Other as “uncivilized” and how they relate to the “civilization model.”

Literature Review

Discussion of ancient race, much like that of modern race, is complicated and controversial. For the purposes of this project, I will be looking at broad anthropological definitions of race and historical analyses surrounding colonization and exploration.¹⁰ These have been necessarily narrowed to provide a clear but still thorough discussion. In order to communicate this nearly three-thousand¹¹ years of material concerning the tradition of race, I will divide the arguments into two categories: anthropological and classical, with an eye towards the historical context of the development of these fields.

Race has always been an important, and contentious, topic in the field of anthropology. Although the field itself was not established until the 19th century, scholars often drew from historical and ancient works which they believed could convey their sentiments better.¹² In the case of these ancient works, intent and context is disregarded in favor of modern interpretation.¹³ This neglect in analyzing the ancient texts for context and nuance compounds the critical misunderstandings of the past – and false justifications for discriminatory practices.¹⁴ The racial

¹⁰ At this time, I will not be addressing race relations between those in Europe.

¹¹ Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are approximated to have been written in 750 BCE, though these epics existed through oral tradition for longer, giving me a 2,768-year range of sources.

¹² “We see that Greek literature, followed by Latin literature, has given later European civilization two highly seductive and therefore extremely powerful tools, suggesting that it is possible to classify humans into superior and inferior groups” (Isaac 2004, 163); “Herodotus’ descriptions of the exotic customs of foreign peoples... became models for Renaissance historians and ethnographers” (Grafton 1992, 38); Additionally, a section of Aristotle’s *Politics*, known as the “theory of natural slavery” was used by the Spaniards to justify their treatment of indigenous Americans (Isaac 2004, 200-201).

¹³ “Ancient and later authorities coexist, pulled out of geographical and chronological context to debate in a sort of “philosophical present,” rather like the “ethnographic present” in which modern anthropologists have represented their subjects” (Grafton 1992, 16).

¹⁴ When confronting someone about change, the excuse “this is how it’s always been” is often used, but no evidence for the practices is given.

binary of white versus non-white¹⁵ that we see in the world today was first proposed during the Renaissance, based on readings of Classical works.¹⁶

During the “era of exploration,”¹⁷ Europeans encountered new groups of people with cultures unlike those they had ever met before. Once credited with making initial contact,¹⁸ Christopher Columbus led the charge of Europeans into the Western hemisphere.¹⁹ His legacy extends from this exploration into the European mindset concerning New World people.²⁰ In the mid-twentieth century, scholars began to question the legacy of Columbus and the ethics of the colonization pattern which followed.²¹ Recent scholarship often discounts the significance of Columbus’ achievements in pursuit of calling out the hypocrisy of his New World “discovery”²² and his personal attitudes about exploration. “Columbus often placed written authority above experience,” trusting more in the accounts of others, most of whom would never set foot in the New World, over his own observations.²³ Scholars recognize that Columbus’ writings influenced the development of race relations in the New World,²⁴ especially the sections in which he employs other works;²⁵ however, while they analyze the effects of Columbus on modern racial beliefs,²⁶ they do not look at the sources that led to his own beliefs. Like Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci²⁷ was an early explorer of the New World that strongly influenced European

¹⁵ Mainly seen as White versus Black.

¹⁶ Fortney 1977, 35

¹⁷ This era is dated from the 1400s-1700s, approximately from Prince Henry the Navigator (Portugal) to Captain James Cook (Britain). It should be noted that in the mid-17th century and early 18th century, colonization and trade in the New World was becoming more common, and there was much more travel between Europe and the Americas.

¹⁸ Columbus did make the first European contact with Caribbean peoples.

¹⁹ Columbus’ first voyage was in 1492; he was followed by Cabot in 1497 (Abulafia 2008, 220).

²⁰ Abulafia 2008; de Las Casas

²¹ Noticeable in popular culture with the replacement of Columbus Day with Indigenous People’s Day in several locations (Ghasarian 1996).

²² Kubal notes that “Columbus could not have discovered an already inhabited place” (Kubal 2008, 1).

²³ I.e. Herodotus (Abulafia 2008, 307).

²⁴ Abulafia 2008; Grafton 1992

²⁵ Abulafia 2008

²⁶ Abulafia 2008; Boyle 2008

²⁷ For whom the Americas are famously named.

perception of the New World; however, the works of Vespucci are knowingly full of falsehoods.²⁸ While scholars do recognize that Vespucci has had an impact from his fantastical tales and his lack of accountability for dehumanizing the indigenous peoples, again they do not critically examine the works he used to form these ideologies.

The foundations of the United States itself were built around an understanding of disparate race relations, which were enforced by both national²⁹ and state law.³⁰ Thomas Jefferson³¹ even wrote on classical works, criticizing Greco-Roman slavery for cruelty when he himself owned (and fathered) slaves.³² Although after the American Civil War, slavery was abolished in all U.S. states and territories,³³ many former slaves were unable to achieve financial independence from their previous owners and remained minimally paid (or altogether unpaid) laborers.³⁴ In addition, African-Americans were not citizens until 1868,³⁵ and were not legally

²⁸ De Las Casas.

²⁹ I.e. the 3/5 Compromise (*U.S. Constitution*. Art. I, Sec. 3, cl. 3.), amended in 1868 by the 14th Amendment (*U.S. Constitution*. Amend. XIV, Sect. 2.). The 14th Amendment is currently under attack by Donald Trump for “birthright citizenship” (Oliviero; *U.S. Constitution*. Amend. XIV, Sect. 1.).

³⁰ In the Reconstruction-era south, “Jim Crow Laws” requiring the segregation of races in all public settings, officially codified in the Supreme Court ruling in favor of “separate but equal” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*).

³¹ Jefferson’s personal library, containing many volumes of classical texts (complete with Jefferson’s personal notes), became the core of the Library of Congress, the National Library of the United States (Cole 2005).

³² He claims that classical slavery was cruel because it oppressed whites who were “artistic and scientific geniuses,” while slavery in his time only oppressed black people, who he believed were naturally inferior (Teets 2018; Mayer 1997).

³³ Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation* freed all slaves in rebelling states/territories (the Confederacy) in 1863, but it wasn’t until 1865 that slavery was abolished in the Union.

³⁴ The practice known as “debt slavery” has been practiced for centuries, but in the U.S., racial laws prevented black people from acquiring wealth or land. In the early 1900s, a form of debt slavery called “sharecropping” ensured a high division of wealth between the upper class and lower class, which contributed to the severity of the Great Depression in the agriculturally-based south (Ochiltree 2004). Additionally, (racial) slavery in the southern United States took two and a half years to enforce after the Emancipation Proclamation (hence the Juneteenth holiday, 1865), and was not abolished in non-rebelling slave states until the 13th Amendment in 1865.

³⁵ The Civil Rights Act of 1866 did grant citizenship to African-American males, but the Constitution cemented this into the highest law in 1868 (*U.S. Constitution*. Amend. XIV, Sect. 1.). Though granted the right to vote in this act, a great number of African-American males faced intimidation, threats of violence and death, unconstitutional tests, and fees when they tried to exercise this right.

protected from persecution and discrimination for another 100 years.³⁶ These laws and protections were not equally guaranteed to those of other non-white racial groups, especially Native Americans³⁷ and Hispanics.³⁸

Race in the Greco-Roman sense is still not fully understood, due to the same disregard for intent and context as in anthropology. Though aspects of classical studies existed in the ancient world,³⁹ the field began to develop in the Renaissance.⁴⁰ Early scholars used classical works to promote their attitudes towards the East,⁴¹ then towards the New World.⁴² These include Herodotus' *Histories*, referred to as the first historical and ethnographic text,⁴³ Hesiod's *Works and Days*,⁴⁴ known for its "ages of men,"⁴⁵ and Hippocrates' *Airs, Waters, Places*, which claims associations between personality characteristics and geography. In the past 30 years, classical scholars have questioned not only their theories of race, but how the field has perpetuated racial ideas.⁴⁶ Scholars such as McCoskey and Isaac have recently written studies broadly analyzing

³⁶ A series of Acts and court cases in the 1950s-60s (Civil Rights Era), most notably *Brown v. The Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were a step towards racial equality under the law (Aiken 2013). Enforcement of these laws is debatable.

³⁷ Current Native American rights under debate include land ownership (and imminent domain), voting, safety of women and children, and much more (Schroedel 2015; Bubar 2004).

³⁸ The current debate over Latinx and Hispanic rights is taking place in a more public arena, as President Donald Trump uses Twitter to spread his personal opinions about human rights and who is deserving of them (@realDonaldTrump or @POTUS).

³⁹ Since classical studies is classified as the study of ancient Greece or Rome, the Romans did participate in classics by their emulation of historic Greece.

⁴⁰ Fortney 1977

⁴¹ The romanticizing of the "Oriental" past (Said 1978).

⁴² "Cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are, but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be. To the Westerner, however, the Oriental was always like some aspect of the West" (Said 1978, 67).

⁴³ Written in the mid-5th century BCE, *Histories* contains descriptions of groups throughout the known world mixed with stories; Redfield 1985, 97.

⁴⁴ Hesiod writes in the late 8th century BCE, shortly after Homer. His work *Theogony* discusses origins and myths of the gods, while *Works and Days* discusses the life of commoners and how to attain greatness in an everyday setting.

⁴⁵ The first age of men, the "golden age" is most relevant to my analysis; "they lived like gods, with carefree heart, remote from toil and misery," "they enjoyed themselves in feasting," "the grain-giving soil bore its fruits of its own accord in unstinted plenty, while they at their leisure harvested their fields in contentment amid abundance" (*Op.* 40).

⁴⁶ I.e. discussions of Bernal's *Black Athena* (Berlinerblau 1999); Kennedy 2018

race in the classical world and criticizing approaches to it;⁴⁷ in addition, an anthology of classical sources concerning race and ethnicity was published by Kennedy, Roy, and Goldman as an introduction to the Greco-Roman concept of Other.⁴⁸ One of the defining texts for this subject, however, remains Said's *Orientalism*, written in 1978.⁴⁹ Currently scholars are discussing how modern bias has influenced our perception of race in the ancient world, and attempting to "correct"⁵⁰ belief systems based off of this, but politics⁵¹ and contemporary racism⁵² dissuade examination into the topic; furthermore, discussions of race in classics revolve around the use of ancient works to directly influence beliefs. They have only recently begun to address the intermediary sources and steps that the beliefs take.⁵³

⁴⁷ McCoskey's *Race: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (2012) seeks to more accurately define ancient race, while acknowledging the effects that misinterpretations have on history and modern society; Isaac's *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (2004) evaluates classical sources discussing "race" and the historical/modern arguments that utilize them. Isaac curiously discriminates against non-Anti-Semitic forms of racism.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, Roy, and Goldman 2013

⁴⁹ Said's work discusses historical and contemporary biases towards the Near East perpetrated mainly through literary history.

