

THE COLONIZER'S MODEL
OF THE WORLD

Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History

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History Inside Out

THE ARGUMENT

The purpose of this book is to undermine one of the most powerful beliefs of our time concerning world history and world geography. This belief is the notion that European civilization—"The West"—has had some unique historical advantage, some special quality of race or culture or environment or mind or spirit, which gives this human community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present.

The belief is both historical and geographical. Europeans are seen as the "makers of history." Europe eternally advances, progresses, modernizes. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is "traditional society." Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical center and a permanent periphery: an Inside and an Outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates.

This belief is *diffusionism*, or more precisely *Eurocentric diffusionism*. It is a theory about the way cultural processes tend to move over the surface of the world as a whole. They tend to flow out of the European sector and toward the non-European sector. This is the natural, normal, logical, and ethical flow of culture, of innovation, of human causality. Europe, eternally, is Inside. Non-Europe is Outside. Europe is the source of most diffusions; non-Europe is the recipient.¹

Diffusionism lies at the very root of historical and geographical scholarship. Some parts of the belief have been questioned in recent years, but its most fundamental tenets remain unchallenged, and so the belief as a whole has not been uprooted or very much weakened by modern scholarship.

The most important tenet of diffusionism is the theory of "the

39. Braudel, *The Mediterranean* (1972); Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society* (1967); Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (1973).

40. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (1989), fig. 1, p. 34. One of the eight regions is the nonmaritime circuit extending from China through Central Asia to the Black Sea.

41. Blaut, *The National Question* (1987b).

42. Needham and collaborators, *Science and Civilization in China* (1965-1984), Vol. 5, part 7; Needham, *Gunpowder as the Fourth Power, East and West* (1985).

CHAPTER 4

After 1492

EXPLAINING 1492

In 1492, as have seen, capitalism was slowly emerging in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. In that year there would have been no reason whatever to predict that capitalism would triumph in Europe, and would triumph only two centuries later.

By "the triumph of capitalism" I mean, in the present context, the political revolution that transferred power from the old feudal landlord elite to the bourgeoisie (the burghers, the capital-accumulating new elite): the bourgeois revolution. This was really a revolutionary epoch, not a single brief event, but I will follow convention by dating it to 1688, the year of England's "Glorious Revolution." In that year (minor qualifications aside) the bourgeoisie definitively took power in England. This class already held power in Holland and in some small states of southern Europe, while in some other parts of Europe (like France) the bourgeoisie was vigorously "rising" in certain regions although the conflict with feudal polities had not yet been won at the level of state power. It should be emphasized that the capitalism that triumphed was not industrial capitalism. How this preindustrial capitalism should be conceptualized is a difficult question because it is something much larger than the "simple commodity production" and "merchant capital" of earlier times. But the Industrial Revolution did not really begin until a century later, in the late eighteenth century, and those who conceptualize the Industrial Revolution as simply a continuation of the bourgeois revolution are neglecting a large and important block of history, both inside and outside of Europe.

The explanation for the rise of capitalism to political power in Europe in the (symbolic) year 1688 requires an understanding of (1) the reasons Europeans, not Africans and Asians, reached and conquered America, and thus garnered the first fruits of colonialism; (2) the reasons the conquest was successful; (3) the direct and indirect effects of the sixteenth-century plunder of American resources and exploitation of

American workers on the transformation of Europe; and (4) the direct and indirect effects of seventeenth-century colonial and semicolonial European enterprise in America, Africa, and Asia on the further transformation of Europe and eventually the political triumph of capitalism in the bourgeois revolution.

In the following paragraphs we will summarize each of these processes in turn, and thus, so to speak, "explain 1492." Then we will turn to the problem of explaining the rise of capitalism to political power in Europe—or more properly, part of Europe—in the period 1492–1688, in the sense of trying to sort out the significance of colonialism and the extra-European world in this epochal transformation. Finally, we will look at the significance of colonialism, and the role of non-Europe, in the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution, roughly, in the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and will look at the complementary process: the beginnings of underdevelopment in Africa and Asia.

This inquiry should lead to an explanation for the fundamental fact that capitalism became centered in Europe. I use the verb "centrate" to emphasize one crucial theoretical argument of this book: the rise of a more-or-less capitalist system had been going on in many parts of the world prior to 1492; after 1492, new forces entered which slowed, then stopped, its evolution outside of Europe and quickened it inside. Thus the rise of capitalism after 1492 was as much a matter of shifting its main headquarters to Europe as it was a matter of "rising" in a simple evolutionary sense.

Why America Was Conquered by Europeans and Not by Africans or Asians

One of the core myths of Eurocentric diffusionism concerns the discovery (so-called) of America.¹ Typically it goes something like this: Europeans, being more progressive, venturesome, achievement-oriented, and modern than Africans and Asians in the late Middle Ages, and with superior technology as well as a more advanced economy, went forth to explore and conquer the world. And so they set sail down the African coast in the middle of the fifteenth century and out across the Atlantic to America in 1492. This myth is crucial for diffusionist ideology for two reasons: it explains the modern expansion of Europe in terms of internal, immanent forces, and it permits one to acknowledge that the conquest and its aftermath (Mexican mines, West Indian plantations, North American settler colonies, and the rest) had profound significance for European history without at the same time requiring one to give any credit in that process to non-Europeans.

In reality, the Europeans were doing what everyone else was doing across the hemisphere-wide network of protocapitalist, mercantile-maritime centers, and Europeans had no special qualities or advantages, no peculiar venturesomeness, no peculiarly advanced maritime technology, and so on. What they did have was opportunity: a matter of locational advantage in the broad sense of accessibility. The point deserves to be put very strongly. If the Western Hemisphere had been more accessible, say, to South Indian centers than to European centers, then very likely India would have become the home of capitalism, the site of the bourgeois revolution, and the ruler of the world.

In the late Middle Ages long-distance oceanic voyaging was being undertaken by mercantile-maritime communities everywhere. In the fifteenth century Africans were sailing to Southeast Asia, Indians to Africa, Arabs to China, Chinese to Africa, and so on.² Much of this voyaging was across open ocean and much of it involved exploration. Two non-European examples are well known: Cheng Ho's voyages to India and Africa between 1417 and 1433, and an Indian voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and apparently some 2,000 miles westward into the Atlantic circa 1420.³ In this period the radii of travel were becoming longer, as a function of the general evolution of protocapitalism, the expansion of trade, and the development of maritime technology. Maritime technology differed from region to region but no one region could be considered to have superiority in any sense implying evolutionary advantage, and novel ideas and techniques were being spread in all directions by rapid criss-cross diffusion. The entire hemisphere was participating and sharing in a Spatial Revolution.

Certainly the growth of Europe's commercial economy led to the Portuguese and Spanish voyages of discovery. But the essence of the process was a matter of catching up with Asian and African protocapitalist communities by European communities, which were at the margin of the hemisphere-wide system and were emerging from a period of downturn relative to some other parts of the system. Iberian Christian states were in conflict with Maghreb states and European merchant communities were having commercial difficulties both there and in the eastern Mediterranean. The opening of a sea route to West African gold mining regions, along a sailing route known since antiquity, and using maritime technology known to non-Europeans as well as Europeans, was an obvious strategy.⁴ By the late fifteenth century the radii of travel had lengthened so that a sea route to India was found to be feasible (with piloting help from African and Indian sailors). The leap across the Atlantic in 1492 was certainly one of the great adventures of human history, but it has been seen in a context of shared technological and

geographical knowledge, high potential for commercial success, and other factors that place it, in a hemispheric perspective, as something that could have been undertaken by non-Europeans just as easily as by Europeans.

Europeans had one advantage. America was vastly more accessible from Iberian ports than from any extra-European mercantile-maritime centers that had the capacity for long-distance sea voyages. Accessibility was in part a matter of sailing distance. Sofala, which is presumed to have been the southernmost major seaport in East Africa in that period (there may have been others farther south), is roughly 3,000 miles farther away from an American landfall than are the Canary Islands (Columbus's jumping-off point) and 5,000 miles farther from any densely populated coast with possibilities for trade or plunder. The distance from China to America's northwest coast was even greater, and greater still to the rich societies of Mexico.

To all of this we must add the sailing conditions on these various routes. Sailing from the Indian Ocean into the Atlantic one sails against prevailing winds. The North Pacific is somewhat stormy and winds are not reliable. From the Canaries to the West Indies, on the other hand, there blow the trade winds, and the return voyage is made northward into the westerlies. Obviously an explorer does not have this information at hand at the time of the voyage into unknown seas. The extent of the geographical knowledge possessed by Atlantic fishing communities in the fifteenth century remains, however, an unanswered and intriguing question, and there is speculation that these people fished around Newfoundland and the Grand Banks before 1492. More concretely, the Iberian sailors going to and from the Canaries, Madeira, and the Azores made use of the same basic wind circulation as did Columbus in crossing the entire ocean; Columbus knew that the trade winds (or easterlies) would assist him outbound and had good reason to believe that the westerlies would assist the return voyage. The point here is a matter of strong probabilities. Overall, it is vastly more probable that an Iberian ship would effect a passage (round trip) to America than would an African or Asian ship in the late fifteenth century, and, even if such a voyage were made by the latter, it is vastly more probable that Columbus's landfall in the West Indies would initiate historical consequences than would have been the case for an African ship reaching Brazil or a Chinese ship reaching California.

Is this environmental determinism? There is no more environmentalism here than there is in, say, some statement about the effect of oilfields on societies of the Middle East. I am asserting only the environmental conditions that support and hinder long-distance oceanic travel. In any case, if the choice were between an environmentalistic

explanation and one that claimed superiority of one group over all others, as Eurocentric diffusionism does, we would certainly settle for environmentalism.

Before we leave this topic, two important questions remain to be asked. First, why did not West Africans "discover" America since they were even closer to it than the Iberians were? The answer seems to be that mercantile, protocapitalist centers in West and Central Africa were not oriented to commerce by sea (as were those of East Africa). The great long-distance trade routes led across the Sudan to the Nile and the Middle East, across the Sahara to the Maghreb and the Mediterranean, and so forth. Sea trade existed all along the western coast, but it was not large in scale, given that civilizations were mainly inland and trading partners lay northward and eastward. Second, why did the trading cities of the Maghreb fail to reach America? This region (as Ibn Khaldun noted not long before) was in a political and commercial slump. In 1492 it was under pressure from the Iberians and the Turks. Just at that historical conjuncture, this region lacked a capacity for major long-distance oceanic expeditions. Also, these cities, which traded directly with the Sudan and the gold regions, did not have the economic incentive that Europeans had to bypass the Saharan land routes in search of a new—that is, cheaper—source of gold.

