Views of Opportunity: The Explorers in the New World

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“I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code”

The natives of the New World viewed “three boats of a size undreamed of, with great wings” (Adams 10), with great awe and wonder, blind to the motivations of the inhabitants inside. These inhabitants, specifically the explorers, viewed migrating to the New World as an opportunity to test and bolster one’s reputation, religiously justify misconduct, and prosper as an individual and a country as a whole.

Migrating to the New World entailed a risk of one’s own reputation. The individual explorer felt it was necessary to strengthen one’s name through their expeditions. Spanish explorer, Cabeza De Vaca, flaunts his confidence in his expedition, to his people “with a firm trust that [his] service would be as evident and distinguished as [his] ancestors” (Baym 29). Passages, such as this, portray De Vaca’s confident belief that his exploration in the New World would bolster his reputation and impress those of his homeland. Similarly, Captain John Smith, intends to reinforce his own reputation by his use of third person in his own writing. It seems he is trying to signify the importance of his own name. He portrays himself as “Captain Smith, who by his own example, good words, and fair promise, set some to mow […] himself always bearing the greatest task for his own share […] he provided most of them lodgings, neglecting any for himself” (Baym 61). Through this, he intended honoring his own reputation by portraying a saintly hero of himself through his explorations.

A good reputation was an apparent thought on the explorers’minds; therefore, they felt their plundering, slaughtering, and general wrongdoing needed to be justified by their beliefs in God’s will. The Spanish explorers, Cabeza De Vaca and Christopher Columbus, were sent to the New World by Spain to basically steal, conquer, and kill. However, these explorers did not view these terms in a negative way like most people would. They saw “everywhere great inequalities of fortune, brought about not by conduct but by accident, and not through anybody’s fault but as the will of God” (Baym 29). These explorers viewed their obvious wrong doings as what was expected by their God. Columbus references the misconduct of other migraters in positive light by justifying that “it is well to give to God that which is His due” (Baym 27). The destruction and stealing of another’s land was what was wanted by God in their minds.

These New World explorers viewed their misconduct positively in a way that would benefit the prosperity of their people. The descriptions of land and resources depicted in their writings portray a persuasive tone to those of their homeland. Christopher Columbus describes his discovery of “Espanola” as a promotion of the land. He mentions the “marvelous pine groves, and very large tracts of cultivatable lands […] in the interior are mines of metals, and the population is without number. Espanola is a marvel” (Baym 26). His tone is intended to persuade more of his people to migrate over to the New World. Similarly, John Smith tries to captivate his audience by the description of the success of labor and prosperity that would be achieved in the New World. He reaches out towards a certain group of people, “fatherless children, of thirteen fourteen years of age, or young married people, that have small wealth to live on” (Baym 72), and promotes that by migrating to the New World, they “may quickly grow rich; [they] may learn their trades themselves, to do the like; to a general and incredible benefit, for king, and country, master, and servant” (Baym 72). These explorers intend to promote a general benefit and prosperity for the individual and country is to be found in the New World.

Through all the trials and tribulations these explorers entailed, their motivations portrayed an underlying influence such as greed and competition. This greedy and competitive mindset is something that was brought over and has stuck in the minds of modern America today. This quality being just one of the many used to describe and “discover how we became what we have become” (Adams vii), as Americans today.

Works Cited

Adams, James. *The Epic of America.* Little, Brown, and Company, 1932.

Baym, Nina, and Robert Levine, editors. *The Norton Anthology of Literature.* W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Shorter 8th ed., 2013.