

## EIGHT PARAGRAPHS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES

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*The greatness of America lies not in being more  
enlightened than any other nation, but rather  
in her ability to repair her faults.*

Alexis de Tocqueville



Columbus Circle, in New York

**1**

A unique figure of enormous historical stature was the Genoese Christopher Columbus (1451-1506), misunderstood, envied and treated unfairly by many. By the way, was the Discoverer of America born in Catalonia, and not in Italy, as some Catalan authors argue? The dispute over his nationality is far from being

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settled, despite the weakness of such arguments. On the other hand, it is possible that the Admiral's baptismal name was Cristòfor (or Cristòfol) Colom.<sup>1</sup>



Here we are, face to face with one of the uncountable beautiful North American landscapes.

### 2

Oral tradition and ancient myths say that the indigenous peoples of North America have always inhabited that continent, the boundaries of which are, to this day, a source of disagreement among geologists, geographers and other specialists in the Earth Sciences. Canada, the United States and Greenland (an autonomous territory of Denmark) are undoubtedly in North American territory. Strictly speaking, half of Iceland is also part of it, if we consider its belonging to the North American Tectonic Plate, and the same goes for all of Mexico (which many cartographers prefer to include on maps of Central America). Still in line with those oral and mythological accounts of indigenous origin, that immense continental mass was called “Turtle Island”. As for the origin of the Amerindians (from the North, South and Centre of America), the best hypothesis is that they came, through multiple migrations – beginning at least 40 thousand years ago – from Siberian Asia through what is now the Bering Strait.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caius Parellada i Cardellach. *Colom venç Colombo: la vera naturalesa catalana del descobridor del Nou Món*, Barcelona, Aleu & Domingo, 1987, pp. 231 et passim; e Marianne Mahn-Lot. *Cristóvão Colombo* (trad. Mário B. Nogueira), Porto, Vertente, 1985, p. 7sq.



Occupied for nearly a millennium, Taos Pueblo, in what is now New Mexico, is estimated to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited hamlets of USA.

**3**

40 thousand years is the minimum estimated period for the beginning of the migratory movements of the Siberian peoples who passed from Asia to America – until then empty of humans. From Beringia, those Upper Palaeolithic pioneers began to spread across the vast vertical continent, reaching its southernmost tip, Tierra del Fuego, some thirty millennia later – a reality that indicates an average speed of one kilometre per year.



San Francisco de Asís Mission Church, near Taos, built between 1772 and 1815

4

Built on the foundations of an earlier church, this new church, dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi, reflects the cultural mixing that occurred between the Spanish and the indigenous peoples of what would become New Mexico. In the past, it was the centre of a fortified square that protected the Franciscans and the local population against the attacks of Comanche Indians. Its architecture, a typical example of the Hispanic colonial style, has been the subject of paintings (think of Georgia O’Keeffe) and photographs that have become famous (think of Ansel Adams, Paul Strand and Ned Scott). In Georgia O’Keeffe’s opinion, San Francisco de Asís Mission Church is “one of the most beautiful buildings left by the Spanish on American soil.”





El Capitán, the giant made of granite, one of the natural beauties of the Yosemite National Park, in California.

5

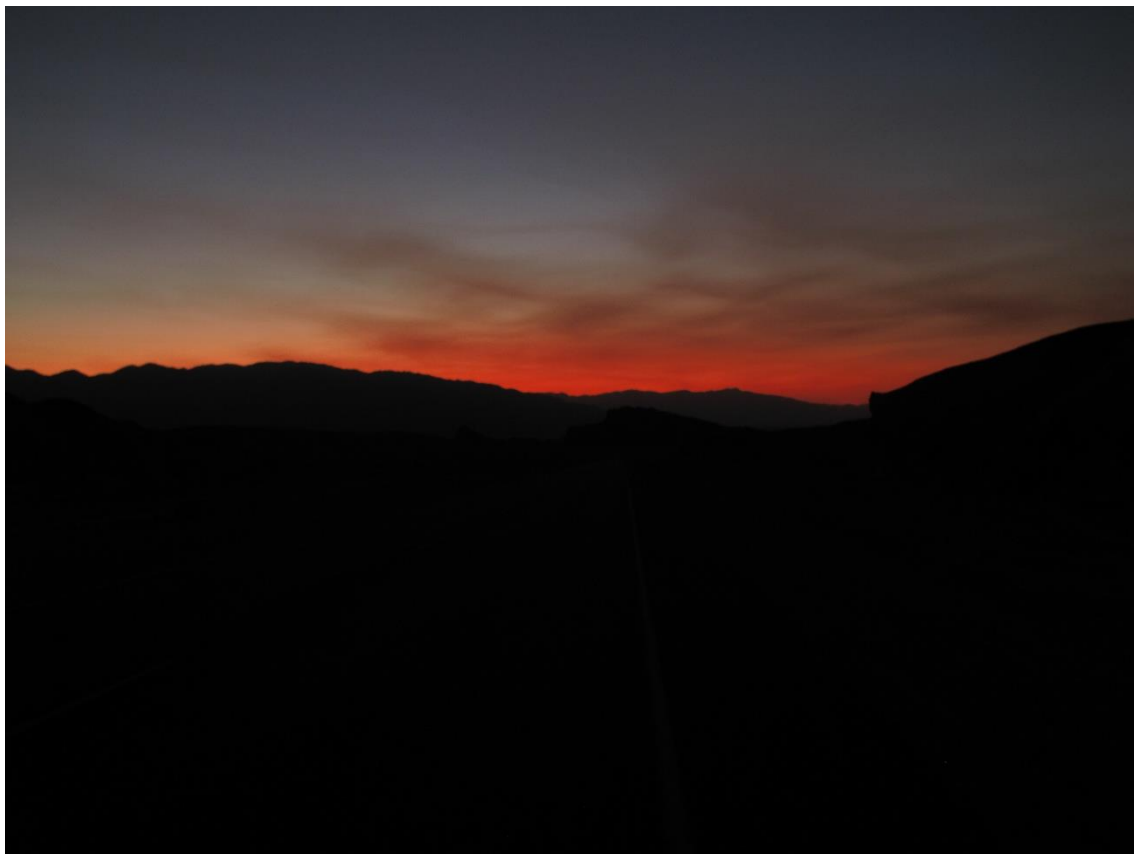
While it was a colony of England, Anglo-Saxon America welcomed three times more immigrants than Latin America. This is the result of the ethnic distinctions that still exist today between the inhabitants of these two parts of the American continent.



These Pueblo Indian constructions represent the height of a culture whose origins date back c. ten thousand years.

6

As I wrote in a recent book, “In fact, the Pueblo people are descendants of the Anasazi, who have lived in the region since c. 600 B.C. According to some authors, they are the makers of the most beautiful ceramics in all of North America. Pueblo Indians are also known for having the grandest architecture in this part of the continent – it was only at the end of the 19th century that larger buildings began to be built in North America, notably in Chicago and New York. (Another striking example of monumental architecture can be found in Cahokia, which in the 13th century was the largest city north of Rio Grande; a thousand years ago, it was the only place, within a very large area, where man found himself completely surrounded by an artificial landscape. ‘Mound building’ was a recurring phenomenon in North America, including cultures such as Poverty Point [1800 to 500 B.C.], Adena [1000 B.C. to 200 A.D.], Hopewell [200 B.C. to 700 A.D.], and Mississippi [700 to 1500], responsible for the construction of Cahokia).” (*História & geografia da arte*, Rio Bonito [Brazil], Benedictus, 2024).



Sunset at Zabriskie Point, in the Death Valley, California

7

A desert with superlative characteristics (among them being the hottest place on planet Earth), Death Valley offers unparalleled scenery, often evocative of the Hell described in the Bible and in Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*. "Zabriskie Point" was the title of a film by Michelangelo Antonioni, released in 1970, whose plot reflects the Counterculture movement and whose soundtrack includes some compositions by the band Pink Floyd.





Grand Canyon, Arizona

8

Let us make our own these words that can be read in the Lonely Planet guide for the United States of America: “Whatever you want to call it (the largest cavity on Earth, the crown jewel of Arizona or one of the seven natural wonders of the world), to truly understand the Grand Canyon, you need to see it, with its mile-wide crack and its width of approximately ten miles, and consider the ages that were necessary to make it. Even the weariest traveller leaves there enriched in his or her ability to appreciate our planet, so ancient and ever-changing.” (Mariella Krause et alii).