Why the Conquest Was Successful

America became significant in the rise of Europe, and the rise of capitalism, soon after the first contact in 1492. Immediately a process began, and explosively enlarged, involving the destruction of American states and civilizations, the plunder of precious metals, the exploitation of labor, and the occupation of American lands by Europeans. If we are to understand the impact of all of this on Europe (and capitalism), we have to understand how it occurred and why it happened so quickly—why, in a word, the conquest was successful.

There is a second crucial reason we need to understand the causality of the conquest. A nondiffusionist history starts all causal arguments with the working assumption that Europeans had no innate superiority, in any dimension of culture, over non-Europeans, no a priori "higher potential" for progress. This leads first to a recognition that Europeans in 1492 had no special advantage over Asians and Africans, ideological, social, or material. But it demands that we make the same working hypothesis about all human communities. Why, then, did Europeans discover America instead of Americans discovering Europe (or Africa, or Asia)? And why, after the first contact, did Europeans conquer the American civilizations

instead of being defeated and driven from America's shores? The working assumption of cultural uniformitarianism—or, if you prefer, the psychic unity of humankind—here confronts the diffusionist tendency to dismiss the peoples of America as primitive and irrelevant.⁵

There were several immediate reasons why American civilizations succumbed, but one of these is of paramount importance and probably constitutes a sufficient cause in and of itself. This is the massive depopulation caused by the pandemics of Eastern Hemisphere diseases that were introduced to America by Europeans.⁶ A second factor was the considerable advantage Europeans held in military technology, but this advantage has to be kept in perspective. The technological gap was not so great that it could by itself bring military victory—after the initial battles—against American armies that were vastly larger and would sooner or later have adopted the enemy's technology. America is a vast territory, and in 1492 it had a very large population, numbering at least 50 million people and conceivably as many as 200 million, a goodly proportion of these people living in state-organized societies with significant military capability.⁷ Military technology tends, historically, to diffuse from one camp to the opposing camp in a relatively short time. Moreover, the superiority of the Spaniards' primitive guns was not really very great when compared with the Americans' bows and arrows. I think it is, therefore, certain that the tide would have turned against the Europeans had the matter been merely one of military capability. There would have been no conquest, or the conquest would have embraced only a limited territory, and certainly would not have swept south as far as the great civilizations of the central Andes. The point is that history went in a different direction because of the incredibly severe and incredibly rapid impact of introduced diseases. Resistance collapsed because the Americans were dying in epidemics even before the battles were joined.⁸ Probably 90% of the population of central Mexico was wiped out during the sixteenth century; the majority of these deaths occurred early enough to assist the political conquest. Parallel processes took place in other parts of the hemisphere, especially where there were major concentrations of population, these in most cases being areas of state organization and high civilization. Perhaps three-quarters of the entire population of America was wiped out during that century.⁹ Millions died in battle with the Spaniards and Portuguese and in forced-labor centers such as the mines of Mexico and Peru, but much greater numbers died in epidemics, and this was the reason that resistance to the conquest was rapidly overcome in most areas.

Both the susceptibility of American populations to Eastern Hemisphere diseases and the lower level of military technology among Western Hemisphere peoples can be explained in fairly straightforward cultural-

evolutionary terms, although evidence bearing on the matter is partly indirect. The Western Hemisphere was not occupied by humans until very late in the Paleolithic period; there is dispute about the first arrivals, but most scholars do not believe that the Americas were occupied before 30,000 B.P. The first immigrants did not possess agriculture. The earliest migrations preceded the Agricultural Revolution in the Eastern Hemisphere; in addition, the source area for the migrations, northeastern Siberia, is generally too cold for agriculture, even for present-day agriculture, and we would not expect to find that these cultures were experimenting with incipient agriculture 20,000 years or so ago although some low-latitude cultures were doing so. Migrants to America were paleolithic hunters, gatherers, fishers, and shellfishers. They came in small numbers, apparently in a widely spaced series of relatively small population movements, and spread throughout both North and South America. Only after some millennia had passed was the stock of resources for hunting, fishing, gathering, and shellfishing under any significant pressure from humans. One assumes that population growth was slow but—this is of course speculative—that population growth eventually did reach the point where conditions were favorable to an Agricultural Revolution.¹⁰ In the Eastern Hemisphere the Agricultural Revolution seems to have occurred (as a qualitative change) roughly 10,000–12,000 years ago. In the Western Hemisphere that point may have been reached about 4,000 years later.¹¹ Thereafter, cultural evolution in the Western Hemisphere proceeded along lines somewhat parallel to those of Eastern Hemisphere evolution: the development of agricultural societies, of monumental ceremonial centers, science, writing, cities, feudal class structures, and mercantile trade. It seems, indeed, that the Western Hemisphere societies were closing the gap. But in 1492, military technology in the most advanced and powerful states was still well behind that of Eastern Hemisphere states. Metal was just coming into use in this arena, and guns had not been invented. Hence the superiority of Cortés's armies over Moctezuma's and Pizarro's over the Incas'. (When Cortés arrived at Tenochtitlán the Aztecs were already dying in great numbers from European diseases which, apparently, had been carried by American traders from Cuba to Mexico. Likewise, the Incas apparently were succumbing to these diseases before Pizarro arrived.¹²)

The susceptibility of American populations to Eastern Hemisphere diseases, and the consequent devastation of American settlements, collapse of states, and defeat and subjugation by the Europeans, is explained within the same general model. Small populations entered America and probably bore with them only a small subset of the diseases that existed in the Eastern Hemisphere at the time of their departure. They came, in

addition, from a rather isolated, thinly populated part of the hemisphere, and a part which, having a cold climate, would have lacked some diseases characteristic of warm regions. Perhaps more important is the history of the diseases themselves. Many diseases originated or became epidemiologically significant during or after the Agricultural Revolution, and have ecological connections to agriculture, to urbanization, to zoological and botanical changes in the ecosystems strongly modified by human land use, and so on. In the Eastern Hemisphere humanity entered these ecological situations after the initial migrations to the Western Hemisphere, hence these migrants to America would not have carried these diseases with them. Later migrants may have done so (although this is again unlikely because they came from a cold and isolated part of Asia, and came in small numbers). But we can assume that the sparse settlement, the hunting-gathering-fishing-shellfishing way of life, and the absence of agricultural settlements and urbanization in the Americas during many millennia, would have caused a disappearance of some of the Eastern Hemisphere diseases that had been carried across to the Americas by migrants. After a time the American populations would have lost their physiological immunities to diseases no longer present in these populations, and they would of course lack immunities to diseases never before encountered. It is known, in this regard, that utter devastation was produced in the Americas from diseases to which Eastern Hemisphere populations had such high levels of immunity that they experienced these diseases as minor maladies only.

Hence there is no need to take seriously any longer the various myths that explain the defeat of the Americans in terms of imputed irrationality or superstitiousness or any of the other classical, often racist, myths about American civilizations in 1492. (The most widely known of these myths is the idea that Mexicans imagined that Cortés and his troops were gods, and fell down before them in awe instead of fighting. This did not happen.) The relatively minor difference in technology between the two communities, and the impact of Eastern Hemisphere diseases upon Western Hemisphere communities, can be explained in terms of the settlement history of the Western Hemisphere and its consequences. The Americans were not conquered: they were infected.

Europe in 1492

In 1492, European society was rather sluggishly moving out of feudalism and toward capitalism. Nothing in the landscape would suggest that a revolutionary transformation was imminent, or even that the social and economic changes taking place were very rapid. The growth of the

English woolen trade in the fifteenth century was not (as it is often depicted) a sign of revolutionary economic change: it was complemented by a decline in competing woolen industries in southern Europe.¹³ Rural growth in this century reflected mainly population recovery (in some areas) after the great plagues of the preceding century, and the commercialization of agriculture that was then taking place had been doing so for some time.¹⁴ Towns were growing, but only slowly, and the urban population was still only a small fraction of total population (except in Italy and the Low Countries); and the urban population of Europe was smaller than it was in many non-European areas.¹⁵ There were strong signs even of economic contraction instead of growth.¹⁶ The Italian Renaissance, in economic terms, did not raise the Italian centers above the level of many non-European centers, including those in nearby Islamic countries (for instance, Cairo), and the Renaissance was not at all a technological revolution.¹⁷ All of this needs to be said by way of setting the stage. Before 1492 there was slow growth in Europe, perhaps even a downturn. Certainly—and this is accepted by the majority of European historians—no truly revolutionary transformation was underway in 1492.

Within a few decades after 1492 the rate of growth and change speeded up dramatically, and Europe clearly entered a period of rapid metamorphosis. There is no dispute about this fact, which is seen in the known statistics relating to prices, urban growth, and much more beside.¹⁸ What is disputable is the causal connection between these explosive sixteenth-century changes and the beginnings of economic exploitation in America (and, significantly but secondarily, in Africa and Asia). There is agreement that the effect was profound. But did it truly generate a qualitative transformation in Europe's economy? Or did it suddenly quicken a process already well underway? Or did it merely modify this process slightly with effects such as inflation? This question cannot be answered unless we break out of the European historical tunnel and look at what was going on in America, Asia, and Africa between 1492 and 1688, the symbolic date for Europe's bourgeois revolution.

COLONIALISM AND THE RISE OF EUROPE, 1492–1688

Colonialism and Capitalism in the Sixteenth Century

Enterprise in the Americas was from the start a matter of capital accumulation: of profit. No matter if some elements of medieval law were incorporated in legal and land-granting systems in (for

Europeans) the New World, and if the Iberian governments took a substantial, though usually overestimated, portion of the profits. The goal of all European individuals and groups involved in the enterprise, clergy apart, was to make money, for oneself or one's country (usually the former).

