

spoils. I burned & sank 19 sail of ships, small & great. All the villages and towns that ever I landed at, I burned & spoiled. And had I not been discovered on the coast, I had taken great quantity of treasure."

For one humane Captain Cook, who saw no point in imposing Britain's savage penal laws upon Polynesian natives — "that thieves are hanged in England, I thought no reason why they should be shot in Otaheite" — there were uncounted counterparts of Vasco da Gama, who cold-bloodedly hanged from his masthead fishermen of an East Indian port he visited — innocent people he had hospitably invited aboard his vessel — in order to terrorize the population on shore. These ferocities remained a stigma on New World exploration and they continued through the centuries, along with forced labor and outright enslavement. The treatment of the natives of the Congo under King Leopold II and those of South Africa under Verwoerd and his successors is a fossilized memento of this original terror and brutality.

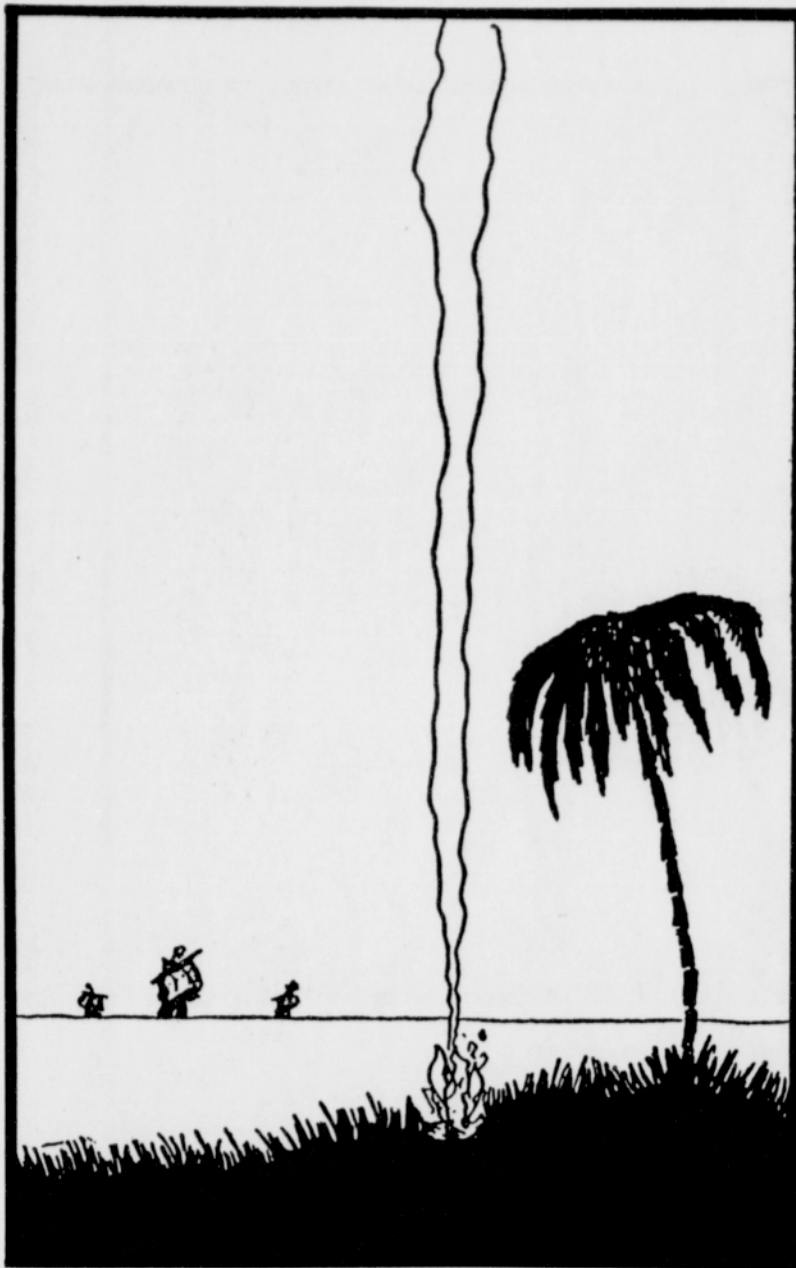
Not merely slavery but genocide gained ground with the New World exploration. As a result, Western man not alone blighted in some degree every culture that he touched, whether "primitive" or advanced, but robbed his own descendants of countless gifts of art and craftsmanship, as well as precious knowledge, passed on only by word of mouth, that disappeared with the dying languages of dying peoples. With this extirpation of earlier cultures went a vast loss of botanical and medical lore, representing many thousands of years of watchful observation and empirical experiment whose extraordinary discoveries — such as the American Indian's use of snakeroot (reserpine) as a tranquilizer in mental illness — modern medicine has now, all too belatedly, begun to appreciate. For the better part of four centuries, the cultural riches of the entire world lay at the feet of Western man, and to his shame — likewise to his gross self-deprivation and impoverishment — his main concern was to appropriate only the gold and silver and diamonds, the lumber and pelts, and such new foods (maize and potatoes) as would enable him to feed larger populations.

