

## ARTS

# A million voices retell the Invasion of America

BY ANGEL FIGUEROA

IN THE SUMMER of 1838, the United States Army rounded up the entire Cherokee Nation and confined them in disease-infested camps. During the following winter, 16,000 hungry and demoralized Indians were shuffled at bayonet point across a thousand miles of frozen prairie and woodland. Herded like stock animals to be resettled at their own expense, a quarter of the Nation — 4,000 people — perished in what was to become known as the Trail of Tears, among the most pathetic episodes in American history.

**Stolen Continents: The 'New World' Through Indian Eyes Since 1492**

by Ronald Wright  
424 pages \$29.99  
Viking — Penguin 1992

Such an ignominious event is generally toned down, if not absent from modern history books. But as a startling and disturbing anecdote, it is merely one of the many incredible revelations which surface in *Stolen Continents*, a seminal historical study that is at once a textbook but reads as smoothly as travel literature.

It is both, as *Stolen Continents* is the latest book by celebrated travel-writer Ronald Wright, author of the best-sellers *Time Among the Maya* and *Cut Stones and Crossroads*. Wright has a reputation for straightforward prose which is lyrical in its simplicity and vivid in its descriptive account. He gets at the heart of an issue by frankly exposing the facts, whether with wit or sincerity, yet always controversially, due to his natural tendency to go against the grain. His newest work is a bold attempt to partly revise the history of the Americas, long since written only by the winners.



The winners were the conquerors and settlers, whose descendants claim that the so-called "discovery" of the



The capture of Tuza Amaru, last king of the Inca free state, in 1572. Drawn by the Indian chronicler Felipe Waman Puma, circa 1600. (Institut d'Ethnologie, Paris) —courtesy Penguin Books

New World is among humanity's finest moments. But as Wright notes in his foreword, the inhabitants of the Americas saw this event and its consequences quite differently. Not all of the New World's peoples perished, and neither did their view of history, but for too long it has been repressed. By stirring the warm coals of a land of paradise that had been razed to the ground by the European invaders, Wright quotes in detail a myriad of authentic sources from five Native peoples to present a startling chronicle of "the 'New World' through Indian eyes since 1492."

The new but old reality of 500 years of invasion are brought to light by the stories of the Aztec, the Maya, the Inca, the Cherokee, and the Iroquois. In fabulous detail, five fab-

rics of different cultures are woven into a travesty of unmeasurable magnitude, and as a bomb of ruthless truths, this magnificent book leaves you breathless with indignation and rage for the appalling injustice that befell the true Americans.



But *Stolen Continents* is not a book of pathos. It is an awakening experience. Wright's work breathes with respect, exoneration, and appraisal for the AmerIndian's struggle of survival on stolen land. It also affirms their great achievements, and in light of the European onslaught, it makes you wonder just who were the truly civilized and who were the real sav-

ages. In turn, we come to understand how "civilization," like "freedom" and "democracy," is a word that kills."



Wright is engaging but never didactic, and his rich commentary is packed with an incredible bibliography of primary sources, which is the signature of any Wright book. History as seen through the eyes of such trustworthy chroniclers as Pedro de Cieza de León, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and James Mooney is re-

counted in lucid detail. But even these are secondary to the power of the Native voice in such magnificent texts as the *Books of Chilam Bilam* of the Maya, *Royal Commentaries* by the Inca Garcilaso de La Vega, and Hasanoanda's *League of the Iroquois*, which led Friedrich Engels to exclaim "This gentile constitution is wonderful! There can be no poor and needy.... All are free and equal — including the women."

Wright chose his case studies on the basis that each Native group still exists to this day, and has the most historical accounts to draw from. The five also stand for the many who will never tell their stories because they are extinct, such as the Ottawas, Delawares, and the Mannhattans, their only entail to their stolen world a name on the map, "which is but a tombstone for a murdered people. But the silence of the Caribbean Taino, the Newfoundland Beothuk, and the Ona of Tierra del Fuego is the most terrible eloquence of all."

"It is they, not I, who have told their story," explains Wright.