The leading group, almost everywhere, was the European protocapitalist class, not only merchants but also industrialists and profit-oriented landlords—not only Iberian but also Italian, Flemish, Dutch, German, English, and so on. This class community took its profit from American enterprise and invested part of it in Europe, buying land and developing commercial agriculture, developing industries (like shipbuilding, sugar refining, and so on) that were associated with the growing colonial enterprise, developing profitable businesses in spheres of activity which served the growing European economy (for instance, the burgeoning Atlantic fisheries), building urban structures, and the like. Part of the profit was plowed back into additional colonial risk enterprise, in America and in the new trading enterprises in southern Asia, Africa, and the Levant. One of the deceptively subtle aspects of the process was the immense increase in purchases of all sorts by European merchants in all markets, inside and outside of Europe, growing out of the fact that these merchants now had incredible amounts of precious metals or metal-based money at their command and could offer previously unheard-of prices. Perhaps half the gold and silver brought back from America in the sixteenth century was contraband, hence available directly for this kind of enterprise, but the remainder, after passing through the great customs houses, quickly entered circulation as the Iberian governments paid out gold and silver for goods and services.¹⁹

Colonial enterprise in the sixteenth century produced capital in a number of ways. One was gold and silver mining. A second was plantation agriculture, principally in Brazil. A third was the trade with Asia in spices, cloth, and the like. A fourth and by no means minor element was the profit returned to European investors from a variety of productive and commercial enterprises in the Americas, including profit on production for local use in Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere; profit on sale of goods imported from Europe; profit on a variety of secondary exports from America (leather, dyestuffs, etc.); profit on land sales in America; profit returned to Europe by families and corporations holding land grants in Mexico and other areas. A fifth was slaving. A sixth, piracy. Notice that all of this is normal capital accumulation; none of it is the mysterious thing called "primitive accumulation."²⁰ (Value from wage labor, not to mention forced

labor, was involved, and much of it was value from production, not simply from trade.) Accumulation from these sources was massive. It was massive enough so that the process cannot be dismissed as a minor adjunct of protocapitalist accumulation in Europe itself, and it was massive enough, I believe, to fuel a major transformation in Europe, the rise to power of the bourgeoisie and the immense efflorescence of preindustrial capitalism, in ways that we will discuss.

Precious Metals

We notice first the export of gold and silver from the Americas and its insertion within the circuits of an Eastern Hemispheric market economy in which gold and silver already provide the common measure of value, directly or indirectly, in almost all markets. The flow of precious metals began immediately after the European discovery of America, and by 1640 at least 180 tons of gold and 17,000 tons of silver are known to have reached Europe.²¹ (The real figures must be at least double these amounts, since records were poor for some areas and periods and since contraband was immensely important.²²) Additional quantities of gold came from colonial activities in Africa. In the period 1561 to 1580 about 85% of the entire world's production of silver came from the Americas. The simple quantity of gold and silver in circulation in the Eastern Hemisphere economy as a whole was profoundly affected: hemispheric silver stock may have been tripled and gold stock increased by 20% during the course of the sixteenth century as a result of bullion brought from America.²³ The fact that much of the pre-existing stock must have been frozen in uses not permitting direct or indirect conversion to money suggests to me that American bullion may have as much as doubled the gold- and silver-based money supply of the Eastern Hemisphere as a whole. (In Europe, the circulation of metal coins increased eight- or ten-fold in the course of the century.²⁴) This process must be seen in perspective: it is money flowing constantly and in massive amounts into Europe, through Europe, and from Europe to Asia and Africa, constantly replenished at the entry points (Seville, Antwerp, Genoa, etc.) with more American supplies, and constantly permitting those who hold it to offer better prices for all goods—as well as labor and land—in all markets, than anyone else had ever been able to offer in prior times.

The importance of these flows of gold and silver is routinely underestimated by scholars, mainly for three reasons (apart from implicit diffusionism, the simple tendency to undervalue causal events in non-Europe). First, the process is seen somehow as purely primitive accumulation. But the metals were mined by workers and transported by

workers; the enterprise overall involved risk capital and all of the other familiar traits of the sorts of protocapitalist productive enterprises which were characteristic of that time (that it was partly state-controlled does not alter this argument, nor does the fact that some of the labor was unfree); and very major economic and social systems were built around the mines themselves in Mexico, Peru, and other parts of America.

Second, the argument that precious metal flows significantly affected the European economy is dismissed by some scholars as "monetarism" (roughly, the theory that changes in money alone are very significant for changes in the economy overall). The error in this charge is a failure to see the sixteenth-century economy in its own, appropriate, geographical and social context, and to impute to the economy of that time the liquidity of exchange and the relative lack of spatial friction that characterizes the capitalist economy of our own time. Two facts here are basic. First of all, the possession of precious metal was highly localized in space. European merchants, as a community, obtained it and set it in motion outward, toward rural Europe and toward markets outside of Europe. Second of all, the supply of precious metal was essentially continuous, and therefore the advantage held by European protocapitalists in terms of prices they could offer for commodities, labor, and land was persistently higher than the prices which competitors anywhere could offer. So the protocapitalist community very steadily undermined the competition in all markets across the Eastern Hemisphere, within Europe and without, eventually gaining control of most international seaborne trade in most of the mercantile-maritime centers from Sofala to Calicut to Malacca.²⁵ The penetration of these markets, the acquisition of trading bases, and the control of a few small but important producing areas (like some islands of the Moluccas), was not a matter of European rationality or venturesomeness, but rather reflected the availability to Europeans of American gold and silver, trans-shipped through Lisbon, Antwerp, Acapulco (in the "Manila galleons"), and so on.

A third sort of doubt about the importance of American gold and silver is associated with the critique of Earl Hamilton's classic theory that the precious metal supply produced an imbalance between factors of production in the European economy, produced thereby a windfall of profits, and thus in effect destabilized the economy and moved it toward capitalism.²⁶ Hamilton was one of the few economic historians to perceive that American gold and silver was a crucial, central cause of change in Europe, although he was (partly) wrong about the mechanisms that brought about this change. The metals did not transform the economy in any direct sense. Rather, they enriched the protocapitalist class and thereby gave them the power to immensely accelerate the

transformation that was already underway—not only in Europe—toward capitalism as a political and social system, and to prevent non-European capitalists from sharing in the process. American bullion hastened the rise of capitalism and was crucial in the process by which it became centrated in Europe.

Plantations

The impact of the slave plantation system on Europe's economy was felt mainly in the seventeenth century and thereafter. But part of the general undervaluing of the significance of early colonialism—of the world outside of Europe—is a tendency not to notice that the plantation system was of considerable importance even in the sixteenth century. Moreover, the early history of the Atlantic sugar plantation economy gives a revealing picture of the way in which the protocapitalist colonial economy was eroding the feudal economy. Sugar planting was not a new enterprise; sugar (contrary to myth) was not a rare commodity, and sugar planting (also contrary to myth) was not an insignificant economic curiosity at the fringe of capitalist development. Commercial and feudal cane sugar production was found throughout the Mediterranean in the fifteenth century.²⁷ Although little is known about the way planting was organized, it is known that commercial sugar production was important in India 2,000 years ago (apparently it was a Mauryan state industry), and in the Middle Ages commercial sugar planting under various feudal and probably protocapitalist systems of organization was found in East Africa, part of West Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Cyprus, the Levant, various parts of Mediterranean Europe, and other regions.²⁸ If cane sugar was not an important commodity in northern Europe this was because of its price, as against that of sweeteners like honey. Europeans first moved the commercial plantation system out into the newly settled Atlantic islands from Madeira to São Tomé and then vastly expanded production in the Americas. But throughout the sixteenth century the new plantations merely *supplanted* the older Mediterranean sugar-producing regions; total production for the Europe-Mediterranean market did not rise until later.²⁹ This was capitalist production displacing feudal and semifeudal plantation production, using the twin advantages of colonialism: empty land and cheap labor. No other industry was as significant as the plantation system for the rise of capitalism before the nineteenth century.

In 1600 Brazil exported about 30,000 tons of sugar with a gross sale value of £2,000,000. This is about double the total annual value of *all* exports from England to *all* of the world in that period.³⁰ It will be recalled that British exports in that period, principally of wool, are sometimes

considered paradigmatic for the "awakening," indeed the "rise," of early-modern Europe. Also in 1600, per capita earnings from sugar in Brazil, for all except Indians, was about equal to per capita income in Britain later in that century.³¹ The rate of accumulation in the Brazilian plantation industry was so high at the end of the sixteenth century that it was able to generate enough capital to finance a doubling of its capacity every two years.³² Early in the seventeenth century the Dutch protocapitalist community (which was heavily involved in the Brazilian sugar enterprise, mainly in the shipping and sales dimensions) calculated that profit rates in the industry were 56% per year, totalling nearly £1,000,000 per year. The rate of profit was higher still a bit earlier, at the close of the sixteenth century, when production costs, including the cost of purchasing slaves, amounted to only one-fifth of income from sugar sales. These statistics should be seen against the background of an industry that was not responding to some novel demand for some novel product in an already-rising Europe, but was merely (in essence) undercutting the precapitalist Mediterranean producers of Spain, Italy, Morocco, Egypt, and elsewhere, in the supply of a highly important commercial product.

Sugar is of course the centerpiece of the plantation system down to the late eighteenth century. But other kinds of colonial production, mainly but not only agricultural, and fully as close to capitalism as was the Brazil plantation system, were of some significance even before the end of the sixteenth century. There was, for instance, some direct production of spices in the Moluccas and some European involvement with Indian merchant capitalists in the organization pepper production in South India. Dyes, tobacco, and other commercially valuable products were flowing from America to Europe. A very large agricultural economy existed in parts of America to supply food, fiber, leather, and other necessities to the mining settlements and other settlements. Immediately after 1492 (or before?) west European fishermen and whalers developed an immense industry in Newfoundland and elsewhere on the North American coast.

To all of this must be added the profits from other sorts of colonial and semicolonial activities in the Eastern Hemisphere.³³ The slave trade was highly profitable even in the sixteenth century. European merchant capitalists of all nations profited greatly from the Lisbon trade with Asia and East Africa in textiles and particularly spices (the Asian spices carried by the Portuguese and sold mainly through Antwerp did not replace the traditional Mediterranean flow but rather added to it, hence providing a novel and important source of accumulation). There was, in addition, considerable profit from the within-Asia trade resulting from the domination of long-distance oceanic trade in East Africa, India, and

Southeast Asia by Portugal (with participation also by Spain and later Holland). Broadly speaking, however, accumulation deriving from Western Hemisphere colonial activities far outweighed that from Eastern Hemisphere activities, colonial and semicolonial, in the sixteenth century. Overall, both the quantitative significance, in that century, of production and trade in colonial and semicolonial areas and the immense profitability of the enterprise, that is, the rapid capital accumulation which it fostered directly and (in Europe) indirectly, add up to a significant vector force, easily able to change the process of economic transformation in Europe from sluggish evolution to rapid revolution.