Unfortunately, the hostility that the European displayed toward the native cultures he encountered he carried even further, into his relations with the land. The immense wide open spaces of the American continents, with all their unexploited or thinly utilized resources, were treated as a challenge to unrelenting war, destruction, and conquest. The forests were there to be cut down, the prairie to be plowed up, the marshes to be filled, the wildlife to be killed for empty sport, even when it was needed for food or clothing. In the act of "conquering nature" our ancestors too often treated the earth as contemptuously and as brutally as they treated its original inhabitants, wiping out great animal species like the bison and the passenger pigeon, mining the soils instead of annually replenishing them, and even in the present, invading the last wildernesses, homes for wildlife and solitary human souls. We ourselves are surrendering them to six-lane highways, gas stations, amusement parks, and lumber interests — as in the redwood groves, or Yosemite and Lake Tahoe, though these primeval areas, once desecrated, can never be fully restored or replaced.

I have no wish to overstress the negative side of this great exploration. If I seem to do so here, it is because both the older, romantic exponents of a new life framed in conformity with the Machine overlooked the appalling losses and wastage, under the delusion either that the primeval abundance was inexhaustible or else that the losses did not matter, since modern man, through science and invention, would soon fabricate an artificial world infinitely more wonderful than what nature had provided — an even grosser delusion. The views of both parties have long been rife in the United States, where the two phases of the New World dream came together, and they are still dominant. Yet the hopes so often expressed in the 16th century, later idealized by the Romantic movements in the 18th and 19th centuries, were not without a foundation. There was a new movement in the 19th century when they seemed, in the North Atlantic states, to be almost on the point of realization of a new type of personality and in a type of community that offered its gifts to all its members: "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

The New World, once its incoming inhabitants had found their roots, captured their imaginations. In its vastness, in its ecological variety, in its range of climates and physiographic profiles, in both its teeming wildlife and the hoarded treasure of food plants and trees, the New World was a land of promise, a land of many promises for both body and mind. Here was a natural abundance that promised to lift the ancient curse of slavery and poverty even before the Machine lightened the burden of purely physical toil. The coastal waters teemed with fish, clams and oysters, and game was plentiful. Those who were at home in the wilderness, like Audubon, never lacked food, despite mortgages and debts. The belief that a better society would be possible in the New World stirred many a company of immigrants, from the Jesuits of Paraguay to the Pilgrims of Massachusetts and the later Hutterites in the West. Thus, almost until the end of the 19th century, the secret name of the New World was Utopia.