⁵⁰ Correct as in "edit," for future use. The damage from past definitions has already been done, but future issues can be alleviated.

⁵¹ Crenshaw 2017

⁵² Dr. Sarah Bond received death threats from alt-right groups after publishing an article over the use of polychrome pigmentation on marble statues as opposed to pure whiteness (Larimer 2017).

⁵³ I.e. Krebs' study tracing the use of Tacitus' *Germania* from its rediscovery in the 15th century to its use by the Nazis in World War II for pro-Aryan purposes (Krebs 2010).

Chapter 1: History of Exploration Narratives

Before we can discuss the details and consequences of Columbus and Vespucci's writings, we must first establish the context of their explorations. The exploration era coincides with several major events in European history, many of which deal with foreign relations and the Other. In the fifteenth century, Europe was in the middle of a crisis: Christianity was perceived to be under attack by Judaism and Islam. While the final Crusades took place in the early to mid-thirteenth century, Spain took the defense of Christianity personally, gaining papal support to conduct crusades of their own in the Reconquista and Inquisition.⁵⁴ The Reconquista ended in 1492 with the Siege of Granada, after which the "Catholic Monarchs," Ferdinand and Isabella, began funding western voyages. While initially the voyages were intended to find alternative trade routes to Asia, the "discovery" of the Americas built a different type of trade system: slavery. African slaves were imported into Europe long before the Americas, but Spanish and Portuguese colonization of Latin America brought a boom in the trade. Spain establishment a feudalistic system in the New World, modelled on the one used in land reconquered from the Moors, but relying on the labor of indigenous Americans. When indigenous labor did not yield enough, due to high death rates from disease and even laws prohibiting certain treatment of indigenous peoples,⁵⁵ large numbers of Africans were imported as slave laborers. There were no debates over the legitimacy of African slavery as there were about the encomienda system,⁵⁶ as

⁵⁴ Reconquista refers to military expansion into Islamic territory in order to push the Moors out of European territory; Inquisition is a church-sanctioned trial to determine whether converts to Christianity (from Judaism or Islam) have truly given up their religion; Inquisition trials are on the basis of "guilty until proven innocent," while modern American courts rely on the Accusatorial system (innocent until proven guilty).

⁵⁵ Las Leyes Nevas, passed by Isabella; It is hard to determine whether these laws were enforced, as the power center remained in Spain while the laws were over Latin America.

⁵⁶ I.e. the Valladolid Debate (1550).

from the beginning indigenous Americans were given the possibility of having souls, thus making them able to convert to Christianity.⁵⁷ Africans were not given this benefit.⁵⁸

At the time of Columbus and Vespucci, Latin was still the Lingua Franca, though vernacular languages were becoming more common during this time.⁵⁹ Due to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman-Turks in 1454, there was an influx in Greek texts into Italy.⁶⁰ These texts, many of which did not survive in Europe but were preserved in Constantinople, were brought into Western Europe, but were essentially inaccessible until they were translated into Latin.⁶¹ For example, Lorenzo Valla's fifteenth century Latin translations made works such as Herodotus' *Histories* and both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* accessible.⁶² It is important to note that exploration era roughly coincides with the Renaissance and a renewal of classical thought through Humanism. Amerigo Vespucci received a more traditional education, being taught by his uncle, a Dominican monk, and could read at least Italian and Latin.⁶³ Christopher Columbus was self-educated, growing up with Italian, but learning Latin, Arabic, and Spanish on his own.⁶⁴ In their educations, both Columbus and Vespucci were both exposed to texts known as "travel narratives," works which describe introduction to the unfamiliar or Other.⁶⁵ Exposure to these

⁵⁷ "They would easily be made Christian, for it appeared to me that they had no creed" (Columbus, 24); The lack of religion in indigenous Americans is taken as a good thing, a chance for the Church to intervene before they can be "corrupted" by another group.

⁵⁸ From Charlemagne's rule of the Holy Roman Empire, it was illegal to have a Christian slave; Prince Henry the Navigator claimed that in the voyages he funded, Africans rejected Christianity and were thus able to be enslaved – Because of the initial reaction of a few, the entire African "race" sacrificed their human rights; Bartolome de las Casas claims that Africans do not have souls in *Memorial de Remedios para Las Indias*, arguing in favor of African slavery as opposed to the encomienda system (Wilson 1957).

⁵⁹ The invention of the printing press made literacy more attainable.

⁶⁰ Constantinople stood as the head of the Eastern Roman Empire/Byzantine Empire until it was taken by the Ottoman Turks; "Translating Homer"

⁶¹ Grafton 1992, 45

⁶² Grafton 1992, 38; "Translating Homer"

⁶³ Vespucci, iv; "Amerigo received a good classical education" (Abulafia 2008, 243).

⁶⁴ Boyle 2008, 74

⁶⁵ I.e. Herodotus, *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid* – the influence of the *Aeneid* on Columbus has been documented, as it is a text about colonization; I will be looking at this in future research.

ancient travel narratives gave shape to modern ones through the frameworks they contain, providing models for explorers to put the unfamiliar into understandable context.

Christopher Columbus was born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy. While little is known of his early life, as a young adult, he had a career as a merchant marine and chart maker based out of Lisbon, Portugal. In 1486, after being denied support for an Atlantic voyage to India by the Portuguese crown, Columbus went to Spain to approach the Spanish crown. After the siege of Granada in 1492,⁶⁶ he was granted royal patronage by Ferdinand and Isabella.⁶⁷ Columbus took four voyages between 1492 and 1502, all with Spanish support. His first voyage, from 1492 to 1493, is his most famous, as it is the voyage on which he “discovered”⁶⁸ the New World.⁶⁹ Columbus landed on the islands of Guanahani⁷⁰ and Hispaniola, both of which he claimed to be part of Japan.⁷¹ The second, third, and fourth voyages of Columbus were for both exploration and merchant purposes.⁷² Throughout these voyages, Columbus continued to enforce his belief that he was in the Far East,⁷³ ignoring the massacre and enslavement of indigenous Americans by those under his command⁷⁴ over promises of grandeur and glory. He died in Spain in 1506, in the midst of a series of lawsuits with the Spanish Crown over New World exploration and trading rights.⁷⁵ During his lifetime, only one letter by Columbus is known to have circulated.

⁶⁶ The last battle in the Reconquista against the Moors.

⁶⁷ Known as the Catholic monarchs; The contributions of Ferdinand and Isabella made up approximately 1/3 of the funding for Columbus’ initial voyage.

⁶⁸ There were already inhabitants in the lands Columbus claimed to discover; The New World had already been visited by Vikings.

⁶⁹ Columbus never knew that he had landed on a new continent. He died believing that he had reached the western islands of India, China, and Japan (the West Indies).

⁷⁰ The identity of this island is disputed, but it is believed to be San Salvador, Bahamas.

⁷¹ Future study will take into account European attitudes towards the Far East and examine its influence on Columbus’ first letter and actions on the voyage.

⁷² 1493-1496, 1498-1500, and 1502-1504.

⁷³ Asia: mainly India, China, and Japan.

⁷⁴ I.e. Alonzo de Ojeda, who captained Vespucci’s initial voyage; also, the establishment of the encomienda system

⁷⁵ The largest and most important case was settled in 1536.

Written in February 1493 and printed in Barcelona the following April,⁷⁶ this letter details the first voyage Columbus took to the New World. Columbus' journal was handed over to the Spanish Crown immediately upon his return in 1493. He was given a copy of this journal before his second journey,⁷⁷ but the crown withheld permission to publish until 1554, assumingly to prevent other powers from gaining knowledge from it. The journal was not published at this time, and it was forgotten until Bartolome de las Casas⁷⁸ rediscovered and consulted it for use in his *History of the Indies*.⁷⁹ It was not until 1825⁸⁰ that the transcript used by las Casas⁸¹ was found by Martin Fernandez de Navarrete, and the Columbus Journal was finally published. Other Columbus texts are fragmentary or unverifiable.⁸²

The journal of Christopher Columbus begins when he leaves Spain in August 1492. He heads to the Spanish-occupied Canary Islands to stock his three ships before sailing for India via the Atlantic. After approximately one month, Columbus lands on the first island in what he calls the West Indies. Columbus' Spaniards give the indigenous people who welcome them on this first island trinkets and broken ceramic, while they give the Spaniards birds, bits of gold, and manufactured goods, thus establishing the pattern of uneven trade that would continue for centuries. Though he does not mention it at the time, Columbus takes several of these indigenous people captive and encourages them to tell other groups that the Spaniards are from Heaven.

⁷⁶ printed in Latin and circulated in Rome by May 1493 (Columbus, xxi).

⁷⁷ Columbus, xv

⁷⁸ Las Casas was one of the first Spanish settlers of the New World who eventually spoke out against Spanish mistreatment of indigenous Americans and the encomienda system. He wrote histories of the Americas and became a Dominican friar after "reforming" his belief system. He argued that indigenous Americans do have souls, are capable of conversion, and thus cannot be enslaved (as potential children of God). I will be examining Las Casas further in future research.

⁷⁹ In which las Casas both knowingly and unintentionally attributed consequences of exploration and colonialism to Columbus (Columbus, xvii).

⁸⁰ Navarrete found the transcript in 1791 and published it in 1825 (Columbus, xxii).

⁸¹ Las Casas also edited the Columbus journal (Columbus, xvi).

⁸² I.e. journals from his second, third, and fourth voyages; letters.

Although he has only met one group at this time, he claims that all of the indigenous peoples will be easy to convert to Christianity, for they have no existing religion, and all speak the same language. Continuing through multiple islands with the same manner of trade, Columbus describes the land as “the most fertile and temperate,” having good soil and weather, as well having people as having the potential to be “good servants.”⁸³ He asserts several times that he is on the edge of reaching the kingdom of the “Great Khan,”⁸⁴ and that the harbors he anchors in are where Asian merchants usually trade, though they are empty when he arrives. He clings to the belief that he is on the edge of the known, near cities and civilizations that Europeans already have trade relations with, “which will doubtless be discovered.”⁸⁵ His captives do tell of trade, and of a fantastical island, “Bohio,” on which cyclopes, dog-men,⁸⁶ and cannibals live.⁸⁷ Because all of the people he has interacted with are “unwarlike,” cowardly, and inherently good, Columbus wants to meet the people who are the opposite.⁸⁸ He believes that because they are “warlike” and “armed,” they “must be intelligent people.”⁸⁹ Columbus encounters just the type of people he is looking for on Hispaniola. He describes them as the “most handsome,” having “better character,” and being “fairer” than others.⁹⁰ They also grow grain, which is used to make bread, something Columbus is delighted by.⁹¹ They are “without any knowledge of war,” but discuss encounters with the cannibals, showing missing skin chunks as proof. The only

⁸³ Columbus, 36; 24

⁸⁴ China

⁸⁵ Columbus, 59

⁸⁶ Dogs are considered greedy in Greek tradition; kunops (κυνῶψ) means dog-faced/greedy (*Il.* 1.159).

⁸⁷ I.e. Cyclopes of *Odyssey* (*Od.* 9); Hdt. 4.13; Hdt. 4.27; Hdt. 4.32; “But the ends of the earth, as they surround the rest of the world, are likely to have in them those things which seem to us finest and most rare” (Hdt. 3.116).

⁸⁸ Columbus, 58

⁸⁹ Columbus, 69

⁹⁰ Columbus, 96; The association of skin color with civilization is alluded to in Hippocrates *Aer.*, but more directly addressed in Aristotle’s *Physionomica* (Isaac 2004, 65; 151); Herodotus uses a model based on the “center and periphery,” associating closeness to the center of the world (where Greece happens to be) with greater levels of civilization.

⁹¹ This is a reference to a correlation between grain agriculture and civilization level in Classical Tradition.

diplomatic meetings that are described in the entire journal are held with leaders from Hispaniola at this time. Columbus provides food and drink, as well as a more even exchange of goods.⁹² After these meetings take place, the Santa Maria crashes, having been left to be steered overnight by an inexperienced ship's boy. The ship is immediately evacuated, and the cargo is saved by order of the king of a nearby village, who hopes to begin good relations with the Spanish. At this time, Columbus announces his decision to establish a fort on Hispaniola. He is also rejoined by Martin Alonzo Pinzon,⁹³ who went off on a solo expedition for a month and a half. Rounding Hispaniola, Columbus meets a group who he believes are the cannibals. They carry bows and arrows, are "more ugly in appearance," and speak a different language.⁹⁴ The interaction that follows is the only active violence depicted in the journal, a battle between arrows and bullets.⁹⁵ Columbus "[believes] that they were [cannibals] and that they eat men," and even if they are not, "they must be neighbours... and have the same customs."⁹⁶ He finds no evidence of cannibalism, of cyclopes, or of his presence in Asia, but leaves the West Indies in mid-January believing in it all. After one month of sailing, Columbus lands in Santa Maria, a Portuguese-held island in the Eastern Atlantic. The Portuguese attempt to arrest him and prevent his return to Spain, trying to steal Columbus' journal and charts for information.

Columbus relies heavily on a model of hospitality, determining the worth of a group on how they react to the Spanish presence. Additionally, he comments on the indigenous peoples' physical appearances, implying that a "better" appearance and pale skin indicate a more

⁹² I.e. large pieces of gold in exchange for captain's robes, nice beads, and other goods that an upper-class Spaniard would own.

⁹³ In the journal it is unclear exactly when or why Pinzon leaves.

⁹⁴ Columbus, 146

⁹⁵ Detailed in Chapter 3.

⁹⁶ Columbus, 148

“advanced” society.⁹⁷ Although Columbus does mention that mythical beings exist just around the corner, he does not actively insert them into his narrative.⁹⁸ His comments are more real, based on actual observation combined with older traditions of judgement based on hospitality and geography, traditions which already place Western Europe -especially Italy - in the most advantageous location.

Amerigo Vespucci was born in 1454 in Florence, Italy. He was employed by the Medici family, who sent him to Spain in 1495.⁹⁹ Vespucci originally worked as a contractor and provision merchant for ships sailing from Spanish ports, especially after the crown breached its contract with Columbus in April 1495.¹⁰⁰ Vespucci claimed to have gone on four voyages, two with the Spanish and two with the Portuguese. His first and second voyages,¹⁰¹ which he claimed to be a navigator on,¹⁰² were the single voyage of Alonzo de Ojeda.¹⁰³ Vespucci’s third voyage, from 1501 to 1502, was his first with the Portuguese. It is in describing his third voyage that Vespucci mentions the first belief in a “New World,”¹⁰⁴ as well as his popular descriptions of indigenous encounters and cultures.¹⁰⁵ Vespucci wrote two letters about his voyages, though at least three forgeries exist.¹⁰⁶ In 1503, he wrote to Lorenzo Piero di Medici in his native Italian,

⁹⁷ In Hispaniola, where the people are “more handsome and of better character,” “they found “two young women as white as any that could be found in Spain.” (Columbus, 96); in contrast, the first people Columbus encounters are “the colour of the people of the Canaries, neither black nor white...” and while they appear to “be good servants and of quick intelligence,” they are described as ruining their appearances with piercings and tattoos “through ignorance” and being “deficient in everything” (Columbus, 23-24).

⁹⁸ “Columbus ... assumed that over the horizon there were people who were born with tails, even though he himself had never actually seen them, and he insisted that they were the only ‘monsters’ of which he had received news.” (Abulafia 2008, 177).

⁹⁹ To tidy the affairs of a merchant who had promised ships to the Spanish crown before his untimely death, indebting his Medici patrons (Vespucci, iv).

¹⁰⁰ Free travel to the West Indies was allowed until this matter settled in June 1497 (Vespucci, v).

¹⁰¹ 1497-98; 1499

¹⁰² Having never sailed before and being 43-years-old at the time of the first voyage.

¹⁰³ The first voyage is fabricated; events of the “second” voyage were transposed into this voyage, as well as entirely false events. Las Casas is considered the most reputable early source to debunk the first voyage (Vespucci, xxxvix).

¹⁰⁴ “It is lawful to call it a new world” (Vespucci, xvi).

¹⁰⁵ The fourth voyage, from 1503 to 1504, also with Portugal, had few discoveries.

¹⁰⁶ Vespucci, iii

describing the 1501 journey. It was translated to Latin and published as *Mundus Novus* in 1503.¹⁰⁷ In 1504, Vespucci wrote to Piero Soderini, the Gonfalonier of Florence, describing all four of his voyages.¹⁰⁸ This Italian copy was reprinted multiple times; however, a French translation was sent to Rene, the Duke of Lorraine.¹⁰⁹ A Latin translation was drawn from the French copy by Martin Waldseemüller and published as “Quattor Americi Vespuccii Navigationes” in *Cosmographiae Introductiae*.¹¹⁰ Waldseemüller was also responsible for creating the map in which the New World was given the name of the Americas.¹¹¹

While Columbus’ journal provides clear linear progression, Vespucci’s letters have an unclear timeline.¹¹² Amerigo Vespucci’s 1504 letter details all four of his voyages. His first voyage departs from Spain in 1497, travelling to the Grand Canaries, just as Columbus did. In 37 days, he reaches what he calls the “mainland,” then he launches into a Herodotean-style¹¹³ description of the indigenous groups he encounters.¹¹⁴ Vespucci first describes their physical appearance,¹¹⁵ then their customs.¹¹⁶ He describes several practices, including their practices of eating at any time¹¹⁷ and of exposure,¹¹⁸ as “barbarous;”¹¹⁹ additionally, he makes the claim that all indigenous Americans eat human flesh.¹²⁰ Unlike Columbus, Vespucci states that there is

¹⁰⁷ Vespucci xvi

¹⁰⁸ Vespucci xvii

¹⁰⁹ Vespucci xviii

¹¹⁰ 1507 (Vespucci xvii-xviii).

¹¹¹ Vespucci xviii

¹¹² I will be summarizing the content of these letters.

¹¹³ “Herodotean ethnography took the form of a running narrative interrupted by anecdotes and descriptions...” (Grafton 1992, 45).

¹¹⁴ Vespucci, 3

¹¹⁵ “Medium stature,” “red” skin, athletic, and “well proportioned” (Vespucci, 6); Taller heights are associated with greater levels of civilization in classical tradition.

¹¹⁶ They carry bows and arrows, women use weapons and have sexual liberty, they have no leader and “live in freedom,” they are polygamous, and have no religion (Vespucci, 7-9).

¹¹⁷ “They enjoyed themselves in feasting;” “they at their leisure harvested their fields” (Op., 40).

¹¹⁸ The practice of allowing a person, often sick or otherwise weak, to succumb to the elements; used frequently in ancient times - i.e. Remus and Romulus (founders of Rome), Oedipus.

¹¹⁹ Vespucci, 7; 12

¹²⁰ Vespucci, 11

linguistic diversity, blaming war between groups on these differences.¹²¹ He says the indigenous groups have “many other barbarous customs” and claims that he “did not see anything of much value,”¹²² even as a merchant travelling to seek trade goods.¹²³ As the first of many instances in which he highlights negative experiences, Vespucci describes an experience where he was “in the greatest danger.”¹²⁴ When a group they encounter does not want to communicate with them and flees their village, the Spanish invade their personal spaces and leave “gifts.”¹²⁵ The indigenous people “[become] friendly”¹²⁶ when they return, upon finding out that the Spanish have one of their enemies as a prisoner.¹²⁷ Even after this group becomes “friendly,” and thus, to some extent, civilized, Vespucci criticizes their welcome, saying “we were received by so many barbarous ceremonies.”¹²⁸ He admits to having told the indigenous people that the Spanish are from Heaven.¹²⁹ He also brags about being called the “Carabi,” which he claims means “men of great wisdom,” but this term bears extreme similarities to Columbus’ Caribs and Canibas, the cannibals.¹³⁰ After staying with a tribe for over a month,¹³¹ he goes to war with their enemies. When this enemy fights back in self-defense, Vespucci deems them worthy of “friendship,”¹³²

¹²¹ Vespucci, 7; “...the Greeks wage war in an extremely stupid fashion... What they should do, since they all speak the same language, is make use of heralds and messengers to settle their differences, since anything would be preferable to fighting.” (Hdt. 7.9.β.2) – The claim that it is stupid to go to war with someone who speaks the same language.

