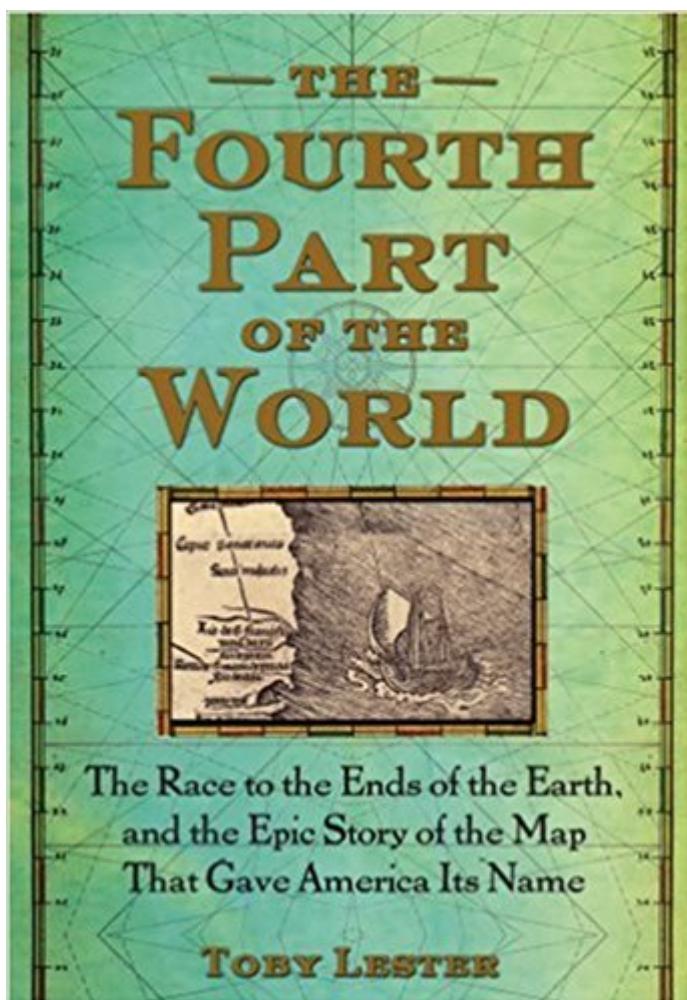


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The Fourth Part Of The World: The Race To The Ends Of The Earth, And The Epic Story Of The Map That Gave America Its Name



Synopsis

"Old maps lead you to strange and unexpected places, and none does so more ineluctably than the subject of this book: the giant, beguiling Waldseemüller world map of 1507." So begins this remarkable story of the map that gave America its name. For millennia Europeans believed that the world consisted of three parts: Europe, Africa, and Asia. They drew the three continents in countless shapes and sizes on their maps, but occasionally they hinted at the existence of a "fourth part of the world," a mysterious, inaccessible place, separated from the rest by a vast expanse of ocean. It was a land of myth—until 1507, that is, when Martin Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringmann, two obscure scholars working in the mountains of eastern France, made it real. Columbus had died the year before convinced that he had sailed to Asia, but Waldseemüller and Ringmann, after reading about the Atlantic discoveries of Columbus's contemporary Amerigo Vespucci, came to a startling conclusion: Vespucci had reached the fourth part of the world. To celebrate his achievement, Waldseemüller and Ringmann printed a huge map, for the first time showing the New World surrounded by water and distinct from Asia, and in Vespucci's honor they gave this New World a name: America. The Fourth Part of the World is the story behind that map, a thrilling saga of geographical and intellectual exploration, full of outsize thinkers and voyages. Taking a kaleidoscopic approach, Toby Lester traces the origins of our modern worldview. His narrative sweeps across continents and centuries, zeroing in on different portions of the map to reveal strands of ancient legend, Biblical prophecy, classical learning, medieval exploration, imperial ambitions, and more. In Lester's telling the map comes alive: Marco Polo and the early Christian missionaries trek across Central Asia and China; Europe's early humanists travel to monastic libraries to recover ancient texts; Portuguese merchants round up the first West African slaves; Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci make their epic voyages of discovery; and finally, vitally, Nicholas Copernicus makes an appearance, deducing from the new geography shown on the Waldseemüller map that the earth could not lie at the center of the cosmos. The map literally altered humanity's worldview. One thousand copies of the map were printed, yet only one remains. Discovered accidentally in 1901 in the library of a German castle it was bought in 2003 for the unprecedented sum of \$10 million by the Library of Congress, where it is now on permanent public display. Lavishly illustrated with rare maps and diagrams, *The Fourth Part of the World* is the story of that map: the dazzling story of the geographical and intellectual journeys that have helped us decipher our world. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

Exclusive: Simon Winchester Reviews The Fourth Part of the World Simon Winchester studied geology at Oxford and later became an award-winning journalist, and author of more than a dozen books. He has written for The Guardian, Smithsonian Magazine, National Geographic, and has reviewed books for The New York Times. His bestselling titles include: The Man Who Loved China, The Professor and the Madman, and Krakatoa. The author divides his time between his home in Massachusetts and in the Western Isles of Scotland. Read Simon Winchester's exclusive guest review of The Fourth Part of the World:

