

Alexander Pope

Post by “Joshua” of February 12, 2025 at 12:40 AM

Ha! That genuinely made me laugh. I haven't read that text since...2019, so I'll need to refresh my memory.

Syphilis was endemic to the Americas, and was introduced into Europe by Columbus on his return. Well, Columbus and his men. I suppose I can't blame him personally. Voltaire discusses this in his *Candide*, which is the only thing I remember about that book; Syphilis is the price of getting chocolate, which was also exclusive to the Americas. Amerigo Vespucci wrote a few letters about his travels to the New World, and in one of them he says this about the native inhabitants:

Quote

We did not find that these people had any laws; they cannot be called Moors nor Jews, but worse than Gentiles. For we did not see that they offered any sacrifices, nor have they any place of worship. **I judge their lives to be Epicurean.** Their habitations are in common. Their dwellings, are like huts, but strongly built of very large trees, and covered with palm leaves, secure from tempests and winds. In some places they are of such length and width that we found 600 souls in one single house. We found villages of only thirteen houses where there were 4,000 inhabitants. They build the villages every eight or ten years, and when asked why they did this, they replied that it was because the soil was corrupted and infected, and caused diseases in their bodies, so they chose a new site. Their wealth consists of the feathers of birds of many colours, or "paternosters" made of the fins of fishes, or of white or green stones, which they wear on their necks, lips, and ears; and of many other things which have no value for us. They have no commerce, and neither buy nor sell. In conclusion, they live, and are content with what nature has given them.

Erasmus will certainly have read these letters. Not only were they sensationally popular, but Erasmus' close friend Thomas More used the voyages of Vespucci as the frame narrative for his *Utopia*. I explored this connection in tedious length in another thread [here](#).