¹²² “... simple peoples are not worth conquering since they have nothing. Those who invade do so out of sheer love of invasion – which is irrational” (Redfield 1985, 113).

¹²³ Vespucci, 9

¹²⁴ Vespucci, 12; Detailed in Chapter 3.

¹²⁵ Vespucci, 14

¹²⁶ The indigenous people are passive in this interaction, as with many other interactions.

¹²⁷ Not because of the gifts; Vespucci, 14

¹²⁸ Vespucci, 15

¹²⁹ Whereas Columbus enforces the belief that his captives came up with this on their own.

¹³⁰ Vespucci, 17

¹³¹ This tribe is not given a notable description; they do live near the “finest harbour in the world” (Vespucci, 18).

¹³² Vespucci appears to view retaliation as a sign of civilization.

however, they reject these attempts, and the Spanish absolutely demolish their village, taking 250 prisoners to be sold as slaves.¹³³ Vespucci returns from this voyage in October 1498.

Vespucci's second voyage departs Spain in May 1499,¹³⁴ sailing to the Portuguese-occupied Cape Verde.¹³⁵ It is 44 days to new land. His first interaction is with alleged cannibals, a negative experience of "faithless" gift rejection.¹³⁶ Vespucci travels, meeting an infinity of wonderful people, "peaceful" with "good manners."¹³⁷ He finds some who they "were unable, either by force or persuasion, to establish any intercourse with" and decries them as "such barbarians;" another is "the most bestial and the most brutal race that has ever been seen" and their island "[offers] no profit."¹³⁸ Vespucci also introduces a dangerous Island of Giants.¹³⁹ He claims many other additional violent encounters, in which indigenous groups "did not wish [the Spanish] to take anything from the land," and were thus worthy of attack.¹⁴⁰ Throughout Vespucci brags about his establishment of uneven trade, at one point describing a scene in which he gives trinkets in exchange for large quantities of pearls.¹⁴¹ He visits Columbus' fort at Hispaniola, claiming that the men there harmed his men,¹⁴² but specifically states that he will not speak of it in detail.¹⁴³ He returns to Spain in September 1500.

¹³³ Vespucci, 20

¹³⁴ confirmed to be the voyage of Hojeda/Ojeda by las Casas.

¹³⁵ This is a possible discrepancy. Vespucci sails to Portuguese Cape Verde in a Spanish voyage, and to Spanish Canary Islands in a Portuguese voyage (voyage 3).

¹³⁶ Vespucci, 24; Detailed in Chapter 3.

¹³⁷ Vespucci, 25; no specific details are given of the distance, groups, actions (of indigenous or Spanish), etc.

¹³⁸ Vespucci, 25

¹³⁹ Vespucci, 27; Detailed in Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁰ Vespucci, 28

¹⁴¹ Vespucci, 29

¹⁴² A possible note on the European becoming Orientalized (Said), the seductive Other (Redfield) – seen in Roman history with the demonization of the Egyptian and the ruin of Mark Antony; or just Vespucci establishing himself in opposition to Columbus.

¹⁴³ Many times, Vespucci refuses to go into detail because he claims to be writing a book (*The Four Voyages*), which is never published, and a manuscript is never found. This particular instance, Vespucci refuses to speak about because of alleged privacy reasons.

Vespucci's third voyage is described in both of his letters, but there are discrepancies between the two. He leaves Lisbon, Portugal, in either March or May 1501,¹⁴⁴ sailing to the Spanish Canary islands. He sails along the African coast before the 67-day voyage to the new world. The 1503 letter, which discusses only this third voyage, has no major episodes; however, in the 1504 letter, Vespucci describes an incident with "people worse than animals."¹⁴⁵ This group, after initially avoiding contact, draws the Portuguese in before brutally murdering and eating them.¹⁴⁶ This encounter is a significant part of Vespucci's third voyage in his 1504 letter, but it is not mentioned in the 1503 letter at all. The 1503 letter is Herodotean-style, much like the section of the 1504 letter discussing the first voyage.¹⁴⁷ It contains many of the same descriptors and sentiments as this section as well. Vespucci claims that the indigenous peoples, formerly "peaceful,"¹⁴⁸ "constantly wage war," but he is consistent in his belief that all are cannibals.¹⁴⁹ He praises the Portuguese for upholding good, for "doing all [they] could to persuade them to desist from their evil habits."¹⁵⁰ In this letter, he describes the land as Eden-like, using Golden Age imagery.¹⁵¹ The third voyage return is unclear – Vespucci does not address it, and thus the 1503 letter ends. Vespucci's fourth voyage is not significant. Leaving Lisbon in May 1503 for Cape Verde, a ship is immediately crashed.¹⁵² He briefly discusses the establishment of a fort at the Bay of All Saints.¹⁵³ Although Vespucci remains in the New World for almost a year,

¹⁴⁴ The two letters vary on this date.

¹⁴⁵ Vespucci, 37; Detailed in Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁶ Bacchic episode – the indigenous women tear the Spanish man apart with their bare hands (*Bacch. #*); Animalistic depiction.

¹⁴⁷ Descriptive; Ethnographic.

¹⁴⁸ Vespucci, 24

¹⁴⁹ "Human flesh is an ordinary article of food" (Vespucci, 47).

¹⁵⁰ Always the moralizing Christian/European – blatant disregard for other cultures; Vespucci, 47

¹⁵¹ "Great trees grow without cultivation" "terrestrial paradise" (Vespucci, 48); Hesiod's *Works and Days (Op.)* is the primary example of golden age imagery

¹⁵² The island is "evil" because the captain crashed in its shallows (Vespucci, 53)

¹⁵³ Vespucci, 55

“[making] friends with all the natives,” not discussing it because of his book.¹⁵⁴ He returns to Lisbon in September 1504, where he concludes the 1504 letter.

We see a very fantastical view of the world through Vespucci’s letters, as it is less important to him to show fact. He engages in and utilizes several standard categories of the classical world, including Hesiodic golden age imagery¹⁵⁵ and insertion of the mythical.¹⁵⁶ Vespucci actively uses the mythical to create a more fantastic image of Latin America, treating the people there as simply another part of his narrative, not real humans. He does employ several categories for evaluating them, for example, the concept of weaponry correlating to civilization level¹⁵⁷ and attempts at the hospitality; however, it is more obvious in his insertion of the mythical that he does not deem indigenous Americans as deserving of thorough evaluation: they are something to be viewed, but not respected.¹⁵⁸

It is important to note that Columbus and Vespucci use what we define now as problematic terminology. While it may not have been contentious at the time that they were writing, their references to the indigenous population set the standard for how Europeans would interact with indigenous Americans for the next five-hundred years. Some terms, such as the use of “Indian” to refer to Native Americans,¹⁵⁹ persist today, long after Vespucci identified the New World as being a separate landmass from Asia. Additionally, the uses of “New World” and

¹⁵⁴ Again, this book is never published or found.

¹⁵⁵ Most obviously in his observance of eating habits; “they have no regular time for their meals, but they eat at any time that they have the wish... they eat at all hours” (Vespucci, 7-8); “they enjoyed themselves in feasting... they at their leisure harvested their fields in contentment amid abundance” (*Op.* 40).

¹⁵⁶ I.e. the “island of the giants” (Vespucci, 27-28); The depiction of iguanas as “like a serpent, except that it had no wings” – serpent referring to dragons (76).

¹⁵⁷ Discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁵⁸ “They deprived the natives of dignity by treating their culture as a spectacle.” (Redfield 1985, 100).

¹⁵⁹ The term “Native American” itself applying to those native to the United States; “Indigenous,” despite being more distant and applicable to any population in their homeland, is the more correct term in referring broadly to the peoples native to the Americas. I will be using “indigenous” and “indigenous Americans” in describing the peoples of Columbus and Vespucci’s narratives.

“discovery” to speak of European exploration of the Americas¹⁶⁰ refers to the fact that the land, though thoroughly populated at the time of Columbus, had not been seen by Europeans.¹⁶¹ Their accounts also show authors who consider themselves much more advanced in a civilizational hierarchy than their subjects. Thus, we see broad assumptions and strong objectification of the people they encounter, especially the women, unrestricted by some functional definition of equality across cultures.¹⁶²

The next two chapters discuss the use of a civilizational hierarchy, which we can see in Odysseus’ establishment of the opposing Other in relation to the Greeks in the *Odyssey*; furthermore, we see it by Columbus and Vespucci in their establishment of indigenous Americans as the opposing Other in relation to Europeans. Characterized by a sense of “higher cultural morale” and judgmental language¹⁶³ on the European side,¹⁶⁴ the civilizational hierarchy model which I discuss is one of opposition. It is an attempt to contextualize the newly encountered and previously unrecognizable as something more familiar to both explorer and reader.¹⁶⁵ Typically through a series of oppositions, or simply description of the “Other,” coupled with ethnocentric terminology,¹⁶⁶ the “Other” is defined by what is not held in common with the dominant group.¹⁶⁷ The reliance on a hierarchy to define a group’s cultural value or

¹⁶⁰ Not to mention the fact that the Americas are named for the man who identified them as being “a new world, because none of these countries were known to our [European] ancestors...” (Vespucci, 42).

¹⁶¹ It is generally accepted that the Vikings had reached North America (Vinland), but the discovery of the New World and journeys of exploration refer mainly to the claims of Western Europeans.

¹⁶² A theoretical definition such as “all men are created equal.”

¹⁶³ I.e. “most barbarous” (Vespucci, 11).

¹⁶⁴ Previously seen in the Greek point of view; Redfield 1985, 101; “moralism critical of barbarian values” (Redfield 1985, 102).

¹⁶⁵ “As Columbus observed and reported on the New World, he naturally turned to his reading... as he looked for a framework in which to insert what he saw” (Grafton 1992, 77).

¹⁶⁶ I.e. “savages” or “bestial;” descriptions in more modern works will use the term “barbarian” as meaning “uncivilized,” drawing on the previous opposition of Greek versus Barbarian (non-Greek speaking).