Effects

There seem to be two particularly good ways to assess the real significance for the rise of capitalism of sixteenth-century colonial production in America, and some other areas, along with trading, piracy, and the like, in Asia and Africa. One way is to trace the direct and indirect effects of colonialism on European society, looking for movements of goods and capital, tracing labor flows into industries and regions stimulated or created by colonial enterprise, and looking at the way urbanization flourished in those cities that were engaged in colonial (and more generally extra-European) enterprise or closely connected to it, and the like. This processes overall would then be examined in relation to the totality of changes taking place in Europe in that century, to determine whether, in Europe itself, changes clearly resulting from the direct and indirect impact of extra-European activities were the prime movers for economic and social change. This task still remains undone. The second way is to attempt to arrive at a global calculation of the amount of labor (free and unfree) that was employed in European enterprises in America, Africa, and Asia, along with the amount of labor in Europe itself which was employed in activities derived from extra-European enterprise, and then to look at these quantities in relation to the total labor market in Europe for economic activities that can be thought of as connected to the rise of capitalism. This task has not been done either; indeed, as far as I know little research has been done on sixteenth-century labor forces and labor markets in American settlements or indeed in Europe. So the proposition which I am arguing here, concerning the significance of sixteenth-century colonialism (and related extra-European activities) for the rise of capitalism in Europe, perhaps cannot be tested as yet.

Still, there are suggestive indications. Some of these have been mentioned already: matters of assessing the quantities and values of colonial exports to Europe. We can also speculate about labor. One

approach is through population. The population of Spain and Portugal in the mid-sixteenth century may have been around nine million.³⁴ Estimates of sixteenth-century populations for America vary widely and there is much controversy about population levels and rates of decline,³⁵ but for the present, highly speculative, and essentially methodological, argument, I will ignore the controversies and play with global estimates. The population of Mexico at midcentury may have been around six million, a population that was undergoing continuous decline from its preconquest level of perhaps 30 million down to one-tenth of that figure (or perhaps less) in 1600.³⁶ Populations in the Andean regions involved in mineral and textile production for the Spaniards may (I am speculating) have totalled five million in the late sixteenth century. Perhaps we can add an additional two million for the population of other parts of Ibero-America that were within regions of European control and presumably involved, more or less, in the European-dominated economy. Let us, then, use a ball-park estimate of 13 million for the American population that was potentially yielding surplus value to Europeans in the mid-to-late sixteenth century. The population seems larger than that of Iberia. Granted, the comparison should be made with a larger part of Europe, certainly including the Low Countries, which were intimately involved in the exploitation of America (and Asia) at this period, along with parts of Italy and other countries. Assume then a figure of 20 million for Europe as against 13 million for America.

I see no reason to argue that the European populations were more intimately involved in the rise of capitalism than the American populations—that is, the 13 million people who we assume were in European-dominated regions. It is likely that the proportion of the American population that was engaged in labor for Europeans, as wage work, as forced labor including slave labor, and as the labor of farmers delivering goods as tribute or rent in kind, was no lower than the proportion of Iberian people engaged in labor for commercialized sectors of the Spanish and Portuguese economy. Moreover, the level of exploitation for Indian labor must have been much higher than that for Iberian labor because portions of the Indian labor force were worked literally to death in this period—depopulation was due in part to forced labor—and so the capital generated by each American worker must have been higher than that generated by a European worker. (We need to remind ourselves again that we are dealing with a preindustrial, basically medieval economy in Europe. It cannot be argued, for instance, that technology or fixed capital in production was more advanced in the utilization of European than in that of American labor, so exploitation was in the last analysis a function of human effort.)

We must next take into account the fact that the capital accumulated from the labor of Americans went directly to the economic sectors in Europe that were building capitalism, whereas most workers and peasants in Europe were still connected to essentially medieval sectors of the economy. Then we must add the labor of Africans and Asians. And finally, we must take into account the European workers, in Europe and elsewhere, whose labor must be considered part of the extra-European economy. By this admittedly speculative reasoning, free and unfree workers in the colonial and semicolonial economy of the late sixteenth century were providing as much or more surplus value and accumulated capital for European protocapitalism, the rising bourgeoisie, as were the workers of Europe itself.

Little is known about the American work force in the sixteenth century, but, again, some speculations are possible. Las Casas asserted that three million or more Indians had been enslaved by the Spaniards in the northern part of Spanish America during the first half of the sixteenth century, and this figure, once dismissed, is now taken seriously.³⁷ It is known that more than 400,000 were enslaved in Nicaragua alone.³⁸ It is realized also that Indian slave labor was extremely important in the European economy of America in that period, in Brazilian sugar planting, Mesoamerican and Antillean mining, and elsewhere. Let us speculate that 100,000 Indians were working as slaves for Spaniards in a given year in the mid-sixteenth century. Perhaps 20,000 Indians were working at free and forced labor in the mines of Mexico and the Andes in the latter part of the century,³⁹ and it is safe to assume that five times that number were involved in the mining economy overall. Potosí, the great Andean silver-mining city, had a population of 120,000 in the 1570s (larger than Paris, Rome, Madrid, Seville). A much greater but unknown number of Indians were workers on haciendas and other European enterprises, or provided periodic forced labor, or provided tribute and rent in kind. (The Cortés *encomienda* in Mexico included 50,000 Indians.⁴⁰) There may have been 100,000 African slaves in America and on the island of São Tomé in the closing years of the century.⁴¹ There may have been 300,000 Europeans, Mulattos, and Mestizos in the Americas in 1570,⁴² of whom conceivably as many as 250,000 were workers.

Perhaps it would not be unreasonable to estimate that one million people were working in the European economy of the Western Hemisphere in the closing years of the sixteenth century, perhaps half of them engaged in productive labor in distinctly capitalist enterprises. Can this have been more than the European protocapitalist work force of the time? All of this is somewhat speculative, but it points toward the conclusion that American labor was a truly massive part of the total labor

of this we must add three additional quantities: labor involved in the slave trade within continental Africa;⁴³ labor in other extra-European regions (São Tomé, Ternate, Calicut, and so on) that was incorporated into the European economy or produced goods for trade to Europeans; and labor of Europeans, inside and outside of Europe, which was part of the extra-European economy—sailors, soldiers, stevedores, teamsters, clerks, foremen, and the rest.

By the end of the sixteenth century the rise of Europe had well begun. As capital flowed into Europe, and as other effects of colonial enterprise also flowed into the European system or region, secondary causation appeared, including agricultural expansion and transformation, primitive manufacturing, urbanization, and expansion of rural settlements and the commercial economy. These latter have been looked at carefully but in a mainly tunnel-historical framework; as a result, the rise of Europe in the sixteenth century has appeared to be a process taking place wholly within the European spatial system, and caused wholly (or mainly) by autochthonous forces. As we have seen, this is an inaccurate picture and an incomplete one. Urbanization was taking place, but mainly in areas connected to the extra-European economy. Inflation was also (with some qualifications) most severe in these areas.⁴⁴ Among the sectors of the European economy that were growing in the sixteenth century, some, like piracy and shipbuilding, were tied directly to the extra-European economy, while others, like wheat production and North Atlantic fishing, were stimulated directly and indirectly by that economy.⁴⁵

I would generalize as follows. The initiating condition, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, is a west and central European economy that is undergoing slow but definite change toward capitalism—as are many regions of Asia and Africa at that same time. Novel forces intrude into the European system, as impinging boundary processes, because of the conquest of America and the other extra-European events, intruding processes which consist mainly of capital and material products (and of course the labor embedded in these things). These then intersect with the ongoing evolving economic, technological, demographic, and other changes. Many new changes appear, as a result not of direct stimulus from the extra-European world but from the changes already underway, which themselves are mainly results of those extra-European boundary processes. The internal European changes of course feed forward to produce intensification of the processes going on in America, Asia, etc., and these, in turn, produce still more changes within Europe.

We can see a geographical pattern in all of this. There is a tendency for major economic changes to occur first near the mercantile-maritime centers that participate in the extra-European processes. Obviously, not

centers that participate in the extra-European processes. Obviously, not all of the centers that existed in 1492 were equal participants in that process, with some of the Iberian, Italian, and Flemish port cities taking the lead. But the network was sufficiently tight so that Hanseatic and English ports were early participants, as were inland cities with special economic characteristics, like Augsburg and Paris. From these many centers, the process spread into the interior of Europe, first into areas that supplied basic staple goods like wheat—the growth at that time of the Baltic wheat trade and manorial production of wheat in parts of central and east Europe is well known—and then elsewhere. At any given time we see a broad and irregular spatial pattern (of the type which geographers call “distance decay”) of descending levels of urbanization and commercial production as we move across the landscape toward interior Europe.

Other processes were underway as well, and so the pattern that I have mapped out here is much too simple. Population growth in some areas reflected sixteenth-century economic changes associated with extra-European events but in other areas it signified recovery from the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century population declines. Other changes, such as peasant revolts, reflected the general crisis of the late feudal economy, but the sixteenth-century rise of prices and (at least in some areas) rents was a contributing force in the unrest. As to the Reformation, I would argue in the Tawneyan tradition that it was broadly an effect, not an independent cause, of the economic changes that were taking place in Europe in the sixteenth century.⁴⁶ But which changes? The internal crumbling of feudalism? The forces impinging from the extra-European world? Both? Probably the spatial diffusion of the Reformation in the sixteenth century reflected mainly intra-European forces,⁴⁷ but by the time of the seventeenth-century bourgeois revolutions, the areas most deeply involved in extra-European activities tended to be centers also of Protestantism. In short: the spatial patterns of change in sixteenth-century Europe reflect to some extent the integration of Europe with America, and secondarily Africa and Asia, but the pattern is still somewhat unclear.

Overall, the processes of transformation and modernization in sixteenth-century Europe were terribly complex, varying in time and place throughout most of that continent. But the generalization is nonetheless fairly straightforward. The extra-European component, after 1492, led to an immense stimulation of changes in Europe, those that produced on the one hand an increase in the rate of European economic change and growth, and on the other hand the beginnings of a centration of capitalism in Europe (a process discussed further below). By the end of

the sixteenth century these extra-European forces had laid the foundation for the political and social triumph of (preindustrial) capitalism, or rather for the fact that the Glorious Revolution occurred in 1688, instead of much later, and in England, instead of Egypt or Zimbabwe or India or China (or all of these at once).

