Contact, communication and creation of the americas, as shown in their historical given names:"on the political meaning of the names of the Americas"

Ruben J. de Hoyos
University of Wisconsin

Abstract

'AMERICA' ("La Bien Llamada", R. Levillier) has had and it has furthermore other appellations: INDIAS, NUEVO MUNDO, IBEROAMERICA, HISPANOAMERICA, INDOAMERICA, LATINOAMERICA, even OCCIDENTAL HEMISPHERIC, etc. etc. And perhaps it was bound to be like that, because "TO GIVE A NAME" it is not only an act of intellectual identification, but also it is the expression of the intention of taking possession of that very thing, separating it from everything else and "MAKING IT OUR OWN". It is not only the intelligence in search of meaning but it is also the expression of the will to possess it and to develop it at "OUR IMAGE AND SIMILITUDE". Every conqueror and empire builder changed the names of the conquered land and every native liberator hurried to change it to a title of his own predilection. The etymological study of the names that these lands have received in nearly five hundred years is -in itself- a legitimate and rewarding job. However, the present study intends to track their "POLITICAL INTENTIONALITY" and that of those who first coined them. Some of these names were born of false perceptions (like INDIAS or AMERICA) others are sort of claims to a distant connection or renewed relation like INDOAMERICA OR HISPANOAMERICA OR LATINAMERICA, etc. The names selected are to be considered under a common pattern: 1) The name: what it was when first manifested and/or later. 2) Who seems to have been the first responsible for its use? 3) When was that name first recorded? 4) In which political and historical circumstances? 5) Was there an explicit/implicit political intent? Regarding the conclusions of this presentations a special attention is to be given to paradoxical contradictions. The "JUST DISCOVERED INDIAS" were not India, but for convenient reasons it was to remain so for more than three centuries. "AMERICA" was not after all discovered by Amerigo Vespuccio, but nobody paid attention to the correction of the good Friar of Alsacia Lorena and so it was to persevere under different re-incarnations. The opportune manifestation of many of the names of America seems to start the reconciliation of a great number of the "AMERICANOS" with a review of their own identities: INDOAMERICA, HISPANOAMERICA, AFROAMERICA, ETC. Others were born out a a neat political purpose like LATINOAMERICA at one time, to stress the role of France in the Americas, or the "AMERICA ESPANOLA" of Ruben Dario to compensate the domineering Teddy Roosevelt from the North, or the one: "WESTERN HEMISPHERE" circulated by the diplomacy of the United States to cover expansionistic policies in the area, etc. etc. All these are individual attempts and partial successes in the search for a collective and individual identity among the Americans and the Americas from North to South. All part of growing and
unexpected effort for a more mature "DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAS", for a second time.