

Source 1

Christopher Columbus, Explorer



As the classroom rhyme goes, Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492 and discovered America. But there is more to the story of the explorer we celebrate with a federal holiday on the second Monday of every October. As historians have continued to learn and write more about the real life of Christopher Columbus, controversy has arisen over the validity of honoring the explorer as a hero.

Like many European explorers, Christopher Columbus encountered indigenous people throughout his voyages. Singularly focused on his mission to find riches and conquer new lands, Columbus and his teams treated the indigenous groups they came across as obstacles to their greater mission.

There are three main sources of controversy involving Columbus's interactions with the indigenous people he labeled "Indians": the use of violence and slavery, the forced conversion of native peoples to Christianity and the introduction of a host of new diseases that would have dramatic long-term effects on native people in the Americas.

Historians have uncovered extensive evidence of the damage wreaked by Columbus and his teams, leading to an outcry over emphasis placed upon studying and celebrating him in schools and public celebrations.

In an era in which the international slave trade was starting to grow, Columbus and his men enslaved many native inhabitants of the West Indies and subjected them to extreme violence and brutality. On his famous first voyage in 1492, Columbus landed on an unknown Caribbean island after an arduous three-month journey.

On his first day in the New World, he ordered six of the natives to be seized, writing in his journal that he believed they would be good servants. Throughout his years in the New World, Columbus enacted policies of forced labor in which natives were put to work for the sake of profits. Later, Columbus sent thousands of peaceful Taino "Indians" from the island of Hispaniola to Spain to be sold. Many died en route.

Those left behind were forced to search for gold in mines and work on plantations. Within 60 years after

Columbus landed, only a few hundred of what may have been 250,000 Taino were left on their island.

As governor and viceroy of the Indies, Columbus imposed iron discipline on what is now the Caribbean country of Dominican Republic, according to documents discovered by Spanish historians in 2005. In response to native unrest and revolt, Columbus ordered a brutal crackdown in which many natives were killed; in an attempt to deter further rebellion, Columbus ordered their dismembered bodies to be paraded through the streets.

In addition to the controversy over enslavement and violent rule, the "Age of Exploration" that Columbus helped lead had the additional consequence of bringing new diseases to the New World which would, over time, devastate the native populations of many New World islands and communities.

In the broader sense, historians have used the phrase "Columbian exchange" to describe the exchange of plants, animals and goods between the East and West that his voyages sparked. Though the effects were widespread and cannot all be dismissed as negative, critics of Columbus have asserted that the worst aspects of this exchange added up to biological warfare.

Eventually, his methods and actions caught up with Columbus. A number of settlers lobbied against him at the Spanish court, accusing Columbus of mismanagement. In 1500, the king and queen sent in a royal administrator, who detained Columbus and his brothers and had them shipped home.

Although Columbus regained his freedom and made a fourth and final voyage to the New World, he had lost his governorship and much of his prestige.

This historical record has cast Columbus into the shadow of enormous consequence. Protests at Columbus Day parades, efforts to eliminate him from classroom curricula, and calls for changing the federal holiday have all followed. Whatever your views of the "Columbus controversy," this holiday continues to be an important way for all Americans to learn more about the Age of Exploration and the enormous transformations it provoked.

Source 2

Biography of Christopher Columbus for Children: Famous Explorers for Kids (by FreeSchool)



Today we're going to learn about the famous explorer, Christopher Columbus. Christopher Columbus, most famous for his historic voyages across the Atlantic Ocean, was born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy. The son of a weaver, Columbus began sailing as a young teen. He sailed to many places—Greece, England, Ireland, Iceland, Portugal, West Africa, and Spain.

In 1476, Columbus was shipwrecked off the coast of Portugal. He swam to shore and settled in Lisbon. It was there that he was first married, and his first son, Diego, was born. In 1485, his wife died, and Columbus moved to Spain. A few years later, his second son, Fernando, was born.