Colonialism and Capitalism in the Seventeenth Century

By the middle of the seventeenth century, changes were taking place in Europe at a rapid rate and on a massive scale, and the problem of sorting out the internal and external causes and effects for this period is a very complex matter. In this same period there occurred a massive expansion, in location and intensity, of formal and informal colonialism in the Americas and around the coasts of Africa and Asia, and for these extra-European processes the problem of complexity is compounded by a lack of quantitative data regarding volume of production, numbers in the labor forces, capital accumulation, and other information that would help us to judge the role of colonialism (as a broad concept) in the changes that were taking place within Europe. These matters are far too complex to permit us to discuss them satisfactorily here. I will limit myself to a rather sketchy intervention or (if you prefer to call it that) a model.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Netherlands and England had emerged as the centers (or center) of capitalist development in Europe.⁴⁸ Although Spain continued to feed huge quantities of silver and some gold into Europe in the first half of this century, and Portuguese plantations in Brazil and trading activities in Asia continued to be important fountains of accumulation, the main expansion of colonial enterprise after 1600 was Dutch and English. The crucial component was the West Indian plantation system, which expanded explosively after about 1640. (Fifty thousand slaves were imported into Barbados alone in the following 50 years. Probably two million slaves were imported into America in the course of the seventeenth century.)⁴⁹ If we place the Dutch and British sugar colonies in the same economic space as the metropolitan countries themselves, it seems likely that the sugar plantation economy was the single largest productive sector in this expanded European economy (or "Atlantic economy," as it is often called) aside from family farming, and by far the largest single generator of value. (Brazilian plantations, producing partly for Dutch capital, were still, in the mid-seventeenth century, more massive than the West Indian.) But British and Dutch enterprise in the Eastern Hemisphere was also expanding very

rapidly; the East India companies were formed around 1600, and by 1650 the Dutch and British together controlled most of the intercontinental trade—unequal trade, and in a sense semicolonial trade—with Asia, as well as the slave trade in Africa. Meanwhile, Spanish enterprise was yielding substantial accumulation in America (whether or not there was a "seventeenth-century depression"). And we must not ignore the great variety of additional extra-European sources of accumulation: a now massive fishing industry in the northwestern Atlantic, resource extraction and the beginnings of European settlement in North America, the slave trade, piracy, Russian enterprise in Siberia, and much more.

The key question is this: How central was the role played by colonial and semicolonial enterprise in the seventeenth-century rise of Europe and of capitalism within Europe? The model I would build involves two elements. The first is a continuation and enlargement of the sixteenth-century processes, which, as I argued, involved a sluggishly growing European economy quickened into rapid development by extra-European forces after 1492. By the middle of the next century the European bourgeoisie had strengthened their class position and (in the key locations) had enticed much of the feudal aristocracy into joining bourgeois enterprise,⁵⁰ and had well begun the process of destroying protocapitalist enterprise outside of Europe, as a result of the inflowing capital from America (and secondarily in that period, Africa and Asia).

Now, apart from stocks of precious metal, it is improbable that capital accumulated from extra-European enterprise in 1500–1650 amounted to a sizeable share of total invested capital in Europe, even in the more advanced regions of Europe, even in the economic sectors in which capital was more or less fluid. What it did do was provide a critical increment: everywhere it allowed the merchant-entrepreneurial community to offer higher prices for products, labor, and land; everywhere it put investment capital in the hands of classes and communities other than the traditional elite, the group less likely to accumulate beyond its social needs and less likely to reinvest profits in new ventures. Colonial capital, in a word, was new capital. Without it, the sluggish late-medieval economy of pre-1492 days would have continued its slow progress out of feudalism and toward capitalism (or something like capitalism), but there would have been no Seventeenth-Century Bourgeois Revolution.

Perhaps the essence of capitalism, at a level of aggregation above the worker-capitalist class relation, is the reinvestment of profits to enlarge productive capacity. Capitalist enterprise can be technologically primitive or advanced but always, to survive, it must accumulate capital. It is never in equilibrium. This point leads us to focus on the conditions that permitted continued growth, exponential growth, in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. This growth did not involve technological change in any important way: production increases were mainly matters of drawing more workers and more productive materials into traditional productive processes to yield more output. Given the fact that capital for expansion was available because of the extra-European enterprises and other, related developments, the key problem in the seventeenth century must have been markets, or demand. The capitalist had access to capital, had access to labor—at the levels of production then prevailing a truly massive proletarianization was not necessary—and had access to raw materials (some European, some colonial). The growth of a capitalist enterprise in that period was perhaps constrained most seriously by the need to open up new markets: to sell more of the product so that more could be produced, more capital generated, and so on.

Some of these markets were in Europe itself, reflecting at first the ability of capitalist enterprise to sell traditional products (like sugar) at lower costs than prevailed under the feudal economy, but gradually the urbanization and commercialization of the continent brought in feedback loops so that the newer way of life, generated by the rise of capitalism, itself generated more internal markets for capitalism. But probably the main growth of markets for protocapitalist enterprise in the seventeenth century, and thus the main stimulus for the rise of capitalism, was *outside* the system. This is well known in the case of trade with eastern Europe. It is known in the case of markets in America, Africa, and Asia, but the quantitative significance of these extra-European markets has not been fully evaluated. In the case of the English bourgeoisie, the main markets for capitalist enterprise, including agricultural and nonagricultural products from England and re-exported products from abroad, were in America, Africa, and Asia, along with nontraditional markets in the Baltic. For the Dutch, extra-European commerce was even more important. Italian communities continued to depend considerably on the eastern Mediterranean.

In the seventeenth century, then, the crucial role of the extra-European world, added on to and perhaps more significant than its sixteenth-century role as provider of bullion and some other products, was to permit an expansion of demand—including forced demand, as on the slave plantations—for capitalist products, a demand sufficiently great so that productive capacity and output of capitalist enterprises could continue to grow at an incredibly fast rate. This growth in output was one of the two essential seventeenth-century forces involved in the rise of capitalism. The second force was, simply, the political triumph itself, the bourgeois revolution. This provided the bourgeoisie with the legal and

political power to rip apart the fabric of the society in its quest for accumulation. Forced proletarianization thereby became possible, as did government support for almost any strategy that the new accumulating elite had in mind. And an Industrial Revolution, a transformation of the methods of production so that output could increase at an even greater rate, became (one might say) inevitable.

THE CENTRATION OF CAPITALISM

The phrase “the rise of capitalism” generally evokes an image of factories, steam engines, masses of wage workers, cities grimy with coal dust: *industrial* capitalism. Our discussion thus far has not dealt with the rise of industrial capitalism—the Industrial Revolution—but with the precursors to that momentous event. But let me, for a moment, review some of these precursors.

Before 1492, most of the preconditions that would be critical for the eventual rise of industrial capitalism were present not merely in parts of Europe but also in parts of Asia and Africa. After 1492, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europe acquired three additional preconditions. One was the very considerable accumulation of wealth from the mines and plantations of America and from trade in Asia and Africa. The second, closely related to the first, was the huge enlargement of markets outside of western Europe for products either produced in western Europe or imported and then reexported; that is, a very great and almost constantly growing demand. Third, and most important of all, the social sectors involved with capitalism took political power on a wide scale in western Europe, something that had not happened elsewhere except on very small terrains. This, the bourgeois revolution, allowed the emerging capitalist class-community to mobilize state power toward its further rise, such that the entire society contributed to the underwriting of colonial adventures and to the preparation of infrastructure such as cities and roads, while the state's police and military power could now be mobilized to force people off the land and into wage work, and to conscript people and resources for advantageous wars abroad. All three of these precursors, as I have argued, appeared because of—or would not have appeared had it not been for—colonialism.

Historians engage in fierce debates about the causes of the Industrial Revolution. Most of the candidate causes, or “factors,” are theories within the “European miracle” category which we discussed and tried to refute in Chapter 2. Propositions about, for instance, general medieval moderniza-

tion of the European economy and polity, medieval technological revolutions, "rationality" in medieval and later times, and the like, are built into the most common explanations for the later emergence of an Industrial Revolution. We showed, I hope, that all of these processes were at work outside of Europe as well as inside, so that they cannot be enlisted as causes of an event that happened only in Europe.

This is a problem where the sequence and dating of events is extremely important. The concept of the Industrial Revolution is usually bound up with two more specific transformations: the development of steam power and generally novel technology in industrial production, and the development of wage labor in industrial production. But the timing is wrong. The technological part of the Industrial Revolution became important very late in the process, too late to explain the revolution itself. It is certainly true that technological advances were taking place in European manufacturing during the period from 1492 to, say, 1750, but very little of this technology was unique to Europe, as we have seen, and, most crucially, the technological advances that eventually became important in increasing manufacturing production and increasing labor efficiency in that production occurred much later: in the last decades of the eighteenth century and, much more profusely, in the nineteenth century. In agriculture, the main technological advances were matters of increasing areal productivity in an environment of declining agricultural labor, but all of the essential technological changes that were involved in this process were traditional and were known outside of Europe. (A few scholars give great weight to newer crops like turnips, but such matters were of very minor importance—setting aside the much earlier introduction of the potato—compared to such things as the increased use of capital and purchased input nutrients. The fact that farmers in western Europe learned how to increase their production while decreasing labor inputs is not at all novel in the history and geography of agriculture. Thus the agricultural revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be considered an effect, not a cause, in the industrializing and urbanizing process.) So the technological side of the Industrial Revolution was not primary cause except as it may have been primary cause for a hemisphere-wide and very slow transformation, as we discussed previously. It appeared too late.

A somewhat similar argument can be given in response to the thesis that the development, by capitalism, of mass wage labor in manufacturing production was primary cause of the Industrial Revolution. This argument is most commonly put forth by those Marxist economists who hold to a strict construction of one of the arguments in Marx's *Capital*. It is indisputable that you cannot have fully mature industrial capitalism

without basing it in a wage-labor setting that is also a (relatively) free labor market, one in which workers can go from employer to employer. But these conditions did not exist prior to the late eighteenth century. Wage labor was predominant, but little of it was employed in manufacturing, and hardly ever did a worker confront a really free labor market, with real choices as to place of employment. These were features of industrial capitalism as it emerged after the Industrial Revolution really got rolling.

