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the early modern world: works in progress

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Renaissance Exploration and the Invention of a New World

Indians, Cannibals and Barbarians: The Beginnings of Early Modern Cultural Relativism

The little-known body of texts written by humanists in the wake of Christopher Columbus's first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean (1492–1493) draws upon classical and ecclesiastical teachings in regard to political existence and Christian evangelization to set forth a nuanced understanding of the difference between pernicious and innocuous forms of barbarism. Although both forms of barbarism are grounded in deficiencies, these texts laud the inherent goodness and perfectibility of the peoples who were subsequently called *Indians*, in contradistinction to the ferocity, cunning and obstinacy of those instead dubbed *cannibals*. Consideration of this body of writings not only undercuts the simplistic claim that Europeans discounted the humanity of America's natives; it also elucidates both how certain markers of intelligence and civility informed strategies of conversion or subjugation, and why the societies of Indians held such an attraction for utopian thought.

Tuesday, 30 September 2014 | 2:00pm | 3610 McTavish | room 21-6

tea and coffee will be available 15 minutes before the start of the session

<http://www.mcgill.ca/iplai/reading-groups/early-modern-world>