¹⁶⁷ “Self-fashioning through the disparagement of alien societies,” “Negative images, misrepresentations, and stereotypes permitted ancients to invent the “other,” thereby justifying marginalization, subordination, and exclusion” (Gruen 2010, 13).

robustness is extremely subjective. Due to this, the dominant group can use previous texts to ascribe whatever value is necessary for their means; thus, beliefs about cultural superiority or inferiority,¹⁶⁸ however unreal they are, can be proven simply by the dominant group circulating the judgement with “historical backing.”¹⁶⁹ We see this throughout history, especially during the colonization of the Americas and the various eras of civil rights.¹⁷⁰ The Greeks and Romans did not have a concept of racial superiority, instead relying on a notion of cultural superiority. In the Renaissance, Europeans claimed classical works as their own¹⁷¹ and consciously manipulated them to change cultural categories into racial categories. It is through the enforcement of a civilizational hierarchy that it is somehow justifiable to oppress non-white peoples. Europeans write that non-white people are inferior to white people, and the compounding of texts with the same belief give false validity to this claim.

¹⁶⁸ i.e. Aristotle theory of natural slavery, which does not refer to races but rather to the kind of government that people are predisposed to accept (people in any region can naturally reject the type of rule they happen to be born under); the theory claims that those who are predisposed to accept monarchy or tyranny are “natural slaves,” while those who are predisposed to accept democracy are “naturally free” (*Pol.*); This work is heavily drawn upon in slave debates, including Las Casas’ Valladolid debate concerning the encomienda system.

¹⁶⁹ “[Herodotus’] work provided a key framework for Columbus on his voyages” (McCoskey 2012, 62).

¹⁷⁰ Including abolitionist movements prior to the U.S. Civil War, citizenship and voting debates after the abolition of slavery, and the civil rights movement spanning the greater part of the 20th century. This also includes Native American land rights discussions, as well as citizenship, voting rights, and broader cultural debates concerning indigenous Americans.

¹⁷¹ Removing them from their historical and cultural contexts.

Chapter 2: Defining the Other: Experiences with the “Civilized”

Chapter Two will discuss several episodes in the *Odyssey*, Columbus, and Vespucci, which deal with the Other on the “civilized” end of the spectrum. I will be utilizing the existing dichotomy of “civilized” versus “uncivilized,” purely as a means of distinguishing the parallels found between the *Odyssey* and the works of Columbus and Vespucci. These categories are, of course, imposed upon groups by another that believes itself to be superior, and thus the lines between “civilized” and “uncivilized” are muddied by a variation in cultural values between groups and through time. The categories I use to define “civilized” is based on what Redfield calls a “soft” people.¹⁷² In general, the term “civilized” will apply to those who have religion,¹⁷³ centralized society, political structures, and trade; additionally, agriculture, though not specifically noted by Redfield, is associated with Greek civilization levels. It is important to mention that categories for “civilization” or “savagery” are extremely subjective, holding no actual value beyond the biases they enforce. They do, however, provide a framework to begin examinations of race on, for these categories have been used in texts since at least Homer and on to the present day.

The *Odyssey*, though classified as heroic epic in genre, contains important interactions between early Greeks and the “Other.” However mythic the groups the Greeks of the *Odyssey* meet are, the content of these episodes indicate that Greeks had begun to think about their position in relation to other groups in a critical manner; additionally, they provide scenes that

¹⁷² “Soft peoples are characterized by luxury, the division of labor, and complexity of nomoi, especially in the sphere of religion,” “Among soft peoples market-exchange proliferates.” “Soft peoples centralize resources through taxation, build monuments, are literate and organized; their politics tend toward tyranny,” “Soft peoples tend to acculturate their dead,” “whereas among soft peoples women tend to become a commodity, disposed of by sale, through prostitution, or otherwise,” “Soft cultures are confusing and seductive, difficult to leave once visited.” (Redfield 1985, 109-110).

¹⁷³ Or at least a perceived propensity for it.

become recurring set pieces for later ethnographic works. Interactions with the “Other” take place primarily from books 6 to 13, with key episodes in books 9 and 10. From books 6 to 8 and later in book 13, Odysseus, the main character, is stranded with a group called the Phaeacians. The Phaeacians are used to juxtapose Greek ideals of civilization and proper treatment of guests¹⁷⁴ with the failure to abide by these ideals, shown mainly in the Laestrygonians of book 10 and the Cyclopes of book 9.

First, I will discuss the Phaeacians of the *Odyssey*, as they provide a model on which Columbus builds his interactions with the people of Hispaniola. Odysseus’ encounter with the Phaeacians spans from books 6 to 8 and book 13, after he is wrecked on their shores, battered and alone. The first person he meets is Nausicaa, the daughter of the king.¹⁷⁵ Nausicaa gives Odysseus food, oil for bathing, and clothes him – proper treatment according to the laws of *xenia*, rules of hospitality, which are enforced by Zeus;¹⁷⁶ additionally, she emphasizes that violation of these rules by either party will result in negative consequences.¹⁷⁷ Similar to the later-mentioned experience with the Laestrygonians, Nausicaa is the one who is expected to introduce the Greeks¹⁷⁸ to the Other, as she is the first contact; however, instead of allowing him to be led into potential danger, the goddess Athena hides Odysseus until he can reach the palace and identify the type of people that he is meeting.¹⁷⁹ Although Athena does tell Odysseus that the Phaeacians are distrustful and unwelcoming of guests,¹⁸⁰ their actions during this meeting do not

¹⁷⁴ The practice of *xenia*, the relationship between a guest and host and the expected behaviors of both.

¹⁷⁵ “I will show you where the city is and tell you that the people here are called the Phaeacians. This is their country, and I am the daughter of great-hearted Alcinous, the Phaeacians’ lord” (*Od.* 6.199-202).

¹⁷⁶ *Od.* 6.212.-216

¹⁷⁷ “We are very dear to the immortal gods” (*Od.* 6.208); “All strangers, all beggars, are under the protection of Zeus...” (*Od.* 6.212-213).

¹⁷⁸ In this case, just one Greek - Odysseus.

¹⁷⁹ Rose notes that Athena’s caution may be entirely justified; Nausicaa speaks of extreme isolation from the rest of humanity, Athena warns of Phaeacian negativity towards foreigners, Arete tells Odysseus to guard his gifts from the Phaeacian sailors on the trip to Ithaca (Rose 1969)

¹⁸⁰ *Od.* 7.30-38

indicate this sentiment. In fact, they risk their own society in order to help strangers return home, against warnings from Poseidon.¹⁸¹ Odysseus himself observes that the Phaeacians are normal-sized, agricultural, and live in towns with clear political organization.¹⁸² It is “the ideal colonial encounter,” with the possibility for danger replaced with feasting and a marriage offer.¹⁸³

The Phaeacians are related to Giants and Poseidon, through their former king Nausithous.¹⁸⁴ Nausithous led the Phaeacians from their homeland to their new home of Schería because they were plagued by raids by the Cyclopes, “a race of savages.”¹⁸⁵ The Phaeacians do sail, having colonized Schería, and claiming to use their ships to help visitors return home safely. Although further depicted as “civilized,”¹⁸⁶ the Phaeacians are established as closely related to the monstrous Other both genetically and geographically. Furthermore, they are depicted with golden age imagery, associating them with a more “primitive” rank in the civilization hierarchy, “noble savages” not fully independent persons from the gods’ careful cultivation.¹⁸⁷

Columbus’ Hispaniola is portrayed in a similar manner to the Phaeacians. Similarly to Odysseus and the Phaeacians, the first encounter depicted with the people of Hispaniola is with a young woman, though the “Other” is removed from their contextual culture rather than the

¹⁸¹ “For the prophecy of old that I heard from my father. He said that Poseidon would be angry with us for giving safe passage and that one day he would wreck a beautiful ship as it sailed home over the misty sea.” (*Od.* 13.178-182).

¹⁸² Odysseus is specifically told that they are normal; Arete, the queen, exercises an abnormal amount of power for a woman in a patriarchal society.

¹⁸³ The king, Alcinous, offers Nausicaa as a bride to Odysseus, even before the Phaeacians find out who he is – “In an encounter, there are “two extreme positions - marriage or cannibalism” (Dougherty 2001, 139)

¹⁸⁴ First Nausithous was born from Poseidon and Periboea, a most beautiful woman, the youngest daughter of Eurydemon, who once was king of the arrogant Giants.” (*Od.* 7.60-63); “[the gods] do not conceal themselves, for we are kin, just like the Cyclopes and savage Giants” (*Od.* 7.218-219).

¹⁸⁵ *Od.* 6.5; see Chapter 3 for more.

¹⁸⁶ In having a government, which is somehow both a democracy and monarchy (hyper-politicized), agriculture, and respect for the gods.

¹⁸⁷ Similar to the Ethiopians, dear to Poseidon: “But Poseidon was away now, among the Ethiopians, those burnished people at the ends of the earth... There he sat, enjoying the feat.” (*Od.* 1.27-32); “Whenever we offered sacrifice to them, they appeared to us in their own bright forms... They do not conceal themselves, for we are kin...” (*Od.* 7.214-218).

dominant party. The Spaniards take the young woman aboard their ship, isolated within a foreign group. They give clothes and gifts before following her to her village.¹⁸⁸ The proper treatment and safe return of this woman result in a warm welcome and proper treatment of the Spaniards.¹⁸⁹ Hispaniola has agriculture, namely grains, which they use to make bread, although Columbus does note a vast amount of fertile land that is unused.¹⁹⁰ Their leaders are the only ones Columbus deems worthy of personally meeting with and establishing relations with.¹⁹¹ Columbus intentionally sets up Hispaniola as a “more civilized” Other in relation to the rest of the groups he has met;¹⁹² however, he also sets them up as being, like the Phaeacians, flawed in their relationship to the monstrous Other.

The people of Hispaniola are “harassed by an intelligent race.”¹⁹³ like the Phaeacians by the Cyclopes. They, however, are assumingly in their original homeland, not having risen to the point of escaping their attackers. There is much confusion about Hispaniola’s identity: Columbus’ captives often refer to it as “Bohio,” but Columbus refers to an island of Cyclopes and cannibals as “Bohio.”¹⁹⁴ Additionally, there is a brief episode in which Columbus believes he has found the cannibals, just around the coast of the same island of Hispaniola.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that Columbus wants to emphasize that despite this “civilized” group

¹⁸⁸ Columbus, 94

¹⁸⁹ Columbus, 95-96

¹⁹⁰ For the Greeks and Romans, the production of wine and baking of bread are key identifiers of civilization. This signifies the establishment of long-term agriculture, a shift from nomadic hunter-gatherers to permanent settlements.