All such theories about the causes of the Industrial Revolution are diffusionist in the sense, and to the degree, that they see the process as an internal evolution within European history and society. As we noted in Chapter 2, an antidiffusionist, anti-Eurocentric body of historical theory has been developing over the past 50-odd years, a body of theory developed mainly, but not solely, by scholars from the extra-European world. In no other arena of historical discussion has this emerging critical school had as great an impact as it has had on the debates about the origins of the Industrial Revolution.

The thesis that industrial development in Europe depended in many ways on colonial processes was widely accepted in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵¹ Later, perhaps because of the growth of diffusionist ideology with its guiding proposition that Europe is the autonomous source of progress, this thesis fell into disfavor among European historians.⁵² It was forcefully advanced by a number of colonial scholars in the 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps understandably it was Indian scholars who emphasized the fact that a highly developed Indian cotton textile industry not only provided some of the new technology for Britain's industry, particularly in dyeing, but also had to be forcibly suppressed by Britain—in a process which some Indian scholars call "the de-industrialization of India"—in order to allow the British industry to develop in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵³ (The cotton textile industry was the leading sector in the early Industrial Revolution.) Also in the 1930s, West Indian scholars, notably C. L. R. James and Eric Williams, began to advance the thesis that slave-based industry and the slave trade were crucial causal forces in British and French industrialization. This general argument evolved into a broad theory which is now widely argued both by Caribbean scholars—it is sometimes called "the Caribbean school of history," rather too narrowly—and by others, many of whom are African-American and African scholars. This theory is of great importance, and I will try to summarize it briefly, ignoring a number of secondary disagreements among some of its proponents.

The most basic and general argument, advanced first by C. L. R. James and Eric Williams, was the proposition that the West Indian

slave-based plantation system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a highly advanced form of industrial system, implicitly the most advanced form in existence at that time. They, and later writers in the same scholarly tradition, showed that the plantation system involved very heavy capitalization, complex business organization, very advanced industrial technology (in milling, rum manufacture, transport, and so on), a large labor force in the sugar factory as well as in the fields, a considerable force of free workers and supervisors as well as slaves, and, most important of all, immense profits—profits not only from the plantation and its production but also from the slave trade and many ancillary components of what Williams called “the triangular trade.”⁵⁴ (Said James in his classic history of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, “the slave-trade and slavery were the economic basis of the French revolution . . . Nearly all the industries which developed in France during the eighteenth century had their origin in goods or commodities destined either for the coast of Guinea or for the Americas.”⁵⁵) I would extend this argument to a slightly more general proposition: Within the overall economic space which the Europeans controlled in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they found it possible to advance the capitalist industrial production system—large-scale, organized, semimechanized—to its highest level, for that era, *mainly* in the plantation system, using slave labor, until the evolution of industrial production as an overall system had evolved sufficiently so that profits could be made even when the labor force was paid a living wage, a wage permitting subsistence and reproduction of the working class, and the system could then be centralized, imported into Europe itself.⁵⁶ Stated differently, the earliest phase of the Industrial Revolution was so crude, undeveloped, and indeed barbaric that free labor could not be used, if the output was to be profitable. Therefore, the capture and forced labor of slaves was necessary for production, or, alternatively, colonial rule elsewhere (as in India) was needed to force the delivery of commodities at very low prices.

Both James and Williams argued that the profits from this complex were crucial in providing much, perhaps most, of the capital required in the early phase of the Industrial Revolution. Williams's book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, provided the classic statement of and argument for this thesis. He showed in great detail how the profits from the slave trade, the slave plantation, and the ancillary economic sectors flowed into England and then into the forms of investment that fueled the Industrial Revolution and its infrastructure (canals, ports, and the like). Most of the mainstream (European) community of scholars has rejected this theoretical position. The general view is that the industrial revolution was an almost entirely intra-European phenomenon, and such matters as the slave trade, the

slave plantation, and the profits from all of this *had* to be merely a detail or footnote.⁵⁷ Periodically, efforts have been made to refute the theory, but the only part of the theory which has really been subjected to empirical critique is the most limited and in a way least crucial part. Engerman and some others tried to show that, if various assumptions of neoclassical economics are made about the eighteenth-century British economy, and if traditionally low calculations are used as regards the number of slaves brought to America, then it would appear that the slave trade was not really very profitable. But in fact the slave trade itself was only a part of the overall complex that Williams and others were looking at; in fact, the plantation as in industrial system was much closer to the center of their attention because it was here that labor was put to use in generating mass commodities. Inikori and others have shown that the numbers of slave transported to the Americas has been underestimated. Finally, the neoclassical assumptions (among them the argument that there were “normal” profits in an eighteenth-century industry, as though the Industrial Revolution and factor and product markets had already matured) are widely questioned.

Another stream of criticism has come from some Marxists, among them Brenner and Laclau, who share the Eurocentric–diffusionist views of the conventional historical school just discussed.⁵⁸ Their positions tend to be grounded in two arguments, one of which is dogmatic and the other fallacious. First, they claim that unfree labor cannot, *by definition*, be considered part of capitalism. This has been answered by C. L. R. James who showed that the error is that of trying to judge a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century labor system by the standards of the mid-nineteenth century, the era of mature competitive capitalism as described by Marx. Even more effective has been the demonstration by Immanuel Wallerstein that capitalism uses a range of alternative labor systems under alternative production conditions, and forced labor is one of these alternative systems.⁵⁹ Second, the Marxist critics claim that processes that occurred outside of Europe and involved then the import of commodities and capital into Europe, must be denominated “exchange” rather than “production,” and so cannot be considered crucial for industrial development or capitalism. This thesis is simply false: production on a slave plantation is just as much production as is production in a Birmingham needle factory.

Scholars such as Bailey, Beckles, Darity, Mintz, Sheridan, Solow, Robinson, and Rodney, and (on a world-scale canvas) Amin, Wallerstein, and Frank, have, in recent years, given strong backing to the critical theory I have outlined here.⁶⁰ Conventional historians sometimes label it “the Williams thesis.” My point is that this “thesis” is something much

larger: it is the current state of the body of theory that pays adequate attention to the role played by colonialism in the Industrial Revolution.

One other point of contention concerns the significance of demand. All parties concede that the decisions to increase productive capacity, decisions which, in aggregate, led to the Industrial Revolution, were made on the basis of judgments that additional commodities, if produced, could be sold. The conventional historians generally treat the increase in demand as a somehow natural product of the modernization of Europe.⁶¹ The critical historians insist, rather, that colonialism was itself required in order to increase the level of demand such that industrialists would make efforts to increase capacity, efforts which, when the revolution got truly underway, involved the use of powerful new productive technology. The critical historians have indeed shown that an immense amount of demand was generated by the slave trade, by the plantations (demand for food, clothing, machinery, ships, and so on), and by the overall expansion of the trading sphere in which European commodities moved in the eighteenth century and thereafter. I would generalize the case as follows: there would not have been an Industrial Revolution had it not been for the immense demand that Europeans were able to generate in the colonies, and it was this fact that, more than anything else, pushed the Industrial Revolution forward.

Capitalism arose as a world-scale process: as a world system. Capitalism became centrated in Europe because colonialism gave Europeans the power both to develop their own society and to prevent development from occurring elsewhere. It is this dynamic of development and underdevelopment which mainly explains the modern world.

In this chapter and the two preceding ones I have tried to show, with empirical evidence, that there was no "European miracle." Africa, Asia, and Europe shared equally in the rise of capitalism prior to 1492. After that date, Europe took the lead. This happened, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, because of Europe's location near America and because of the immense wealth obtained by Europeans in America and later in Asia and Africa—not because Europeans were brighter or bolder or better than non-Europeans, or more modern, more advanced, more progressive, more rational. These are myths of Eurocentric diffusionism and are best forgotten.

NOTES

1. Europeans did not "discover" America: the hemisphere was settled many millennia earlier by people who migrated in from Siberia and the Arctic. So I prefer not to conceptualize the European arrival as a "discovery." Likewise, the idea that the

Western Hemisphere is a "New World" is false since it was hardly new to those who lived there and greeted Columbus on his arrival in 1492. It is, however, very difficult to avoid using the phrase "New World" in certain contexts, and I will occasionally have to do so.

2. See K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean* (1985); Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia* (1968); Sherif, *Slaves, Spices and Ivory in Zanzibar* (1987). It is highly likely that West Africans sailed across to the Americas before 1492. (See DeVisse and Labib, "Africa in Intercontinental Relations," 1984.) However, because there seem not to have been major mercantile-maritime port cities in West Africa—unlike East Africa—it is not likely that transatlantic voyages before 1492 had significant impact on Africa or on America. This is probable for several reasons. First, in the absence of such major port cities and large-volume long-distance sea commerce, it is likely that ships along the coast were rather small. They would easily have been capable of a westward voyage to America, given the strong and steady trade winds blowing westward, but a return voyage would have to have been made far to the north or the south, in the zone of the westerlies—roughly as far north as the latitude of southern Europe or as far south as the latitude of Namibia. Therefore the round trip would have been a very formidable undertaking. On the other hand, we may indeed learn from future scholarship that West African sailors, Moroccan sailors, and West European sailors all were fishing and whaling quite regularly off the coast of America (perhaps on the Grand Banks) before 1492; if strong evidence for this emerges, then we would consider it likely that West Africans were familiar with the round-trip voyage and with some parts of the American coast. But we do not have such evidence at present, and we have to consider it more likely that any West African ships that reached America were blown off course, in which case a return voyage would have been very difficult. It would have to have been made without prior knowledge of the long, circuitous route (unless American sailors knew the route and gave navigational information to the African sailors—but we do not have convincing evidence at present that Americans crossed the Atlantic before 1492). Secondly, the portion of the American coast that is closest to Africa, roughly the Brazilian coast south of the mouth of the Amazon, seems not to have had major population concentrations and abundant gold and silver artifacts inviting trade or plunder. (Granted, if West Africans reached the West Indies, they would have found such artifacts in abundance, as did Columbus.) And thirdly, the complex of historical conditions that would turn a single voyage into the beginning of a massive conquest seem unlikely to have been present in coastal West Africa. Large-scale trade, a class of merchant-capitalists, banking and other institutions of capitalism, and the like, were found in interior West African urban centers, but not, it seems, in the urban centers along the coast: these were not important as mercantile-maritime centers. For the interior cities, major long-distance trade went northward and eastward overland, and it is unlikely that attempts would have been made to develop large-scale oceanic travel from a coastal harbor.

