

De Orbe Novo

PETER MARTYR AND
RICHARD EDEN

In what may be the first written celebration of diversity in America, the Italian Peter Martyr, who traveled with the first

Spanish explorers, describes the wonder of God in creating different colored people in his 1516 book *De Orbe Novo*. His writings were later translated and amplified for English readers by Richard Eden.

One of the marvellous things that God useth in the composition of man is colour, which doubtless can not be considered without great admiration in beholding one to be white, and another black, being colours utterly contrary. Some likewise to be yellow, which is between black and white, and other of other colours, as it were of divers liveries. And as these colours are to be marvelled at, even so is it to be considered how they differ from another as it were by degrees, forasmuch as some men are white after divers sorts of whiteness, yellow after divers manners of yellow, and black after divers sorts of blackness; and how from white they go to yellow by discolouring to brown and red, and to black by ash colour, and murrey somewhat lighter than black; and tawny like unto the West Indians which are altogether in general either purple or tawny like unto sod quinces, or of the colour of chestnuts or olives—which colour is to them natural and not by their going naked, as many have thought, albeit their nakedness have somewhat helped them thereunto. Therefore in like manner and with such diversity as men are commonly white in Europe and black in Africa, even with like variety are they tawny in these Indies, with divers degrees diversely inclining more or less to black or white. No less marvel is to consider that men are white in Europe and black in Africa, even with like variety are they tawny in these Indies, with divers degrees diversely inclining more or less to black or white. No less marvel is it to consider that men are white in Seyville, and black at the cape of Buena Speranza, and of chestnut colour at the river of Plata, being all in equal degrees from the equinoctial line.

Likewise that the men of Africa and Asia that live under the burnt line (called Zona Torida) are black, and not they that live beneath or on this side the same line as in Mexico, Yucatan, Quauhtema, Lian, Nicaragua, Panama, Santo Domingo, Paria, Cape, Saint Augustine, Lima, Quito and the other lands of Peru which touch in the same equinoctial.... It may seem that such variety of colours proceedeth of man, and not of the earth, which may well be although we be all born of Adam and Eve, and know not the cause why God hath ordained it, otherwise than to consider that his divine majesty hath done this as infinite other to declare his omnipotence and wisdom in such diversity of colours as appear not only in the nature of man, but the like also in beasts, birds and flowers, where diverse and contrary colours are seen in one little feather, or the leaves growing out of one little stalk. Another thing is also to be noted as touching these Indians, and this is that their hair is not curled as is the Moors' and Ethiopians' that inhabit the same clime; neither are they bald except very seldom, and that but little. All which things may give further occasion to philosophers to search the secrets of nature and complexions of men with the novelties of the new world.

Questions to consider:

1. How does the explorer use sensory and figurative language to describe the new world?
2. What is the tone of this entry?
3. What is main idea that the explorer is stating in this journal excerpt?
4. How does this explorer's journal differ from the notions you may have had about early explorers?