*Stolen Continents* is divided into three sections — invasion, resistance,

and rebirth, revealing the dynamic depth of a proud heritage as well as an on-going struggle that continues to this day. Victims of exploitation and imported diseases, AmerIndians have not only survived, but carry a legacy that is rooted in the bloodied soil of their ancestors. Gifted as he is to mesh the present with the past, Wright gives new weight to 20th

**"It makes you wonder who were the truly civilized and who were the real savages"**

century events which are only continuing chapters of a story begun 500 years before: the perpetuation of United States *lebensraum* since the Trail of Tears, Canada's betrayal of the Iroquois that led to the Oka crisis, the paradoxical nature of Peru's *Sendero Luminoso*, and the fact that "if Guatemala were truly a democracy, it would be a Maya Republic."



Wright's scouring through the records paints George Washington, Sir John A. MacDonald and even Simón Bolívar in a new light, and a dark one at that. Few other statesmen of the time are spared. Perhaps most culpable is Andrew Jackson, 7th president of the United States, a precursor to cowboy Reaganomics in his style and form. If this book were an affidavit, even Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson would fail to escape indictment.

Rigoberta Menchú, a soft-spoken Maya who has lost her entire family to the violence in Guatemala, makes it known that for Native Americans, "the celebration of Columbus is an insult." As 1992 marks the quincenary of the Discovery of America, *Stolen Continents* is more a diagnosis of the *Invasion of America*. It is a book which resonates with a million anguished voices of the expurgated dead, and in the words of Farley Mowat, they "tell us the diabolic truth of ourselves."

## Primus: the band, the bass, the cheese

BY MICHAEL GRAHAM

REMEMBER as if it were a meal ago." Said Tommy the Cat as he reeled back to clear whatever foreign matter may have nestled its way into His mighty throat. Many a fat alley rat had met its demise while staring point blank down the cavernous barrel of this awesome prowling machine. Truly a wonder of nature this urban predator. Tommy the cat had many a story to tell, but it was a rare occasion such as this that he did...

"She came slidin' down the alleyway like butter drippin' off a hot biscuit. The aroma, the mean scent, was enough to arouse suspicion in even the oldest of

Tigers that hung around the hot spot in those days. The sight was beyond belief. Many a head snapped for double, even triple takes as this vivacious feline made her way into the delta of the alleyway where the most virile of the young tabbys were known to hang out. They hung in droves. Such a multitude of masculinity could only be found in one place... and that was O'Malley's Alley.

The air was thick with cat calls (no pun intended) but not even a muscle in her neck did twitch as she sauntered up into the heart of the alley. She knew what she wanted. She was lookin' for that stud bull, the he cat. And that was me. Tommy the Cat is my name and I say unto thee...

Say baby do you wanna lay down by

me..."

And so goes Primus' tale of "Tommy the Cat" which appears on both their first album, *Suck on This* and third, *Sailing the Seas of Cheese*,



featuring Tom Waits as Tommy the Cat.

Primus produces some of most mind-boggling music I have ever heard. Lyrically, their songs share a great sense of story telling with unforgettable characters such as Jerry the Race Car Driver, Harold on the Rocks, John the Fisherman and Mr. Knowitall. I like to think of the lyrics as what Dr. Seuss might have written on acid. Musically, Primus' albums smoke — mostly because of the warped bass playing.

The bassist in question is Les Claypool. Where he learned to play bass the way he does I don't know. His style is completely unique and very intense. He plays funk, thrash,

jazz, and there are no words to describe the rest. He uses techniques such as slapping, tapping, plucking and grinding — on both fretted and fretless!

The drummer, Tim "Herb" Alexander is very tight and provides ample power percussion and machine-gun drum fills. Guitarist Larry LeLonde is content to stay behind the abnormal bass riffs, but he is a great soloist and adds a lot of intensity to the overall sound of the band.

Primus cannot really be described — you have to hear them. All I can say is that if you like psychotic, bass driven, intense music (with a twisted sense of humor) then this is a band to look into.