Some scholars maintain the truth of two propositions about West African transatlantic voyaging that I cannot accept. The first of these asserts that Africans exerted an important influence on American cultures before 1492. The second asserts that West Africans crossed the Atlantic in much the same way as did Columbus, but they had different values than the Europeans, and did not choose to murder, plunder, enslave, and enrich themselves at the expense of Americans as did the Europeans; and therefore they did not attempt conquest. Most of the evidence offered in support of

important precolumbian diffusion from Africa to America is taken from the old arguments of European scholars of the "extreme diffusionism" school we discussed in Chapter 1. The extreme diffusionists claimed that ancient Egyptians or Phoenicians crossed the Atlantic, and, in essence, brought civilization to the Americans. Some modern scholars modify this mainly by insisting that because Egypt was a clearly African civilization—this I am certain is true—it was an African people, not a putatively European people, who brought civilization to the Americas. A second source of evidence is the apparently African facial features of the great Olmec head sculptures of southern Mexico. But some precolumbian Americans must have had these features, too: they are not rare among modern Latin American Indians. But the most serious objection to this theory is the following: The Olmec civilization is the oldest known civilization in the Americas. If Olmec civilization came from Africa, and was not developed indigenously by people of America, then we would have to say that Americans simply did not have the ability to civilize themselves; civilization had to be something brought in from elsewhere, by diffusion. This is viewed as a deep insult by Latin Americans, who maintain, I am sure correctly, that Western Hemisphere peoples developed civilization on their own. Perhaps they acquired a few domesticates from sailors arriving from across the Atlantic or the Pacific. But the real cultural development was a matter of independent invention, not diffusion. Again we notice that the form of argument comes from classical diffusionism: some human communities are inventive and others merely imitative. Based only on the thin and questionable evidence that has been presented thus far that Africans brought major cultural advances to America, this thesis is not persuasive.

Somewhat more troublesome to me is the argument that when Africans crossed the Atlantic before or at the same time as Columbus did, they did not have the savage values of the Europeans, and so did not try to conquer, loot, and enslave. To accept this, one would have to believe that there is something absolutely fundamental in European culture, something very old, and very deeply embedded, that makes Europeans different from other humans. This admits a good part of the Eurocentric claim that Europeans are unique among humans; it merely inverts the argument and claims that their uniqueness lies not in progressiveness but in aggressiveness, predatoriness, and cupidity. I am much more comfortable with an argument that begins with the idea of a common basal human mentality ("psychic unity"). It then explains the bloodthirstiness of the European conquistadors as an effect of the kind of civilization they represented: its development of an oppressive class structure in feudalism, and its further development of protocapitalism, a system in which wealth is obtained at all cost and in any way possible. Bloodthirsty protocapitalist communities, ready and anxious to conquer, loot, and enslave wherever this brought a profit, were found in many parts of the Eastern Hemisphere, in all three continents. My argument in this book is that the key factor favoring European moves of conquest in the Americas, and not favoring West African moves of this sort, was the existence of major mercantile-maritime centers in coastal Europe, protocapitalist centers of the sort found in the interior of Africa but with the *added* features associated with long-distance oceanic trade. Sofala and Kilwa in East Africa had these features but Sofala and Kilwa were—as we note in this chapter—very much farther from the American looting grounds than were the Iberian ports and the Canary outports. (I have not cited specific scholars who hold these views that I criticize because a full and fair review of their theories is not possible in the space of a single long footnote. Obviously, I do not agree with the theory of Ivan Van Sertima, as presented in his important work *They Came Before Columbus* [1976], concerning the precolumbian

diffusion of major civilizing traits from Africa to America, although he is very probably correct in his view that Africans *did* come to America before Columbus did.)

3. Filesi, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages* (1972); Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (1970); Panikkar, *Asia and Western Influence* (1959).

4. I have not learned of documented evidence that North Africans or West Africans regularly sailed up and down the coast past Cape Bojador. (See DeVisse and Labib, "Africa in Intercontinental Relations," 1984.) Apparently medieval sailing techniques—European and non-European—had difficulty with the passage prior to the time when Portuguese voyages began in the fifteenth century. However, there was no question of "discovery." The sea route was known in antiquity. Important land routes paralleled the entire length of the coast, from Fez south to Takrur (near modern Dakar) and beyond (see Niane, "Mali and the Second Mandingo Expansion," 1984, and Levitzion, "The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500," 1971), and there were medieval-era settlements in the Canaries and along the coast itself. Basically, it was much cheaper to travel overland, and probably faster. What the Portuguese "discovered" was a method of outflanking the competing merchant interests of North and West Africa, by applying sailing technology known to Europeans and East Africans but not known (or at any rate used, or at any rate *known* to have been used) by West Africans in that period. It should be noted also that the Portuguese navigational strategy in passing Bojador was basically the same strategy used for voyages to the Atlantic islands, and probably known to Moroccan sailors as well as Europeans.

5. Blaut, "Diffusionism: A Uniformitarian Critique" (1987).

6. For general reviews, see Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (1972) and McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (1976). See Borah and Cooke, "La Demografía Histórica de América Latina: Necesidades y Perspectivas" (1972); Whitmore, "A Simulation of Sixteenth-Century Population Collapse in the Basin of Mexico" (1991); Alchon, *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador* (1991); Lovell, "'Heavy Shadows and Black Night': Disease and Depopulation in Colonial America" (1992).

7. See Denevan, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (1976), for a review of the disputes concerning the American population at the time of the conquest.

8. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (1972); Alchon, *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador* (1991).

9. For a discussion of the various calculations, see Denevan, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (1976); Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492" (1992); Lovell, "'Heavy Shadows and Black Night'" (1992); and Whitmore, "A Simulation of Sixteenth-Century Population Collapse in the Basin of Mexico" (1991).

10. The assumption here is that population continued to grow so long as food resources for hunting, gathering, fishing, and shellfishing were abundant. At a certain purely hypothetical time, it is likely that people who had certainly already experimented with crop cultivation, found that a better supply of food (and fiber, etc.) would be obtained through agriculture, and so began the transformation. Note that this argument is in no way Malthusian.

11. See Fiedel, *Prehistory of the Americas* (1987).

12. See Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange* (1972), Lovell, "'Heavy Shadows and Black Night,'" and Alchon, *Native Society and Disease in Colonial Ecuador* (1991).

13. Miskimin, *The Economy of Early Renaissance Europe, 1300–1460* (1969).

14. Abel, *Agricultural Fluctuations in Europe from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (1980).

15. de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (1984).

16. Hodggett, *A Social and Economic History of Medieval Europe* (1972) (“[The] 200 years after c.1320 may be said to be a period of down-turn in the [European] economy as a whole,” p. 212); Lopez and Miskimin, “The Economic Depression of the Renaissance,” (1961–1962); C. T. Smith, *An Historical Geography of Western Europe Before 1800* (1969).

17. Lopez, “Hard Times and Investment in Culture” (1953); Thorndyke, “Renaissance or Prenaissance?” (1943).

18. Braudel, “Prices in Europe from 1450 to 1750” (1967); de Vries, *European Urbanization* (1984). On the rapid impact of these changes on Asia, see, for example, Atwell, “International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy circa 1530–1650” (1982); Aziza Hasan, “The Silver Currency Output of the Mughal Empire and Prices in India during the 16th and 17th centuries” (1969).

19. Céspedes, *Latin America: The Early Years* (1974); McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700* (1984).

20. In classical political economy, and in some of modern Marxist economics, the idea of “primitive accumulation” serves as a kind of catchall for ways of accumulating capital that did not involve—in essence—capitalist enterprise. Pirate treasures and the like were “primitive accumulation,” and, in general, the kind of wealth brought from the American colonies in the sixteenth century was considered primitive accumulation. (According to Marx, “The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there”: Marx, *Capital*, 1976, vol. 1, p. 918). But “primitive accumulation” cannot really be defined with any precision. I will argue here that the wealth accumulated in the Americas was primitive only in the sense that it was part of a preindustrial-capitalist economy. In other respects, notably in the involvement of labor and value produced by labor, it was regular accumulation. The distinction is very fundamental, as we will see, because, if what transpired in the colonies was not “real” or “ordinary” accumulation, scholars can claim that the colonial economy was backward and “feudal,” rather than a primitive sort of capitalism.

21. E. J. Hamilton, *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain, 1501–1650* (1934); Brading and Cross, “Colonial Silver Mining: Mexico and Peru” (1972); H. and P. Chaunu, *Séville et l’Atlantique (1504–1650)*, vol. 6, pt. 1 (1956); Cross, “American Bullion Production and Export 1550–1750” (1983).

22. See note 19 above.

23. Vicens Vives, *An Economic History of Spain* (1969).

24. Vilar, *A History of Gold and Money, 1450–1920* (1976).

25. There remained, nonetheless, a very large trade carried on by non-European merchants in the China Seas and the Indian Ocean.

26. E. J. Hamilton, “American Treasure and the Rise of Capitalism” (1929), and *American Treasure and the Price Revolution in Spain* (1934). Also see the important book by Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (1951), which builds in part on Hamilton’s theory to argue for the great importance of the Americas in the rise of Europe during this period and later.

27. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (1989); Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (1949–1950).

28. See, for example, Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry* (1989); Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (1949–1950); Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700–1100* (1983); N. S. Gupta,

Industrial Structure of India During the Medieval Period (1970); Niane, ed., *UNESCO General History of Africa*, Vol. 4. (1984); Bray, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 6, Part 2, *Agriculture* (1984).

29. Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (1949–1950).

30. Simonsen, *História Econômica do Brasil, 1500–1820* (1944); Furtado, *The Economic Growth of Brazil* (1963); Minchinton, *The Growth of English Overseas Trade* (1969). Also see the more general, but extremely important, works of I. Wallerstein, A. G. Frank, and S. Amin, particularly Wallerstein’s *The Modern World System*, 3 vols. (1974–1988), Frank’s *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America* (1968) and his *World Accumulation, 1492–1789* (1978), and Amin’s *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974) as well as his *Unequal Development* (1976).

31. Edel, “The Brazilian Sugar Cycle of the 17th Century and the Rise of West Indian Competition” (1969).

32. Furtado, *Economic Growth of Brazil* (1963).

33. See K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and civilization in the Indian Ocean* (1985); Satish Chandra, *The Indian Ocean: Explorations in History, Commerce and Politics* (1987); Magalhães-Godinho, *L’Economie de L’Empire Portugais aux XV et XVI Siècles* (1969).

