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1616: The World in Motion

Thomas

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Thomas Christensen is no slouch when it comes to writing page-turning nonfiction. Among his previous books are *The Discovery of America and Other Myths* and *The U.S.-Mexican War*. In handling his weighty subject matter, Christensen avoids modern man's typical perceptions about historic events.

His most recent book offers another fresh, deeply researched and thoughtfully composed window back in time. While his focus is on a single year that has not been widely recognized as one of upheaval and change, he aptly demonstrates just how significant 1616 was to art, culture, trade, sexual roles, and a whole lot more on a global scale. Using that year as "a base that helps to keep those travels grounded," Christensen plunges into a world of dawning modernity.

A full list of the goings-on in 1616 would fill this review. They include the colonization of the Americas and international trade wars, arc between courtesans in Italy to Japan's pleasure districts, then leap from Pocahontas to Johannes Kepler, from ruler to revolutionary, midwife to Mughal, and female writer to female soldier. This book takes it all in.

Such a method for surveying world history surely has its potential pitfalls. Yet Christensen manages to portray and connect disparate events with remarkable cogency. While jumping from continent to continent he manages to capture the very expanse (and connectedness) of a world in the early stages of globalization. He also affords his reader a peek into the lives of those who were right there making it all happen.

Any professor who wishes his students to get an overview of the way evolving societies interact with regard to trade, art, and culture, or the ways civilization shifts and coalesces, will find an ally in this book. At the same time, the myriad illustrations and pictures (along with a few bawdy anecdotes) will make for an amusing addition to a home library.

Christensen's writing is droll and at times hilarious. He has a wonderful way of juxtaposing his facts so that the ironies often present in human behavior shine through. Expect to get a few dry laughs or wry grins out of this tome of nascent multicultural offerings.

LEIA MENLOVE (Spring 2012)

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