¹⁹¹ Columbus, 100-102; 104-107; 115-116

¹⁹² He says that they are the “most handsome,” have “better character,” and are “fairer” than the others; Additionally, he states that “the manner of them, and their customs and mildness and behavior showed them to be a more alert and intelligent people than the others” (Columbus, 102).

¹⁹³ “... it appears likely that they are harassed by an intelligent race, all these islands living in great fear of those of Caniba.” (Columbus, 92); Columbus, 102

¹⁹⁴ “That island of Espanola, which the Indians called “Bohio”” (Columbus, 140); “which those Indians whom he had with him called “Bohio.” They said that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead, and others whom they called “Canibals.” Of these last, they showed great fear...” (Columbus, 68).

¹⁹⁵ Columbus, 146-153

existing, the “savage” cannibal does still loom very near to Hispaniola. Additionally, he diminishes Hispaniola’s civilization by associating their achievements with golden age imagery in a way similar to the Phaeacians: the Other relies on nature, and divine intervention, in order to survive, not their own ingenuity.¹⁹⁶

There is one interaction in Vespucci that resembles an aspect of the Phaeacians. Vespucci remains with one group for over a month who is constantly raided, in a manner similar to the Cyclopes and Caribs.¹⁹⁷ This episode, however, is not focused on the victims of the raids, those who Vespucci has already deemed worthy of some sort of friendship; rather, it is in his response to their assailants that we see parallels to the Phaeacians. Vespucci arrives, on the offensive, attacking this group without asking questions, but when they show that they are willing and ready to fight back, his tone changes.¹⁹⁸ He views their “defiance” as an indication of intelligence (and civilization) and thus, that they are worthy of friendship;¹⁹⁹ however, when they reject his advances, he destroys and enslaves their entire village.²⁰⁰ This is similar to when the Phaeacians reject hospitality after Poseidon punishes them for helping Odysseus, in that the Phaeacians decide to no longer aid visitors due to a negative experience,²⁰¹ while Vespucci decides to enslave the group after they react negatively to his offer of friendship.²⁰² Although his

¹⁹⁶ “The land is so rich that there is no need for them to labour much to get themselves food and clothing...” (Columbus, 103).

¹⁹⁷ “They made a complaint how, at certain times, a very cruel and hostile tribe came by way of the sea to their land, murdered many of them, subdued them, and took some prisoners, carrying them off to their own houses and land” (Vespucci, 18).

¹⁹⁸ “It was concluded that these people desired hostility with us” (Vespucci, 20).

¹⁹⁹ It was then decided that we should do all in our power to make friends with them...” (Vespucci, 20); We do see this same determination by Columbus in relation to the Cannibals: “The admiral says that he believes that there is something in [the claims of cannibalism and violence], but that since they were armed, they must be an intelligent people...” (Columbus, 69).

²⁰⁰ “... and if they rejected our friendship, we should treat them as enemies, and that we should make slaves of as many as we could take” (Vespucci, 20).

²⁰¹ “The great seafaring ship was closing in fast when Poseidon slapped it with the flat of his hand and turned it to stone rooted in the seafloor.” (*Od.* 13.167-170); “Let us all agree never again to provide safe escort to any man who comes to our city” (*Od.* 13.185-187).

²⁰² The Spanish were attacking with both guns and cannons when Vespucci makes this “generous” offer.

values are different, Vespucci's desire to test the boundaries of hospitality and levels of civilization in relation to the "Other" is the same as Odysseus' among the Phaeacians', among others.

Odysseus' encounter with the Lotus Eaters,²⁰³ though brief, illustrates the perceived dangers of travel and exposure to other cultures. Although the Lotus Eaters are essentially benign, they feed Odysseus' men the fruit of lotus plants which make them forget their homes in Greece. They no longer desire to return to their own culture, but rather to remain with this Other.²⁰⁴ This episode, however brief, highlights the very real fear that "that one may lose the will to return home" through travelling.²⁰⁵ The Lotus Eaters perfectly exhibit an aspect of a "soft"²⁰⁶ people, they are the seductive Other that the Greeks cannot bear to leave.²⁰⁷

An episode of Columbus, though it does not exactly parallel the Lotus Eaters, contains similar rhetoric and themes. In one village, Columbus describes the indigenous population as treating the "Christians"²⁰⁸ in a similar way to how Jesus is treated upon his entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.²⁰⁹ They kiss the Spaniards' feet, groping them and "trying to find out if they were of flesh and bone like themselves," offering them gifts.²¹⁰ From the second village he encountered, Columbus has allowed and encouraged indigenous people to say that the Spaniards come from Heaven.²¹¹ This episode shows the Other as not only tending toward religion,²¹² but

²⁰³ *Od.* 9.84-102

²⁰⁴ "The lure of the exotic" (Dougherty 2001, 95-96).

²⁰⁵ Dougherty 2001, 96

²⁰⁶ Redfield's category; This is "civilized."

²⁰⁷ "Soft cultures are confusing and seductive, difficult to leave once visited." (Redfield 1985, 110)

²⁰⁸ Another part of Columbus' establishment of the Other, defining the world by the realm of Christianity (Christian vs. Indian). I will address this aspect in future research.

²⁰⁹ Matthew 21:1-11

²¹⁰ Columbus, 54

²¹¹ Though I do question the validity of this – Columbus repeatedly says that they don't understand each other.

²¹² Redfield 1985, 109

as this “noble savage” trope, a people located outside of time and used as objects in Western narratives. This intentional comparison of the Spaniards to Christ is an obvious departure from mainstream Christianity, taking a more deceptive parallel in the portrayal of classical heroes, in this case, Odysseus.²¹³ In this, the Spaniards are the sons of God and the natives are Jews, deemed unworthy by the Church, Spain, and thus, God.²¹⁴

Columbus’ interactions, especially with the people of Hispaniola, show a civilizational model based more on mutual acceptance, tying in older models of evaluation based on hospitality or *xenia* which resembles the model that Odysseus uses in his interactions. Vespucci, on the other hand, shows a model equating civilization level with abilities for warfare.²¹⁵ We do see some use of this “warfare model” in the *Odyssey*, specifically when Odysseus notes the use of rocks as weapons by the Laestrygonians and Cyclopes, but we see more of a reliance on the “hospitality” civilization model. It should be noted that the previously-mentioned episode in Vespucci does show an effort to test hospitality rather than just warfare abilities.

²¹³ “Then Athena, born from Zeus, made him look taller and more muscled, and made his hair tumble down his head like hyacinth flowers,” “So Athena herself made Odysseus’ head and shoulders shimmer with grace” (*Od.*6.236-238; 6.243-244).

²¹⁴ To this day, Jesus’ Jewish background (genealogy, childhood, status within the Roman colony, etc.) is highly contested in Christianity, especially the Catholic Church. Spain persecuted Jews in the Inquisition under the Church’s authority.

²¹⁵ i.e. “The Massagetæ... use bronze for the heads of their spears and arrows and for the blades of their sagareis...” (*Hdt.* 1.215); “...the Garamantes, who shun all human intercourse and contact. They have no weapons of war and no knowledge of ways to defend themselves” (*Hdt.* 4.176).

Chapter 3: Defining the Other: Experiences with the “Savage”

Chapter Three will discuss several episodes in the *Odyssey*, Columbus, and Vespucci, which deal with the Other on the “uncivilized” end of the spectrum. Again, I will be referring to Redfield to help define the categories for “uncivilized.” Redfield’s “hard” people directly oppose his “soft” people.²¹⁶ The term “uncivilized” will be applied to those who do not have political structure and rely on gifts rather than trade. As noted by Redfield, “soft” peoples “acculturate” their dead, while “hard peoples [tend] to naturalize them,” alluding to the practices of cremation and embalming on the “soft” side,²¹⁷ and cannibalism on the “hard” side.²¹⁸

First, I will discuss the Laestrygonians, for they closely parallel a group in Vespucci which I will discuss in a moment. Odysseus’ encounter with the Laestrygonians follows his episodes with the Lotus Eaters and Cyclopes in his narrative and shows some elements of caution towards the Other he has learned from these encounters. When approaching the island, it appears uninhabited, having “no sign of plowed fields,” the most obvious sign of a sedentary (agricultural) society, but having “smoke rising up from the land.”²¹⁹ Unlike in the previous scenes, Odysseus sends a reconnoiter team to investigate the people, rather than going and potentially placing himself in danger. In a “scene [that] bears a certain resemblance to Odysseus’ initial with Nausicaa in Book 6” the team meets a young girl in a town, who leads them to the

²¹⁶ “Hard peoples are simple, harsh, and fierce” “hard peoples rely on gift and theft, the heroic modes of exchange,” “Hard peoples have relatively weak political organizations and tend toward anarchy,” “Soft peoples tend to acculturate their dead, hard peoples to naturalize them,” “among hard peoples women are treated as an abundant natural resource, more or less freely available,” “Hard cultures fall short of civility; they are unwelcoming and difficult to visit” (Redfield 1985, 109-110).

²¹⁷ This destruction or preservation of the physical body removes the body from the natural world, but releases the soul (Redfield 1985, 109).

²¹⁸ Which returns the physical body to the earth and the soul to the cultural group (Redfield 1985, 109).

²¹⁹ *Od.* 10.112-113

home of the king, her father.²²⁰ From this point, however, the language changes to resemble the incident with the Cyclopes. At the home of the king,²²¹ the Greeks are immediately confronted by a giant woman;²²² Additionally, when others approach, they are described as being “not like men who eat bread, but like a lone wooded crag high in the mountains,” extremely similar to the description of the Cyclopes.²²³ It is not, however, until men approach, that the Greeks are in physical danger. The Laestrygonian king eats one of the men without any conversation or prior actions.²²⁴ While the other men escape to their ships, the Laestrygonians have already been alerted of their presence. “They pelted [the Greeks] from the cliffs with rocks,” like the Cyclopes, another monster.²²⁵ Even though no harm has actually been done to the Laestrygonians, and the Greeks are attempting to flee, “the Laestrygonians speared [their] bodies like fish, and carried them back for their ghastly meal.”²²⁶ It is unknown whether they cook the men that they have caught.²²⁷

We see Odysseus’ judgement of the Laestrygonians as lesser than the Greeks in the terminology he uses throughout the interaction. He describes the reaction of the recon team to the woman as “horror,” and refers to her as “as huge as a mountain top.”²²⁸ The other Laestrygonians are depicted like a swarm, “[coming] up on all sides, thousands of them.”²²⁹

²²⁰ Dougherty 2001, 140

²²¹ Specifically called a home, not a palace.

²²² *Od.* 10.127

²²³ *Od.* 10.184-185; “This particular choice of image recalls all too clearly the description of Polyphemus’ similarly monstrous size” (Dougherty 2001, 140).

²²⁴ “He seized one of my men and made him into dinner” (*Od.* 10.129-130).

²²⁵ Note that the Cyclopes once plagued the human Phaeacians; *Od.* 10.136-137; This is also a judgement based on weaponry, as seen in Vespucci; furthermore, the use of rocks as opposed to “actual” weapons (i.e. swords, bows and arrows) indicates a lower rank on the civilizational hierarchy.

²²⁶ *Od.* 10.140-141; Fishing is practice common to all peoples who live near water; the Laestrygonians pervert this practice by fishing for humans to eat.

²²⁷ From context, the king eats the first Greek raw; There is a correlation between civilization levels and whether a group cooks their meat or not, especially relating to cannibalistic practices (Hdt. 1.119; 1.129; 2.37; 3.23; 3.99; 4.26; 4.61).

²²⁸ *Od.* 10.127

²²⁹ *Od.* 10.132-134

Additionally, they described as being “not like men but like the Sons of the Earth, the Giants:” monsters that plague both men and the gods.²³⁰ Odysseus further enforces this description in stating that the rocks which the Laestrygonians are using as weapons are “too large for a man to lift.”²³¹ They pelt the Greek ships, causing “sickening” sounds, before “spearing the [Greeks] like fish...for their ghastly meal.”²³² While the initial interaction with the Laestrygonians is similar to Odysseus’ with the “civilized” Phaeacians, the image has quickly turned to that of a monster, strikingly similar to his interaction with the Cyclopes.

On his second voyage, Vespucci describes an episode extremely similar to the Laestrygonians. He describes an island that appears uninhabited. Similarly to Odysseus’ reconnoiter team, the Spanish go in search of water, finding roads leading inland.²³³ Following these roads, Vespucci finds five women of large stature, who, like Nausicaa, are unable to run away from the approaching strangers.²³⁴ Vespucci immediately expresses intent to abduct the younger women to serve as a spectacle in Spain;²³⁵ however, while they are plotting, men from the island, who are “much bigger than the women” approach with weapons, murmuring to themselves.²³⁶ Fearing for their lives, the Spanish decide to just walk away, with no evidence to prove that this island exists.

Vespucci’s judgements are much more clear than Odysseus’. He specifically expresses his intent to capture the indigenous women, as well as the fact that they will not be treated as

²³⁰ *Od.* 10.135

²³¹ *Od.* 10.137

²³² *Od.* 10.138; *Od.* 10.140-141

²³³ Odysseus’ men follow a road to find a girl drawing water (*Od.* 10.116-119).

²³⁴ “They were so frightened that they had not the power to run away.” (Vespucci, 27); “Only Alcinous’ daughter stayed. Athena put courage in her heart and stopped her trembling. She held her ground...” (*Od.* 6.138-140).

²³⁵ “For the wonder of the thing, we wanted to keep them.” “our intention was to take the young girls by force and to bring them to Castille as a wonderful thing” (Vespucci, 27).

²³⁶ Vespucci, 27

equals in Spain.²³⁷ He speaks of the people in a superior manner, as if they are not even there. He says, “it was a rare thing to behold them”²³⁸ and refers to them as “such people,” distancing himself from this group.²³⁹ He also describes how the Spanish were “in such danger,” but suddenly “had little fear of them” upon seeing that the only weapons that this group wields are bows and arrows.²⁴⁰ The most obvious parallel to the *Odyssey* is, of course, Vespucci’s decision to name this island the “Island of the Giants,” as the Laestrygonians are Giants as well;²⁴¹ however, it is an important divergence that Vespucci names this island for the physical appearance of the indigenous population, as Odysseus only does this with the Cyclopes.²⁴²

Next, Odysseus’ encounter with the Cyclopes²⁴³ makes another fear of traveling real in that the natives of this land are immediately hostile.²⁴⁴ Having approached the island of the Cyclopes in darkness and fog,²⁴⁵ Odysseus must discover what type of people live on the island, something we see in all of his interactions;²⁴⁶ although he begins this episode by disclosing his judgement, that the Cyclopes are indeed savages. They are depicted as being entirely backwards;²⁴⁷ Cyclopes do not have agriculture,²⁴⁸ something emblematic of Hesiod’s Golden Age;²⁴⁹ They “have no assemblies or laws,” while the Greeks very closely associate political

²³⁷ They will serve as “a wonderful thing,” something to gawk at (Vespucci, 27).

²³⁸ Another reference to them being a spectacle, not people.

²³⁹ Vespucci, 27

²⁴⁰ “The natives rushed down and shot many arrows; but we then had little fear of them (Vespucci, 28).

²⁴¹ Vespucci, 28; Vespucci rarely names specific places, but it is important that he names this island after a physical characteristic of the people who live there. His typical naming style refers to notable characteristics of the location itself: i.e. the village of Venezuela, named for Venice, as the village was built atop a lake. Vespucci is clearly objectifying this group.

²⁴² Odysseus does name the home of the Lotus Eaters after them, but that is a cultural trait, not a physical one.

²⁴³ Cyclopes in plural, Cyclops in singular.

²⁴⁴ “Fear of hostile indigenous peoples” (Dougherty 2001, 135).

²⁴⁵ *Od.* 9.137-145

²⁴⁶ “I wanted to see him, and see if he would give me a gift of hospitality” (*Od.* 9.219-220); whether they are “hospitable folk who fear the gods” or “wild savages with no sense of right or wrong” (*Od.* 9.169-171).

²⁴⁷ “Lacking in all the characteristics of civilized life” (Dougherty 2001, 97).

²⁴⁸ “Neither plow nor plant, but everything grows for them unsown” (*Od.* 9.106-107).

²⁴⁹ “The grain-giving soil bore its fruits of its own accord in unstinted plenty” (*Op.*, 40).

structure to levels of civilization.²⁵⁰ They “have no craftsmen,” meaning they are lower on the civilizational model.²⁵¹ Additionally, they live alone, individualists having little interaction with others in their society.²⁵² The Cyclopes “do not sail,” signifying a lack of trade relations and economy at the basic level, but more importantly to Odysseus, further indicating lack of practice with hospitality;²⁵³ A collectivist society, such as the Greek one that Odysseus belongs to, cannot function in isolation, as community involvement is essential to everyone’s survival.²⁵⁴ It is actually the social isolation between individuals in this society that is the Cyclopes’ downfall, as Odysseus proves that teamwork²⁵⁵ is victorious over the individual in his trickery and subsequent attacking of the Cyclopes.²⁵⁶ Additionally, the Cyclopes do not respect the gods, rejecting Zeus’ protection of the guest-host relationship of *xenia* and flat-out rejection of the gods’ supremacy.²⁵⁷ When Odysseus does ask for the protection of these rights, the Cyclopes eats several men raw,²⁵⁸ which will claim as the reason for blinding him: Odysseus (and the Greeks) claims to carry out the will of the gods.²⁵⁹

Odysseus’ terminology in this interaction makes his belief of superiority clear.

Furthermore, the Cyclopes episode is much more extensive than others, and Odysseus gives us clear judgements of civilization, often to be taken in juxtaposition to the “civilized”

²⁵⁰ A Homeric belief that is fleshed out in Hesiod, Herodotus (Hdt. 1.97; 1.192; 3.82) and Greek tragedy. Also see Aristotle Politics 1 (*Pol.*).

²⁵¹ *Od.* 9.122; higher order civilization model of Classical Tradition.

²⁵² Assuming that the *Odyssey* episode is indicative of everyday life Cyclopes society.

²⁵³ *Od.* 9.122

²⁵⁴ Communal religion (especially ritual and sacrifice), democracy, etc.

²⁵⁵ Collectivism.

²⁵⁶ Odysseus is able to stab Polyphemus’ eye out and trick him with the name “Noman” because the other Cyclopes do not care enough to protect him; they are not invested in each other’s well-being (*Od.* 360-411).

²⁵⁷ The following exchange: “Respect the gods, sir. We are your suppliants, and Zeus avenges strangers and suppliants” (*Od.* 9.262); “Cyclopes don’t care about Zeus or his aegis or the blessed gods, since we are much stronger” (*Od.* 9.266-268).

²⁵⁸ “He eats them raw, washing them down with unmixed milk” (Dougherty 2001, 135); the correlation of raw vs. cooked meat to civilization; it is likely that a “civilized” group would have mixed their milk with water.

²⁵⁹ “You had the gall to eat the guests in your own house, and Zeus made you pay for it” (*Od.* 9.478-479).

Phaeacians.²⁶⁰ Odysseus describes the Cyclopes as “a savage with no notion of right and wrong,”²⁶¹ “a huge creature,”²⁶² and a “freak of nature.”²⁶³ Cyclopes are not considered civilized, for they are pastoral, not agricultural,²⁶⁴ and their society does not have political structure.²⁶⁵ The island across the harbor from theirs is “fertile,” “lush and soft,” but “unplowed, unsown, virgin forever,” full of Golden Age imagery.²⁶⁶ Odysseus claims that the Cyclopes could have a successful settlement on this island, but they do not take the initiative to colonize, thus deciding that they are not as advanced as the Greeks, who do colonize other lands.

On his voyage, Columbus begins hearing rumors of cannibals from his captives, who say that they live on the island of Bohio. The captives say that there are also one-eyed men on this island.²⁶⁷ Allegedly, the people of this island take captives and eat them.²⁶⁸ Columbus decides to find this island, because he thinks it’s interesting that the people of this rumored island are “warlike.”²⁶⁹ He believes that “since they were armed, they must be intelligent people.”²⁷⁰ He assumes that “the people of that island of Bohio must be more astute and have greater intelligence than to capture [the Spaniards].”²⁷¹ He claims that “the Caniba are nothing else than the people of the Great Khan” with no evidence other than he has assumed he’s in Asia.²⁷² The

²⁶⁰ The Phaeacians are, of course, distantly related to the Cyclopes through Poseidon; “The Phaeacians offer the model of hospitality and the Cyclopes that of cannibalism as two ways that archaic Greeks experience new peoples in the New World” (Dougherty, 103).