For four centuries, the intellectual leaders of the New Exploration prospected and ransacked every part of the planet. Through Captain Cook and Darwin, they went on long, difficult



HENDRIK VAN LOON

voyages, making oceanic and meteorological observations and bringing to light countless marvels of marine zoology; through Schoolcraft and Catlin and Lewis Morgan, they surveyed and made graphic records of the indigenous cultures, already gravely disturbed by the intrusions of Western man; through Layard, they uncovered "Nineveh," and through Stevens, made known by description and drawing, the first great Mayan ruins, while through Aurel Stein and Raphael Pumpelly remote Turkestan and Inner Mongolia, once the seat of high cultures, became known again. Though this first exploration was swift and necessarily superficial, it uncovered ways of life that reached back into a distant past, bringing to life forgotten cities and neglected monuments, revealing the vast variety of languages and dialects, to be numbered by the hundred even in small tracts like New Guinea, along with the myths, the legends, the forms of plastic and graphic art, the systems of notation, the rituals and laws, the cosmic interpretations and religious beliefs of humankind. Thus, during the centuries when the agents of mechanical uniformity were steadily gaining the upper hand, reducing or defacing natural variety in the interest of speed, power, and financial gain, these other explorers, these of the mind moved in the opposite direction, and revealed for the first time the immense cultural variety of humanity — the rich compost of human history, which almost matches the original abundance and variety of nature.

A by-product, created almost by accident, of this world-wide exploration in space was an equally decisive historical exploration in time — that which was mischaracterized by Jacob Burckhardt, a historian of genius, as the "Renaissance." The unearthing of both Greek and Roman antiquity from its surviving documents and monuments was only a single incident in a much wider survey of the human past. As geographic exploration loosed these spatial bonds of a particular soil and culture, so this new temporal exploration loosed the bonds of the immediate present. For the first time, the human mind began to move about freely in both past and future, picking and choosing, anticipating and projecting, released from the provincial presence of an over-insistent here and now. Through both natural history and cultural

history, Western man discovered many significant aspects of his nature that have been left out of the purview of scientific investigation. If the present generation has now lost this feeling of liberation, it is because all too soon 17th century science imprisoned the mind in an ideology that denied the realities of biological self-transformation and historical creativity.

Though other cultures — like the Sumerian, the Mayan, and the Indic — coupled human destiny with long vistas of abstract calendar time, the essential contribution of the Renaissance was to relate the cumulative results of history to the multitude of cultural achievements that marked the successive generations. By unburying statues, monuments, buildings, and cities, by reading old books and inscriptions, by reentering a long-abandoned world of ideas, these new explorers in time became aware of fresh potentialities in their own existence. These pioneers of the mind invented a time machine more wonderful than H. G. Wells' technological contraption. At a moment when the new mechanical world picture had no place for "time" except as a function of movement in space, historical time — duration, in Henri Bergson's sense, which includes persistence through replication, imitation, and memory — began to play a conscious part in day-to-day choices. If the living present could be visibly transformed, or at least deliberately modified from a Gothic to a formalized classic structure, the future could be remolded, too. Historic time could be colonized and cultivated, and human culture itself became a collective artifact. The sciences actually profited by this historical restoration, receiving a fresh impetus from Thales, Democritus, Archimedes, Hero of Alexandria.

For the first time, it would seem, the future, however untried, was more attractive than the past, as the experimental and the novel took precedence over the well-tested and the traditional. Even a monk like Campanella, in the heart of the Church, could express this new sense to perfection in a letter to Galileo: "The novelties of ancient truths, of new worlds, new systems, new nations are beginnings of a new era." But the fantasy of a terrestrial New World, which seized Western man after the 15th century, was an attempt to escape time and the cumulative effects of time (tradition and history) by exchanging all that for unoccupied space. This took many forms: a religious form by breaking away from the Established Church and its orthodoxies, a utopian form by founding new communities, an adventurous form by conquering new lands, a mechanical form by substituting machines for organisms, and by trading physical changes, in which time exists only as wear and tear, for organic changes, in which time leaves a permanent record. Finally, this New World took a revolutionary form: an attempt to make over the ways and habits and goals of a large population, in which all these modes of escape were more or less combined in a single complex — the new Heaven and earth that would come into existence once royalism, feudalism, ecclesiasticism, and capitalism should pass away.

