

Christopher Columbus

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*A Facts-Based Guide to Accompany
Courage and Conviction:
The True Story of Christopher Columbus*

A KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS DOCUMENTARY FILM

The voyages of Christopher Columbus were a watershed moment in the history of human civilization. For centuries people from all walks of life found in them elements of virtue and human potential – an encounter between peoples with new possibilities beyond the horizon. In recent decades, facts have been pushed aside in an effort to recast Columbus as a villain and/or architect of violence and injustices.

While Columbus was not perfect and some of the men accompanying him certainly committed abuses, it is neither fair nor intellectually honest to blame Columbus for such injustices nor any of the societal issues we face today.

Knights of Columbus has prepared this Facts-Based Guide as a resource for all to use.



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Columbus®**





Context & Culture

- During the middle of the 15th century, instability and conflict plagued the Mediterranean region.
 - Conflicts arose and escalated between Ottoman Empire and Western Europe over Constantinople (present day Istanbul), making travel by land difficult.
- Western European monarchs race for power and influence – momentum builds for exploring a westward sea route to Asia.
- Indigenous Peoples of the Americas live through their own experiences of conflict – including threat of enslavement, violence and even human sacrifice.



The Taíno and Carib peoples – historical enemies and early inhabitants of the Caribbean.

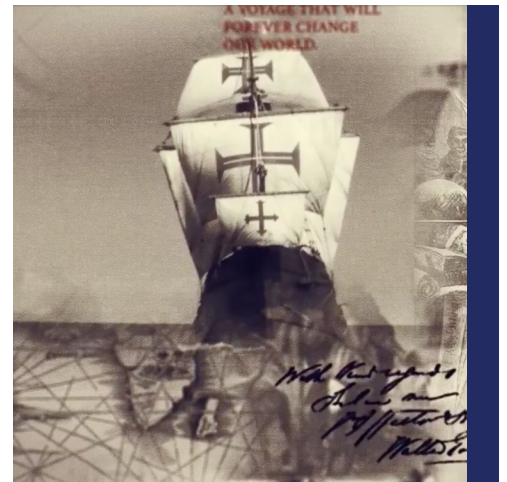


Christopher Columbus

- Born in Genoa in 1451.
- Self-taught (immersed himself in books, especially history, geography and astronomy).
- Began sailing early in his life.
- Interested in new routes to Asia.
- Worked as a sailor in Portugal (circa 1470s).

The Voyages

- Petitioned the Portuguese crown to endorse his plans for a voyage – repeatedly rejected.
- In January 1492 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (Spain) received Columbus in audience and agreed to sponsor his voyage.
- Columbus undertook four voyages to the Americas during which he explored the Caribbean Islands as well as the coasts of Central and South America.
- To undertake the dangerous voyages, the Spanish Crown sent pardoned criminals to travel with Columbus – persons who were not well suited to be colonists nor to follow Columbus' leadership.

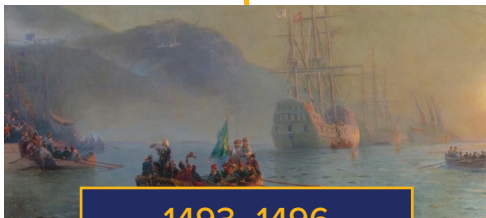




1492–1493

First Voyage

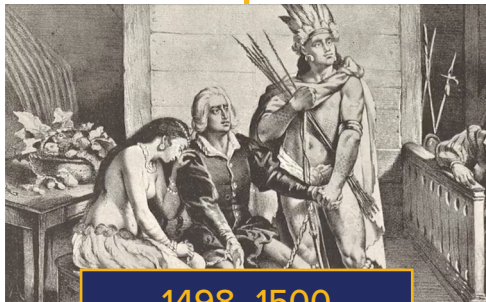
- Departed Spain, August 1492
- Arrived in the present-day Commonwealth of the Bahamas, October 12, 1492.
- Explored the island of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic).
- Returned to Spain, March 1493.



1493–1496

Second Voyage

Departed September 1493 with a fleet of 17 ships carrying some 1,200 men. Establishment of first colonies and trading posts..



1498–1500

Third Voyage

Departed Spain, May 1498, with objective of exploring present-day South America. This voyage ended when Columbus returned to Hispaniola and was arrested by the new Governor of the Indies, Francisco de Bobadilla, for executing men who disobeyed his orders to maintain good relations with the Natives and alleged dereliction of his duties as governor. Columbus was returned to Spain in chains but ultimately acquitted of any wrongdoing.



1502–1504

Fourth Voyage

Columbus' final journey was made with the permission of Queen Isabella but without the support of Spanish authorities in the Caribbean. Columbus explored the coast of Central America, but his ship was damaged in a storm, forcing him and his crew to spend a year on the Island of Jamaica before being transported back to Spain by Spanish colonists.



Columbus' Relationship with Indigenous Peoples

- Columbus' standing orders were to treat Native peoples fairly.
- Columbus shared a positive relationship with Guacanagari, leader of one of the Taíno tribes that welcomed the Spaniards.
- Conflicts between Spaniards and local tribes arose, leading to violence, prisoners of war and general mistrust.
- