

"1491" by charles c. mann essay sample

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In this article, “ 1491”, Charles Mann introduces a very controversial topic about the pre-Columbus Americas. Before the year 1492, many different civilizations of Native American Indians inhabited the Americas. How many people actually lived in the Americas before the European invaders came in contact with the new world? For generations, historians and professors have been fascinated by this question and have always answered with conflicting conclusions. Also, how was the whole ethnic group almost eliminated from the earth in such a short amount of time? Although there are quite a few intriguing questions unanswered, the fact that the Native Americans were capable of surviving on their own and had a bigger impact on the new world than those from the old world is undisputed.

In 1966, anthropologist Henry Dobyns estimated that the western hemisphere was home to nearly 90 to 112 million people. He supports his argument by claiming the first Spaniards to arrive to the New World is responsible for the near elimination of the natives. Dobyns believed the Spaniards brought disease to the coastal lines of the Americas and completely wiped out the nearest civilizations. Also, immunologically unprepared natives located in the inland of the Americas were killed by disease and unfamiliar pathogens. Disease must have spread so quickly that the Americas were mostly depopulated when the westerners began to explore different areas of the newly found land.

Those associated with the “ hate-America crowd”, and today’s Native Americans involved in this controversial study, tend to support Dobyns’

beliefs. Although the role of disease is not an argument, the population number is. Anthropologist Daniel Ubelaker argues that Dobyns' numbers are too high. Ubelaker states that more evidence would be seen if populations were so dense. The author compares Ubelaker's views in which he believes they are "asserting the continent was filled with people who left no trace", to "looking at an empty bank account and claiming that it must once have held millions of dollars."

Studies show that the Indians were well adapted to their land and have changed the Americas more than the invading Europeans did. The Natives were very innovative and had advanced road and agricultural systems. They reshaped the landscapes to their own benefit, discovered new uses for fire, and grew original crops that are now found all over the world. Some of the crops that originated in the Americas are tomatoes, potatoes, and corn. The abundant crop production in the Old World reduced hunger and resulted with an incline in population. Corn was brought to Africa and was believed to be the reason why population increased over there as well. This made the slave trade possible. Hernan Cortez and his troops discovered city called Tenochtitlan. The city was bigger than Europe's Paris and consisted of botanical gardens, wide streets, carved buildings, and markets. In other parts of the Americas, like Massachusetts, colonist John Smith claims that the land was planted with gardens and inhabited by good people. He also stated that he'd rather live in the Americas than anywhere else in the world.