It was about this time that Christopher Columbus began to be fascinated by the idea that it might be possible to sail west from Europe to reach Asia. Trade of spices and silk with India and China was incredibly important—and incredibly profitable—but the journey, whether overland or by sea, was long and dangerous. If Columbus could succeed in sailing directly from Europe to Asia by going west, he could make a lot of money and become very wealthy.

It is a misperception that most people back then thought that the world was flat. In fact, most people knew that the world was round, but nautical experts thought that Columbus had estimated the distance from Europe to Asia to be much too small. They thought that he would only make it halfway there before running out of food and supplies. Because of this, he could not convince anyone to give him the money he needed for the voyage. His idea was rejected in Portugal, Genoa, and Venice.

Then, he went to Spain in 1486 and tried to persuade King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella to finance his expedition, but they were at war and did not have time or money for exploration.

Six years later in 1492, the war ended and the king and queen agreed to give Columbus the money he needed. On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed west from Spain with three ships: the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria.

Two months later, on October 12, they reached the Bahamas, landing on an island that Columbus named San Salvador. Columbus was convinced that he had reached the Indies, a series of islands in Southeast Asia, and so he called the people that he met there "Indians." He didn't find very much gold on San Salvador, and so he sailed around exploring other islands.

On Christmas Day, the largest ship, the Santa Maria,

ran aground and had to be abandoned, so Columbus left 39 crewmen in what is now Haiti to start a settlement and hopefully, find more gold.

Columbus took some of the native people with him and returned to Spain in March of 1493. Besides the people and a little gold, Columbus brought back things like pineapples, turkeys, parrots, and tobacco to prove that there were riches to be found across the ocean. He was rewarded by being named Admiral of the Ocean Sea and was appointed Vice-roy and Governor of the new lands.

Word of his discovery spread quickly through Europe, and before the year was out, Columbus set sail leading a second, much larger expedition. With 17 ships and more than 1,000 men, they were ready to begin colonizing the islands Columbus had found. When they arrived, they found that the original settlement had been destroyed, and everyone left behind had been killed by the native people. They established a new settlement and began to search for gold, but when little was found, Columbus enslaved the native people and forced them to help search for more riches.

On his third voyage, Columbus finally reached the continental mainland when he landed in Venezuela. Unfortunately, conditions at the settlement were very bad, and the settlers blamed Columbus. In 1500, he was arrested and forced to return to Spain. He was eventually freed, but he lost his titles and much of his money.

In 1502, he made a fourth and final voyage to the new world, still searching for a passage to India or China. He returned to Spain in 1504, and on May 20th, 1506, at the age of 54, Christopher Columbus died, probably still believing that he had successfully sailed to Asia.

It is true that Christopher Columbus was not the first person to discover the Americas—that would be the ancestors of the native inhabitants—and he wasn't even the first European to reach the New World (a voyage by Leif Erikson about 500 years earlier succeeded in reaching Canada).

However, the voyages of Christopher Columbus had a huge impact in the history of the world because he brought back word of these new lands to Europe and began a new period of trade and colonization. Plants, animals, people, and diseases went back and forth across the ocean and had a lasting impact on almost every culture on the planet. Because of this, we commemorate Columbus's first landing every October—on Columbus Day.

Source 3, Newsela Pro-Con

PRO

Columbus was a man of his time, history shows he is worth celebrating

Monuments honoring Christopher Columbus are being defaced and destroyed. This year's Columbus Day celebrations will spark strong debate over the explorer's legacy. However, looking at Columbus in the big picture of history, one can see today's anti-Columbus sentiment is misguided.

First, let's consider the spread of European disease, principally smallpox. Smallpox is estimated to have killed 70 to 80 percent of Native Americans. Though these numbers are staggering, the deaths happened over many decades. Holding Columbus responsible is not logical. Further, calculating an actual number of deaths is impossible. Estimates of pre-Columbus populations vary widely. In Hispaniola, the island that now makes up the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, for example, the estimates run from 250,000 to 3 million.

