

**FRANCISCO JAVIER CLAVIJERO (1731–1787)**  
***THE HISTORY OF MEXICO (1780)***

The dissertations which we enter upon are both useful and necessary, to illustrate the ancient history of Mexico, and confirm the truth of many points maintained in it. The first Dissertation is requisite, to supply the defective knowledge we have respecting the first population of that new world. The second, though tedious and less calculated to interest, ought not to be omitted, in order that we may know the foundations of our chronology; and will prove useful to whoever may hereafter write the history of Mexico. All the others are equally important, to guard incautious readers from the mistakes and deceptions they would otherwise be led into, by the crowd of modern authors, who, without possessing sufficient knowledge, have not been ashamed to write on the land, the animals, and inhabitants of America.

Any person who reads the work of [Cornelius de Pauw] must entertain a thousand ideas contrary to the sincerity of our history. He is a philosopher of the present fashion, and learned; particularly on certain subjects . . . He mingles insult and buffoonery in his discourses; enters without respect into the house of God, and sheds malevolence and invective from his pen without reverence for truth or feelings for innocence. He decides rashly, and in magisterial tone; incessantly cites the writers of America, and declares his work to be the fruit of ten years toil.

The attempt made by [de Pauw] is to persuade the world, that in the vast region of America all nature has degenerated; in the plants, in the animals, and in the inhabitants. The earth, encumbered with lofty mountains and rocks, and in the plains deluged with stagnant and corrupted waters, or covered with woods so vast and so thick, that the sun's rays never penetrate them, is, he says, generally barren, and more abounding in poisonous plants than all the rest of the world: the air unwholesome, and more cold than that of the other continent: the climate unfavorable to the propagation of animals: all the animals native to these countries were smaller, more deformed, feeble, cowardly, and stupid, than those of the ancient world; and those which were transported there soon degenerated, as well as the planted transplanted there from Europe . . .

[According to de Pauw] . . . the men [Indians] hardly differed from the beasts, except in figure; but even in this, many marks of degeneration appear . . . they are brutal and weakly, and subject to many violent disorders, occasioned by the insalubrity of their climate; but however their bodies may be formed, their minds are still more imperfect . . . their cowardice was made manifest at the conquest; their moral vices are correspondent to their physical defects . . . they lived without laws; the few arts they knew were very rude; agriculture was totally neglected by them, their architecture pitiful, and their utensils still more imperfect: in the whole new world were only two cities, Cuzco in North, and Mexico in South America, and even these constituted but miserable hamlets.

**Taken from Francisco Javier Clavijero, *The History of Mexico*, trans. Charles Cullen (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 2:197–198.**