34. de Vries, *European Urbanization* (1984).

35. William Denevan, “Introduction,” in Denevan, ed., *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (1976), and “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” (1992); Lovell, “‘Heavy Shadows and Black Night’” (1992).

36. See Borah and Cook, “La demografía histórica de América Latina: necesidades y perspectivas” (1972); Whitmore, “A Simulation of Sixteenth-Century Population Collapse in the Basin of Mexico” (1991).

37. Semo, *Historia del Capitalismo en México: Los Orígenes, 1521–1763* (1982).

38. Radell, “The Indian Slave Trade and Population of Nicaragua During the Sixteenth Century” (1976).

39. Bakewell, “Mining in Colonial Spanish America” (1984).

40. Semo, *Historia del Capitalismo* (1982).

41. For various calculations, see Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1969); Furtado, *Economic Growth of Brazil* (1963); Deerr, *History of Sugar* (1949–1950); Florescano, “The Formation and Economic Structure of the Hacienda in New Spain”; Inikori, *The African Slave Trade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (1979), esp. pp. 57 and 248; McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World* (1984).

42. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World* (1984).

43. In the present discussion I am giving far too little attention to Africa and particularly to the effects of the slave trade in Africa. See Chapter 2.

44. Fisher, “The Price Revolution: A Monetary Interpretation” (1989).

45. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (1972), pp., 10–11.

46. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1952 edition).

47. Hannemann, *The Diffusion of the Reformation in Southwestern Germany, 1518–1534* (1975).

48. There is debate as to why the center shifted from Iberia to the lower Rhine–southern England region. Perhaps the same forces which had made this northern region a mercantile–maritime center in the Middle Ages permitted it to gain control of the overseas enterprise: namely, large population, abundant nearby fertile land and forest resources, access to many markets (the Rhine, the Baltic, etc.). Vis-à-vis Italy, it held most of these same advantages plus that of location on the Atlantic and possession of the requirements for rapid growth of oceanic shipping and fishing fleets.

49. See Deerr, *The History of Sugar* (1949–1950); Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (1969); and Inikori, *The African Slave Trade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century* (1979). The question whether slave labor is or is not proletarian—a serious issue in discussions of the slave plantation system (see Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, 1985)—will be taken up later in this chapter. In any event there is no disagreement about the contribution of slave (and other forced) labor to capital accumulation, hence to surplus value generation, using “surplus value” in a sense appropriate to modes of production different from industrial capitalism.

50. However, a good share of the old landowning elite joined in the new enterprise. It is not correct to assume that the new protocapitalist elite was in simple opposition to the old elite. There is much confusion on this matter, some of it occasioned by literal acceptance of Marx's idea that merchants are somehow not the class that evolves into the early capitalist, entrepreneurial, accumulating class. On the role of medieval merchants in protocapitalism, see Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1300–1500)* (1948); Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (1967).

51. See R. W. Bailey, “Africa, the Slave Trade, and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism in Europe and the United States: A Historiographic Review” (1986); W. Darity, Jr., “British Industry and the West Indies Plantations” (1990).

52. There were, of course, exceptions. Brooks Adams, in his 1895 work *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, argued (pp. 259–260) that the British victory at Plassey in 1757, which immediately gave Britain access to cheap Indian cotton (and other Indian “plunder”) set into motion the explosive industrialization of Britain's cotton textile industry, leading directly and immediately to the major inventions of that industry: the spinning jenny in 1764, the mule in 1776, and Watt's steam engine in 1768.

53. See Palme Dutt, *The Problem of India* (1943); Alavi et al., *Capitalism and Colonial Production* (1982).

54. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) and *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Also see the later work by James, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery: Some Interpretations of their Significance in the Development of the United States and the Western World” (1970); and the later work by Williams, *British Historians and the West Indies* (1966). Important recent contributions include: R. W. Bailey, “The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the United States: The Textile Industry of New England” (1990); W. Darity, “British Industry and the West Indian Plantations” (1990); J. Inikori, “Slavery and the Revolution in Cotton Textile Production in England” (1989). Also see note 60 below.

55. *The Black Jacobins* (1938), pp. 47–48.

56. I have argued elsewhere (Blaut, *The National Question*, 1987b, chap. 7) that the level of oppression and exploitation associated with slave labor as it was used in the plantations could not have been applied to members of the European cultural community itself. (This was indeed tried, but quickly abandoned in favor of slave labor.) Generally, cultural rules and practices limit the level of exploitation of producers within a society—a matter of maintaining social peace in a society—but no such rules apply to external or foreign workers.

57. See the excellent review by C. Robinson, “Capitalism, Slavery and Bourgeois Historiography” (1987). Also excellent is Bailey, “The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the United States” (1990).

58. See Brenner's “The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism” (1977); E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977).

59. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (1974–1988).

60. See Bailey, “The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the United States” (1990), Darity, “British Industry and the West Indian Plantations” (1990), Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), and Robinson, “Capitalism, Slavery and Bourgeois Historiography” (1987); also, see Beckles, “The Williams Effect: Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* and the Growth of West Indian Political Economy” (1987); Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery* (1973), and his “Eric Williams and *Capitalism and Slavery*: A Biographical and Historiographical Essay” (1987); Solow, “Capitalism and Slavery in the Exceedingly Long Run” (1987); Inikori, “Slavery and the Development of Industrial Capitalism” (1989); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972).

61. Some Marxists treat it this way, too: “[What] distinguished the English industrial development of the early modern period was its continuous character, its ability to sustain itself and to provide its own self-perpetuating dynamic. Here . . . the key was to be found in the capitalist structure of [English] agriculture” (Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” 1985, p. 53).

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This book has two basic themes or arguments. First, in Chapter 1, I try to explain what Eurocentric diffusionism is as a body of ideas, and to show how this theory—or supertheory, or world model—came to dominate European scholarly thought a century ago and why it still does so to a considerable extent today. And second, in Chapters 2 through 4, I carefully examine the single most important part of diffusionism, the theory of Europe's historical superiority or priority, the theory of "the European miracle," and I try to refute it.

Diffusionism needs to be analyzed much more thoroughly than I have been able to do in this book. Many diffusionist theories and programs that, today, exert an important and unfortunate influence on many fields of thought and action have not been discussed here. In other writings I have explored the influence of diffusionism on theory and practice concerning the national question, or nationalism,¹ and on theory and practice concerning the development of peasant agriculture.² Other writers have, of course, examined many aspects of diffusionism and problems caused by diffusionism.³ But, overall, the critique of diffusionism has barely begun.

The critique will have to range across many fields of scholarship and practice. Here—just to make this point clear—are four examples.

1. Philosophical dualism, the body of epistemological and ontological doctrine developed in European thought from Descartes to Kant and the neo-Kantians, appears to be, in part, a projection of the dualism of Inside and Outside. Reason is Inside. Mere matter, mere sensuousness, is Outside—the non-European world and the irrational mentation of its inhabitants.

2. The so-called Big Bang Theory, the theory that everything began at one space-time point and this point was *here*, seems to be diffusionism

on the largest canvas of all. Big Bang cosmogony appears to be fortified less by empirical evidence than by a hunch that the whole idea is "reasonable"—the essential judgment (as we noticed in Chapter 1) by which culture projects its prejudices into science.⁴

3. The theory that AIDS diffused out of Africa is very reminiscent of a historical chain of theories, each explaining some plague as a counterdiffusion from non-Europe to Europe. (We discussed aspects of this question in Chapters 1 and 2.) A recent book entitled *AIDS, Africa and Racism* gives important evidence that the AIDS-out-of-Africa doctrine may, indeed, be simply a new incarnation of this diffusionist view of human disease.⁵ If this is the case, the matter of causality of HIV-retrovirus-caused disease may have to be rethought. The forms found *outside* of Africa may be more relevant for explanation and cure than those *inside* Africa.

4. Many theories about economic history since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and about economic development today, seem to be steeped in diffusionism. The Industrial Revolution has *not* diffused outward from Europe to non-Europe. Not only does it have origins in non-Europe as well as Europe (we discussed this matter in Chapter 4), but the notion that industrialization has been spreading to the non-European world is largely a false (conformal) idea. The diffusion of *maquiladora*-style assembly-plant activities in the Third World is not genuine industrialization but rather a kind of world-scale putting-out system: Outside provides cheap labor, Inside provides most of the raw materials and most of the consumption, and garners nearly all of the profit as well as the permanent infrastructure. The industrialization of Japan began long ago and was not an effect of diffusion.⁶ The industrialization of Korea and one or two East Asian ministates in recent decades has not been imitated elsewhere.⁷ The diffusion of industrialization, therefore, is not a simple and natural diffusion process, but a political agenda. And an agenda for scholarly inquiry.

This book, therefore, has no real conclusion. The book itself is an introduction: an introduction to the study, to the diagnosis and treatment, of a serious malady of the mind.

NOTES

1. Blaut, *The National Question* (1987b); Blaut and Figueroa, *Aspectos de la cuestión nacional en Puerto Rico* (1988).

2. Blaut, "Two Views of Diffusion" (1977) and "Diffusionism: A Uniformitarian Critique" (1987a).

3. Reference has been made to this work in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.
4. See Talkington, "But the Editor Looks at the Universe from a Different Frame of Reference" (1986); Frankel, "Marxism and Physics: A New Look" (1991).
5. Chirimuuta and Chirimuuta, *AIDS, Africa and Racism* (1989). A naively diffusionist view of AIDS is given in Shannon and Pyle, "The Origin and Diffusion of AIDS" (1989); see the critique of this view in Watts, Okello, and Watts, "Medical Geography and AIDS" (1990).
6. Japan became industrialized precisely because of a lack of diffusion. It was the only major non-European country that managed to avoid European domination, and this resulted from its inaccessibility. It was, among major societies, the farthest and most inaccessible from the standpoint of Europeans, and by the time European power had subdued China, in the nineteenth century, Japan had been able to begin its military modernization; hence the victory over Russia, the beginnings of colonial expansion, and the onset of an industrial revolution around 1900.
7. At the other end of the scale, giant countries like India and Brazil have a great deal of industry but in proportion to their size—and on a per capita measurement—they are no more industrialized than are smaller Third world countries. See Amin, *Delinking: Toward a Polycentric World* (1990).

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