²⁶¹ *Od.* 9.205-206

²⁶² He is called a “creature,” not a man (*Od.* 9.181).

²⁶³ *Od.* 9.184

²⁶⁴ “Not like men who eat bread” (*Od.* 9.184); “crates stuffed with cheese” (*Od.* 9.210).

²⁶⁵ “Who pastured his flocks off by himself” (*Od.* 9.182); “lived apart from others and knew no law” (*Od.* 9.183).

²⁶⁶ *Od.* 9.113; *Od.* 9.129; *Od.* 1.120

²⁶⁷ Columbus, 68; Columbus, 73; I.e. Cyclopes; Arimaspians – one-eyed but normal size. In Classical Tradition, there is a persistent myth (throughout multiple sources and times) of cannibals on the far reaches of the known world. For example, Herodotus discusses cannibals in Scythian tribes, in the far north.

²⁶⁸ The captives never return.

²⁶⁹ Columbus, 69

²⁷⁰ Columbus, 73

²⁷¹ Columbus, 85

²⁷² Columbus, 92; 74

only violent confrontation in the journal occurs when Columbus reaches the region he believes to be Bohio,²⁷³ and meets men carrying weapons – bows and arrows. They speak a different language and are “more ugly in appearance.”²⁷⁴ Assuming that they are “evil-doers,” a battle breaks out.²⁷⁵ “He believed that they were those from Carib and that they eat men” with no proof, but believes it anyways.²⁷⁶

A major episode in Vespucci’s 1504 letter, but not mentioned at all in the 1503 letter, Vespucci encounters “people worse than animals.”²⁷⁷ They do not want to communicate with the Portuguese, and “would not trust [them],”²⁷⁸ so they Portuguese leave trinkets on the beach. They are “astonished” by these,²⁷⁹ and build a fire, which Vespucci believes to be “signs” that they want to meet with them.²⁸⁰ The Portuguese send two men to seek trade-worthy goods, and later several women appear on the beach signaling to the boats, then the Portuguese send a single young man out, and he is murdered in front of the ships by indigenous women as the men guard with arrows. They tear him apart, cooking and eating him, indicating that they have ate the other men.²⁸¹ The other Portuguese men are forbidden from retaliating by their captain.

The judgements in this passage are both ideological and terminological. Vespucci is perturbed by indigenous distrust in the Portuguese, He discusses the murder of his men as if it

²⁷³ Which is also a name for Hispaniola.

²⁷⁴ Columbus, 146-147

²⁷⁵ As much of a battle as there can be between arrows and bullets.

²⁷⁶ “If they were not Caribs, at least they must be neighbours of them and have the same customs” (Columbus, 148).

²⁷⁷ Vespucci, 36

²⁷⁸ Vespucci, 36

²⁷⁹ The Other as not equally intelligent to the speaker: the indigenous groups are depicted as being fascinated by mundane or simplistic items (as defined by the dominant group); Vespucci specifically states that the items left for this trade scenario are worthless to Europeans.

²⁸⁰ This is similar to a method of Carthaginian trade with Libyans beyond the Pillars of Heracles – beyond one boundary of the known world (Hdt. 4.196).

²⁸¹ “The men made signs how they had killed the other two Christians and eaten them” (Vespucci, 38).

were a Bacchic ritual,²⁸² the women as monstrous warriors – powerful and brutal.²⁸³ This image of the women as animalistic is characteristic of the treatment of Asians.²⁸⁴ Additionally, Vespucci is disturbed by the “cruelty with which they treated the dead,” seeing it as an “intolerable insult.”²⁸⁵ He does not react the same way to other cannibals he encounters, possibly because this group cooks the flesh, as cooking meat is a sign of higher civilization.²⁸⁶

Vespucci has two specific scenes that are characterized by a disrespect for hospitality. In his second voyage, Vespucci’s first encounter is a two-hour canoe chase. They overtake the canoe to find four indigenous captives, their two captors having fled the scene. The captives are held by the Cambali tribe, alleged cannibals.²⁸⁷ Upon hearing that the Cambali are cannibals, the Spanish release all their captives and return their canoe; however, the entire tribe flees. Vespucci describes this as “a barbarous act” and says that the Spaniards “judged them to be a faithless and ill-conditioned people.”²⁸⁸ Although the indigenous tribe is reacting in a reasonable manner considering the actions of the Spanish, Vespucci is viewing this scene from the restrictive

²⁸² Women are “tearing the Christian to pieces” in Bacchic fashion,²⁸² before “they roasted him” and “showing [the Spanish] many pieces,” ate him. (Vespucci, 38).

²⁸³ “[The women] all began to touch and feel him” but suddenly one knocks him to the ground. The other women “[take] him by the feet, and [drag] him towards the hill” while men “[shoot] at [the ships] with their bows and arrows.” (Vespucci, 37); Hdt. 4.110-117

²⁸⁴ Said (Orientalism); At this point, Vespucci has not identified this land as separate from Asia, so he is viewing New World natives in the same way (lense/bias) that he would an Asian person.

²⁸⁵ Vespucci, 38

²⁸⁶ “The ferocious consumption of human flesh is, in fact, a topos that appears frequently in Greek myth and literature” (Dougherty 2001, 136).

²⁸⁷ “Told [the Spaniards] by signs that they had been castrated to be eaten” (Vespucci, 23); “very fierce men who eat human flesh” (Vespucci, 23-24).

²⁸⁸ Vespucci, 24; Original Italian says “Che gli giudicamo gente di pocho fede de di mala conditione,” Literally “We judge them people of little faith and of bad condition” (*Vespucci Reprints* 1916). Lack of trust (*fides* in Latin, *fede* in Italian) is characteristic of barbarians in Roman ethnographic literature.

ethnocentric point of view. He judged them, as cannibals, to be somehow more intelligent²⁸⁹ and worthy of friendship, similar to his interaction in voyage one.²⁹⁰

In his first interaction on the first voyage, Vespucci writes of a village in which they were in “the greatest danger,” where the indigenous group is cautious and does not show signs that they want to communicate with the Spanish. The village is “built over a lake, like Venice” (later named Venezuela) and the people travel in boats.²⁹¹ They eventually begin approaching in their canoes, sending forth young girls first, which Vespucci sees as a “sign of friendship.”²⁹² Suddenly the girls leap from the Spanish ships and the other people grab their bows/arrows and spears. Such “treachery” meant that the Spanish absolutely had to defend themselves.²⁹³ (They have guns, cannons, etc.) He brags about how they “routed and slaughtered” the indigenous people then pillaged their village, taking their belongings, but Vespucci complains that their things are “of little value.”²⁹⁴ The Spanish take several prisoners, but most of them escape “with great cunning.”²⁹⁵

We see more negative experiences in Vespucci than in Columbus’ narrative. The majority of negative experiences in Columbus revolve around more mythical things, less rooted in fact, such as the cannibals. Columbus’ cannibals live on the same island rumored to be home to Cyclopes and dog-men, but these claims are unsupported by evidence.

²⁸⁹ In the manner of Columbus; possible linguistic similarities and/or confusion between “Cambali” and “Caniba”/“Carib.”

²⁹⁰ Chapter Two, retaliation against the Other who rejects friendship.

²⁹¹ Vespucci, 12

²⁹² Vespucci, 12

²⁹³ Vespucci, 13

²⁹⁴ Vespucci, 13

²⁹⁵ Vespucci, 13; Trickster Savages are uncommon.

Conclusion

In this project, I have examined several episodes in the journal of Christopher Columbus and letters of Amerigo Vespucci to determine the influence that classical works, mainly Homer's *Odyssey* and Herodotus' *Histories*, played in their narrative construction. There are obvious parallels in these texts, from Vespucci's use of the Laestrygonian scene from book 10 of the *Odyssey* to describe an Island of Giants, to Columbus' depictions of Hispaniola as the "civilized savage," much like the Phaeacians of books 6 to 8 and book 13 of the *Odyssey*. Both explorers used elements from the classical texts which they were exposed to in their humanist educations to make the unfamiliar in the New World more recognizable; however, their application of these ancient categories and frameworks to unfamiliar humans in travel narratives is problematic. They discuss the people they encounter using references to ancient, and often mythical, groups, objectifying real humans in their attempts to describe unfamiliar lands, wildlife, and cultural practices. The people of the travel narrative have no agency; they are objects in the narrative, used in this case to create a European identity as opposing to Others, placing Europeans in a position of cultural superiority. Everything about indigenous peoples is filtered through the lens of European understanding. We see this practice continued in modern ethnography, as the ethnographer must interpret information before presenting it to readers. The ethics of placing Europeans in a position to qualify indigenous persons, or any subjugated person, is still debated in anthropology today.²⁹⁶

There is no legitimacy in superiority ideologies;²⁹⁷ however, the value we give to them by embedding our own interpretations of ancient concepts into the "proof" of such ideologies

²⁹⁶ I.e. the necessity of a person's disclosure of bias.

²⁹⁷ "As Aristotle pointedly put it: with regard to their place in the human species, no difference exists between a black man and a white man" (Gruen 2010, 182).

makes it difficult to unravel the truth. The implications of these beliefs boil down to a centuries-long tradition of dehumanization, appropriation, and objectification of indigenous Americans enforced by the cultural hierarchy that explorers like Columbus and Vespucci believe in; additionally, the civilizational hierarchy allowed Europeans to justify practices such as slavery²⁹⁸ and encomienda. Later, the perceived cultural superiority of Europeans²⁹⁹ was enforced through assimilation programs, the forced indoctrination of Native American children in boarding schools, stripping them of their original culture and replacing it with Western values and a classical education.³⁰⁰

This project is not complete. While I have been able to examine many facets of Columbus and Vespucci in relation to the *Odyssey* and Herodotus, I have only scratched the surface. Additionally, I have found references to other classical works: for example, Euripides' *Bacchae*³⁰¹ and several works of Aristotle.³⁰² I would like to expand my examinations of Columbus and Vespucci, but I also want to examine other works concerning exploration, especially Bartolome de las Casas' *History of the Indies*, but also those concerning conquistadors.

²⁹⁸ Through the dehumanization of Africans, which I want to address in future research.

²⁹⁹ Specifically Western Europeans.

³⁰⁰ My knowledge of assimilation programs is specific to the United States.

³⁰¹ Vespucci's cannibals in Chapter 3.

³⁰² For example, the *Politics*.

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