This attempt to make a new beginning rested on the valid perception that at various points something had profoundly gone wrong in humanity's development. Instead of accepting this as ineradicable, as an integral defect for which the theological name had been original sin, and instead of submitting to it as fatally ordained by the gods, Western man, in his growing self-confidence, wanted to wipe the slate clean and begin all over. And therein lay a trap, for in order to overcome time, in order to begin anew, it was imperative for him to not run away from his past but to confront it, and literally to live down its traumatic events within himself. Until every generation did this consciously, examining its hoary traditions in the light of new experience, evaluating and selecting every part of its heritage, humanity could make no fresh start. In one mind after another, that effort was begun, but at too early a point it was abandoned. So it remains an urgent task for those who still seek a better world in our own day.

Lewis Mumford, who was born in 1895 and died in 1990, was a social philosopher, writer and teacher. He was a critic of what he considered the dehumanizing tendencies of modern technological civilization and argued that humanity's only hope lie in a return to human and morally sensitive culture. He taught at several universities, including Stanford, University of Pennsylvania, University of California at Berkeley and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Among his many books are *The Story of Utopias* (1922), *Technics & Civilization* (1934), *The Culture of Cities* (1938), *The Condition of Man* (1944), *The Conduct of Life* (1951), *The Transformation of Man* (1956), *The City in History* (1961), *Interpretations & Forecasts* (1973). "Promises of the New World," first published in the October 10, 1970 *New Yorker*, was taken from the first chapter of his two volume work, *The Myth of the Machine* (*Technics & Human Development* [1969] and *The Pentagon of Power* [1970]).



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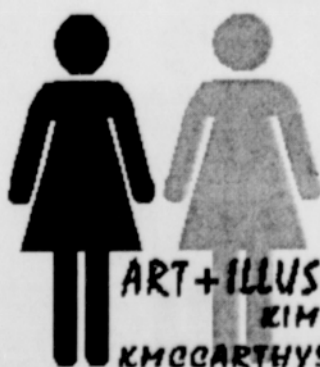
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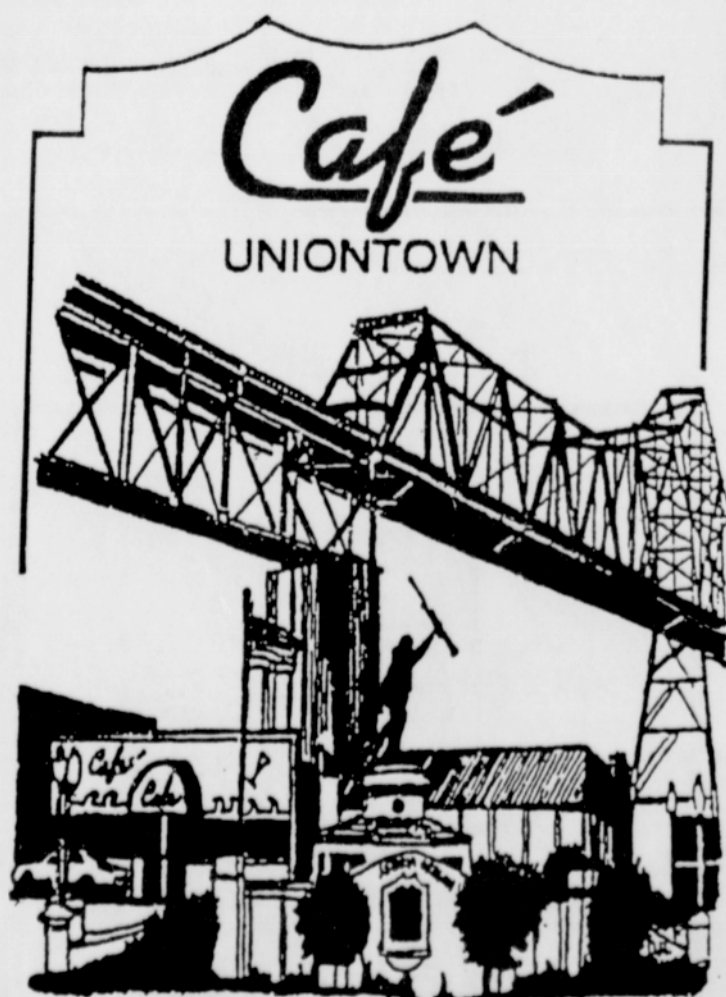
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