Starred Review. With the excitement and exhilaration of an explorer, Atlantic contributor Lester sets off on his own journey of discovery across the seas of cartography and history. In 2003, the Library of Congress paid \$10 million for the only existing copy of the 1507 map that was the first to show the New World and call it America. Lester ranges over the history of cartography, such as the zonal maps of the Middle Ages that divided the world into three parts—Africa, Europe and Asia. In 1507, Martin Waldseemüller and Matthias Ringmann, working with a small group of scholars in a small town in eastern France produced their map, based on Amerigo Vespucci's voyages to the West and discovery of South America. In just a few decades the Waldseemüller map was out of date, but its world-changing status lived on, and in 1901 a Jesuit priest, poking around a small German castle, stumbled on a copy. Lester traces the map's journey to America over the next century in a majestic tribute to a historic work. First serial to Smithsonian magazine. (Nov. 3)

Simon Winchester's review above does not give this book justice, although I must say that Lester's ability to spin a great story around an arcane subject may rival Winchester's. To me this book is about so much more than the naming of America on a map - it is really about the process of discovery and enlightenment and the pitfalls and pratfalls along the way. I ordered the book in an attempt to research an even more arcane issue I did not find in the book, but was immediately captivated by the exposition, and set my current book aside to read this to completion. The title of the book could maybe not be more cryptic or off-putting, but don't let that deter you. The Fourth Part of the World refers to the somewhat mythical, yet actual undiscovered lands (after Asia, Europe and Africa) described by the ancients which we know now as America. Lester spins an exhaustively researched yet page-turning story of how this mythical land was gradually given substance and shape by explorers and cartographers. That the mapmakers at the center of the story write "America" on their map is almost incidental to the story. The great story, which Lester tells so wonderfully well, is how incredibly important world maps effected the philosophy of the day. Lester makes the case that it was this map that caused Copernicus to form his theory of the Universe, which if true, is far more significant than simply naming America. For the average reader like me, this book will fill in a lot of the gaps in your learning about the age of exploration, and possibly give insight to the shortfalls and missteps we continue to repeat while exploring new domains without the proper "map". "The Fourth Part of the World" is truly not an arcane subject, and it's a wonderful read.

This volume is one of the reasons that a really fine printed book will never go out of style. Its cover, its design, its typography, its photographs, and its TEXT are simply superb. You will learn a lot about map-making, too, and you will appreciate what great navigators the old-time sailors were. Did you know that early map-makers always placed Jerusalem at the top of the map? Plenty of other Christian symbolism went into the early maps, too. European explorers traveled all the way across Asia to China, making maps as they went. Buy it; you won't be sorry.

Along the same lines as Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel*, in terms of being an "idea driven, non-fiction" book, as the WSJ review quote says on the front cover. As a lover of non-fiction myself, I found this book enlightening from cover to cover. It filled in a lot of blanks for me about the middle ages and the weird things, like headless persons, people used to believe in. Unfortunately, the book doesn't resolve the question of how Waldseemuller's seminal 1507 map showed the Pacific, and the

South American Pacific coast, years before Balboa and Magellan actually (allegedly) saw it for the first time for Europeans (though ideas are proposed -- it's a question that could be ultimately unanswerable). For me, given that Waldseemuller's South American west coast is represented by two straight lines (a physical improbability) it seems likely that it was a good guess, and Lester's book does suggest such a reason as a possibility. In Waldseemuller's second map, made a few years later, he recanted on South America's Pacific coast, and drew the continent as ending against the edge of the map, much more like Ptolemy's original map, for reasons unknown. But what the Waldseemuller map really represents, and where the Guns, Germs and Steel book is lacking, is the tremendous intellectual achievement that writing; mass (ostensibly religious) conferences inspired by writing; and the printing press gave to the Europeans. Christopher Columbus was one of the first people to benefit from early, printed books. By the 1490's the pressure to cross the Atlantic from Europe to the west must have been palpable and inevitable, despite this bold and often mysterious character called Christopher Columbus; and despite Amerigo Vespucci.

As an avid antique map collector for the past 15 years, I was aware of this text through my obscure cartographic circles. But this book should not be considered an esoteric text on a singular document, the Waldseemuller map. Yes, the Waldseemuller map printed in 1507, but thought lost for 400 years and existing today in only a single copy found in 1901, is the centerpiece of this story. It is the map that gave the name America to the newly discovered lands, and is considered America's birth certificate. How the map came to be is an epic tale that spans centuries and civilizations. Toby Lester is a detective that leaves no trail unexamined, and has found as many avid antique map collectors have, that when you examine one map you find a trail of bread crumbs that must be consumed. This delightful tale of discovery and voyage, religion and humanism, is tremendously delightful. The reader will learn what many cartophiles already know. To paraphrase the History of Cartography Project: A map is a metaphor for science and knowledge, for trade and commerce, for colonial and religious expansion. All those stories and more are found in a map, and all those stories are told well by Toby Lester in "The Fourth Part of the World."

This is a very interesting book. It is really detailed and sometimes a bit too much so for the casual reader. It begins with how a particular map came into existence, but then that particular map does not get discussed until well past the half-way mark. However, it's got a lot of information on western geographic development. I was disappointed that there was no mention of the great Chinese admiral of the Ming dynasty, Zheng He, who was sailing great distances well before Columbus.

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