

Columbus Day - Academic

Columbus Day is an U.S. holiday on October 12th that commemorates Christopher Columbus's discovery of America.

Task:

1. Answer the questions in complete sentences below. Consider the validity of each source before making your argument. Is it a reliable source, why or why not? How could the author be biased in any way? Answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.
2. Write a response to the question: "Should Columbus Day be a national holiday in the United States?" Explain why or why not using at least 4 of the sources. See rubric posted below the assignment under the American History I: "Unit 1" tab at www.leininger.weebly.com

First, watch the following videos for context regarding Christopher Columbus:

<https://www.biography.com/video/christopher-columbus-mini-biography-6831683604>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il5hwpdJMcg&feature=youtu.be>

Document 1

Christopher Columbus kept a detailed record of his voyages to the New World. This is an excerpt from his journal on the day he first made contact with natives.

Saturday, 13 October 1492--At daybreak, great multitudes of men came to the shore... they came to the ship in canoes, made of a single trunk of a tree, wrought in a wonderful manner considering the country; some of them large enough to contain forty or forty-five men, others of different sizes down to those fitted to hold but a single person. They came loaded with balls of cotton, parrots, javelins, and other things too numerous to mention; these they exchanged for whatever we chose to give them. I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of this metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed large vessels of gold, and in great quantities.

1. How did Columbus interact with the natives?
2. What did Columbus want from the natives?
3. What do you think of the reliability of this source?

Document 2

Joel Barlow was an early American poet who lived from 1754 to 1812. The following is an excerpt from his poem *The Vision of Columbus* which hailed the explorer as a hero.

This extraordinary man, who was now about twenty-seven years of age, appears to have united in his character every trait, and to have possessed every talent, requisite to form and execute the greatest enterprises. He was early educated in all the useful sciences that were taught in that day. He had made great proficiency in geography, astronomy and drawing, as they were necessary to his favorite pursuit of navigation. He had now been a number of years in the service of the Portuguese, and had acquired all the experience that their voyages and discoveries could afford. His courage and perseverance had been put to the severest test, and the exercise of every amiable and heroic virtue rendered him universally known and respected.

Such was the situation of Columbus, when he formed and thoroughly digested a plan, which, in its operation and consequences, unfolded to the view of mankind one half of the globe, diffused wealth and dignity over the other, and extended commerce and civilization through the whole.

4. According to Barlow, what are some of Columbus' positive characteristics?
5. What are Columbus' accomplishments?
6. How reliable is this source?

Document 3

Source: Howard Zinn, *The People's History of the United States*. Howard Zinn is a professor of history at Boston University. He received a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University and is the author of more than 20 books. In the excerpt below, Zinn cites the writing of Bartolomé de las Casas, a Catholic priest who moved from Spain to the New World in 1508. De las Casas witnessed and opposed the harsh treatment of the natives by Spanish settlers.

When he arrived on Hispaniola in 1508, Las Casas says, "there were 60,000 people living on this island, including the Indians; so that from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it...."

Thus began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas. That beginning, when you read Las Casas-even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says, or less than a million, as some historians have calculated, or 8 million as others now believe?) is conquest, slavery, death. When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure-there is no bloodshed-and Columbus Day is a celebration.

7. According to Bartolomé de las Casas, the native population in the New World fell from approximately 3 million in 1492 to 60,000 in 1508. What happened to the natives?

Document 4

Dr. Warren H. Carroll is a leading Catholic historian and author, and the founder of Christendom College. He received his Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. The following excerpt is from an article he wrote for *The Catholic Social Science Review*.

Let us begin, therefore, by defining the word "discovery" in the context of history. A discovery is made when an individual or a nation finds something or someone or some people or some places of special importance, not previously known to them. When any previously unknown people is first found by another people, that people may be said to have been discovered. People as well as places can be discovered. The fact that people live in places unknown to another people does not mean that they, and the places where they live, cannot be discovered. No people from any other part of the world ever discovered Europe; but Europeans discovered all other parts of the world.

In all of history, only the Europeans and the Polynesians of the south Pacific have been true discoverers, sailing for the explicit purpose of finding new lands, trading with their people, and colonizing them. And of all discoverers, Christopher Columbus was the greatest, because he accomplished the most against the highest odds. Before Columbus' time all European voyages had followed coastlines, or crossed open seas to lands previously known or at least sighted by storm-driven ships. Only Columbus set off directly across a broad, unknown sea with no specific knowledge of how far it extended or what lay on the other side.

8. Why does Carroll consider Columbus to be the greatest explorer of all time?
9. Why does Carroll disagree with critics who claim Columbus did not "discover" the New World?

Document 5

Christopher Columbus' reputation has not survived the scrutiny of history, and today we know that he was no more the discoverer of America than Pocahontas was the discoverer of Great Britain. Native Americans had built great civilizations with many millions of people long before Columbus wandered lost into the Caribbean.

Columbus' voyage has even less meaning for North Americans than for South Americans because Columbus never set foot on our continent, nor did he open it to European trade. Scandinavian Vikings already had settlements here in the eleventh century, and British fisherman probably fished the shores of Canada for decades before Columbus. The first European explorer to thoroughly document his visit to North America was the Italian explorer Giovanni Caboto, who sailed for England's King Henry VII and became known by his anglicized name, John Cabot. Caboto arrived in 1497 and claimed North America for the English sovereign while Columbus was still searching for India in the Caribbean. After three voyages to America and more than a decade of study, Columbus still believed that Cuba was a part of the continent of Asia, South America was only an island, and the coast of Central America was close to the Ganges River.....

After he failed to contact the emperor of China, the traders of India or the merchants of Japan, Columbus decided to pay for his voyage in the one important commodity he had found in ample supply - human lives. He seized 1,200 Taino Indians from the island of Hispaniola, crammed as many onto his ships as would fit and sent them to Spain, where they were paraded naked through the streets of Seville and sold as slaves in 1495. Columbus tore children from their parents, husbands from wives. On board Columbus' slave ships, hundreds died; the sailors tossed the Indian bodies into the Atlantic.

Because Columbus captured more Indian slaves than he could transport to Spain in his small ships, he put them to work in mines and plantations which he, his family and followers created throughout the Caribbean. His marauding band hunted Indians for sport and profit - beating, raping, torturing, killing, and then using the Indian bodies as food for their hunting dogs. Within four years of Columbus' arrival on Hispaniola, his men had killed or exported one-third of the original Indian population of 300,000. Within another 50 years, the Taino people had been made extinct [editor's note: the old assumption that the Taino became extinct is now open to serious question] - the first casualties of the holocaust of American Indians. The plantation owners then turned to the American mainland and to Africa for new slaves to follow the tragic path of the Taino.

-----Examining the Reputation of Christopher Columbus by Jack Weatherford

Jack Weatherford is an anthropologist at Macalaster College in St. Paul, Minn. His most recent book is "Indian Givers." He wrote this article for the Baltimore Evening Sun.

10. According Weatherford, why should Columbus be less significant to the United States and what was his effect on the Native Americans he did encounter?