

# The Use of Classics by Columbus and Vespucci to Racialize the New World

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## 1. Odyssey 10.112-141

... There was no sign

Of plowed fields, only smoke rising up from the land.

I sent out a team – two picked men and a herald –  
To reconnoiter and find out who lived there. 115  
They went ashore and followed a smooth road  
Used by wagons to bring wood from the mountains  
Down to the city. In front of the city  
They met a girl drawing water. Her father  
Was named Antiphates, and she had come down 120  
To the flowing spring Artacia,  
From which they carried water to the town.  
When my men came up to her and asked her  
Who the people were and who was their king,  
She showed them her father's high-roofed house. 125  
They entered the house and found his wife inside,  
A woman, to their horror, as huge as a mountain top.  
At once she called her husband, Antiphates,  
Who meant business when he came. He seized  
One of my men and made him into dinner. 130  
The other two got out of there and back to the ships,  
But Antiphates had raised a cry throughout the city,  
And when they heard it, the Laestrygonians  
Came up on all sides, thousands of them,  
Not like men but like the Sons of the Earth, 135  
The Giants. They pelted us from the cliffs  
With rocks too large for a man to lift.  
The sounds that came from the ships were sickening,  
Sounds of men dying and boats being crushed.  
The Laestrygonians speared the bodies like fish, 140  
And carried them back for their ghastly meal,

## 2. Vespucci 27-28 (a)

We found that this other island was inhabited by very tall people. We landed to see if there was any fresh water, and not thinking it was inhabited, as we had not seen anyone, we came upon very large foot-marks in the sand, as we were walking along the beach. We judged that if the other measurements were in proportion to those of their feet, they must be very tall. Going in search, we came into a road which led inland. There were nine of us. Judging that there could not be many inhabitants, as the island was small, we walked over it to see what sort of people they were. When we had gone about a league, we saw five huts, which appeared to be uninhabited, in a valley, and we went to them. But we only found five women, two old, and three children of such lofty stature, that, for the wonder of the thing, we wanted to keep them. When they saw us, they were so frightened that they had not the power to run away. The two old women began to

2. Vespucci 27-28 (b)

invite us with words, and to set before us many things, and took us into a hut. ... Our intention was to take the young girls by force, and to bring them to Castille as a wonderful thing. While we were forming this design there entered by the door of the hut as many as thirty-six men, much bigger than the women, and so well made that it was a rare thing to behold them. They, in like manner, put us into such a state of perturbation that we rather wished we were on board, than having dealings with such people. They carried very large bows and arrows, and great clubs with knobs. They talked among themselves in a tone as if they wished to destroy us. Seeing ourselves in such danger, we made various suggestions one to another. ... We at last agreed to go out of the hut, and walk away in the direction if the ships as if nothing had happened, and this we did. Having taken out route to return to the ships, they also came along behind us at a distance of about a stone's-throw, talking among themselves. ... At last we came to the beach, where the boats were waiting for us. We got in, and, when we were some way from the shore, the natives rushed down and shot many arrows; but we had little fear of them. We replied with two bombard-shots, more to frighten them than to do them harm. They all fled into the woods, and so we took leave of them, thankful to escape after a dangerous adventure. They all went naked like the others. We called this island the Island of the Giants, by reason of their stature.

3. Odyssey 7.60-63

First Nausithous was born from Poseidon	60
And Periboea, a most beautiful woman,	
The youngest daughter of Eurydemon,	
Who once was king of the arrogant Giants.	

4. Odyssey 6.4-10

... the Phaeacians,	
A people who had once lived in Hyperia,	
Near to the Cyclopes, a race of savages,	5
<u>Who marauded their land constantly.</u>	
One day Great Nausithous led his people	
Off to Scheria, a remote island,	
Where he walled off a city, built houses	
And shrines, and parceled out fields.	10

5. Columbus, 92

... it appears likely that they are harassed by an intelligent race, all these islands living in great fear of those of Caniba.

6. Odyssey 6.190-202

And white-armed Nausicaa answered him: 190  
“Stranger, you do not seem to be a bad man  
Or a fool. Zeus himself, the Olympian god,  
Sends happiness to good men and bad men both,  
To each as he wills. To you he has given these troubles,  
Which you have no choice but to bear. But now, 195  
Since you have come to our country,  
You shall not lack clothing, nor anything needed  
By a sore-tried suppliant who presents himself.  
I will show you where the city is and tell you  
That the people here are called Phaeacians. 200  
This is their country, and I am the daughter  
Of great-hearted Alcinous, the Phaeacians’ lord.

7. Columbus, 92

So they brought the woman, a very young and lovely girl, to the ship, and she spoke to those  
Indians, for they all had the same language. The admiral caused her to be clothed and gave her  
glass bead and hawks’ bells and brass rings and sent her back to her land very honourably,  
according to his customs. ... She showed them the situation of this village.

8. Columbus, 96

At the moment when all those people were with the Christians they saw a great array or crowd of  
people coming with the husband of the woman whom the admiral had treated with honour and  
sent back, and they brought her, riding on their shoulders, and they gave thanks to the Christians  
for the honour which the admiral had shown her and the gifts given to her.

9. Odyssey 13.165-170; 13.177-187

... the Lord of Earthquake 165  
Went to Schería, where the Phaeacians live,  
And waited. The great seafaring ship  
Was closing in fast when Poseidon slapped it  
With the flat of his hand and turned it to stone  
Rooted in the seafloor. Then the god was gone. 170  
...  
Then Alcinous spoke to his people:  
“Alas for the prophecy of old that I heard  
From my father. He said that Poseidon  
Would be angry with us for giving safe passage 180  
And that one day he would wreck a beautiful ship  
As it sailed home over the misty sea.  
And he would hem our city in with a mountain.  
What the old man said is all coming true.  
Now hear what I have to say. Let us all agree 185  
Never again to provide safe escort  
To any man who comes to our city.

10. Vespucci, 20

Next day we saw a great number of the people on shore, still with signs of war, sounding horns and various other instruments used by them for defiance, and all plumed and painted, so that it was a very strange thing to behold them. All the ships, therefore, consulted together, and it was concluded that these people desired hostility with us. It was then decided that we should do all in our power to make friends with them, and if they rejected our friendship we should treat them as enemies, and that we should make slaves of as many as we could take.

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