

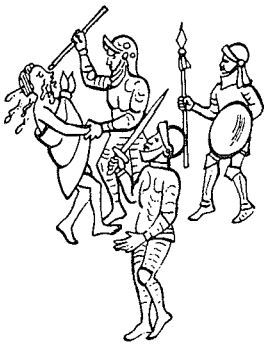


prised some 388 titles, including a seven-volume history of New England and a scientific account of America's natural "curiosities." For the latter, he was admitted to England's Royal Society. Silverman, a New York University historian, does more than tally his subject's accomplishments: He shows how Mather's commitment to preserving "Christian Israel," God's Puritan "chosen people," contributed to his posthumous image as religious fanatic. Declining church membership during the 1680s spurred Mather's fear of Puritan vulnerability; but, as Silverman explains, Mather's paranoia also reflected his fellow New Englanders' "mentality of invasion." Menaced during the 1670s by the Dutch and French foes of England, their settlements repeatedly ravaged by fires and epidemics, unable to fend off the encroachments of "popish" English governors, Mather's generation of colonial Puritans had grown fearful, suspicious, and inflexible. Near the end of his life, however, Mather began to be seen by a younger generation as a half-crazed, self-promoting pedant. Forgetting the circumstances of Mather's time, later critics were even less kind to the man who wanted only to "Do Good."

**THE CONQUEST
OF AMERICA**

by Tzvetan Todorov
translated by Richard
Howard
Harper, 1984
274 pp. \$17.95

The discovery and conquest of the New World by the Europeans is usually seen as part of the inevitable "geopolitical" march of history. Todorov, a Bulgarian-born philosopher who now teaches in France, treats the Spanish triumph in America during the 16th century as an illuminating chapter in Western intellectual and moral history. Examining diaries and chronicles of explorers, conquistadors, and historian-priests, he shows how the Spanish slowly fashioned an ideology to justify their subjugation of the natives. From Christopher Columbus onward, Todorov explains, the Spaniards were reluctant to view Indians as human, even as they marveled at the "natural" goodness of the Caribbean islanders or the civilization of the Aztecs. The



Spaniards' Christianity complicated matters. Many devout Catholics, including the Dominican bishop and chronicler Bartolomé de Las Casas, deplored the brutal mistreatment of the Indians and feared that conquest would corrupt the conquerors. Other churchmen used Christian doctrine to sanction colonialism. Wrote the theologian Ginés de Sepúlveda: "The loss of a single soul dead without baptism exceeds in gravity the death of countless victims." His countrymen concurred: In Mexico alone, the number of Indian "souls" declined from an estimated 25 million to one million between A. D. 1500 and 1600. Why did the Indians offer so little resistance to the conquistadors? One reason, Todorov argues, was the Aztecs' fateful reliance on myth, ritual, and the reading of signs to interpret daily reality. Cortés, for example, encouraged the Aztecs in their belief that he was Quetzalcoatl, a legendary ruler and demigod whose return had been predicted by soothsayers. The cunning European seized Montezuma's empire with hardly a struggle.

Contemporary Affairs

LONG ROAD HOME:
A China Journal
 by Vera Schwarcz
 Yale, 1984
 284 pp. \$19.95

For a glimpse into the personal side of life in China, Western readers usually must turn to journalistic accounts, which, while colorful, too often ignore the historical context. Hence the value of this diary by a gifted China scholar. As a member of the first group of officially sponsored American scholars to the People's Republic, Schwarcz, now a professor of history at Wesleyan, spent 16 months (February 1979–June 1980) in Beijing. At Beijing University, she did research on the May Fourth Movement of 1919, an early attempt by Chinese intellectuals to import Western ideas and democratic politics. Schwarcz's research neatly dovetailed with her daily experience. Her journal describes her growing contacts with a variety of philosophers, critics, poets, and artists—people badly treated