It's also worth remembering all other epidemics. The Black Death, originating in Central Asia, killed 40 percent or more of the European population. Roughly 50 million people died between 1346 and 1353. This is a negative result of the interaction of any civilizations.

Let's also remember the exchange of disease worked both ways. Most historians believe the Great Pox that killed 5 million in Renaissance Europe came from the Americas.

Mayans Were Barbaric People

Next, consider the early civilizations of the

Americas. They have left behind beautiful monuments. However, the earliest societies, like the Mayans, were as brutal in exploiting subject peoples as any civilization elsewhere.

Tourists love to visit the magnificent pyramids of Teotihuacan and Mayan sites close to resorts. So beautiful! So inspiring! So conveniently located! Not so beautiful if you consider the human sacrifice that regularly occurred there.

War, slavery and human sacrifice pre-dated the 1492 arrival of Columbus.

European civilization has evolved, but 20th century wars, atrocities, genocide and terrorism show humanity is prone to the same savage impulses.

Columbus was a product of his time. He was also a great explorer, a fearless adventurer, a man of faith and a leader who blazed a path to the modern world.

Italian And Hispanic Descendants Celebrated Him

He holds a special place in the minds of Italian-Americans and Hispanic-Americans in particular. These groups celebrate Columbus Day with parades and statues.

Parks, playgrounds, streets, squares and schools throughout the U.S. bear Columbus' name.

No question, we must examine the accomplishments of Columbus. Doing so in the proper context shows there's no reason to destroy, deface or remove his monuments — or minimize his legacy.

CON

We must recognize that progress for some led to injustice for others

The Los Angeles City Council in California has joined many other cities in replacing Columbus Day. A holiday called Indigenous Peoples Day will instead recognize the contributions, and suffering, of Native Americans.

Of course, giving workers a day off does not make up for centuries of discrimination, enslavement and government-approved killing of Native Americans., nor would wiping Columbus Day off the calendar.

Without question, the nation must do a far better job recognizing the violent history against the country's indigenous people. California's leaders in the 1850s made no secret of their desire to destroy the area's native people. Legislators funded anti-Indian armed forces. Natives were massacred. Villages were destroyed and tribes forcibly relocated.

Special Holiday Could Appease Opponents

Would a holiday help Californians learn about this shameful period? Would it encourage reconciliation? Possibly.

Leaders could consider an official public apology. Or they could consider compensating tribes that lost sacred sites or returning land of special value. Los Angeles, in particular, could provide greater protection for sacred sites. It could offer official support for local tribes. Many tribes still seek federal recognition.

The true stories of native

peoples, beyond the simplistic portrayal of the first Thanksgiving meal, must become part of our national story. Schools should be required to teach the history, even the parts we'd like to forget.

Supporters of Indigenous Peoples Day say the government also must remove Columbus Day from the calendar. Columbus was a cruel slave trader who brought about the mass killing of native peoples.

Columbus Day Appeased Special Interests

But why must this be a choice? The debate over Columbus Day reflects confusion about how the history of racism and oppression in the U.S. fits into a proud national identity. The U.S. has taken in millions of needy immigrants but also grew through colonization that devastated native populations. Columbus Day wasn't created to celebrate colonial domination. It was designated a federal holiday in 1934 after a campaign by Italian-Americans and Catholics. They were targets of ethnic and religious discrimination at the time.

Erasing history is not the answer. The better approach is confronting it honestly.

Whether the holiday is called Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day or Explorers Day or History

Day, isn't there a way to celebrate a nation rising on a promise of liberty and equality, while also recognizing that progress for some led to displacement, injustice and death for others? There should be.



A statue of Christopher Columbus stands in Providence, Rhode Island. Photo by: Kenneth C. Zirkel/Wikimedia Commons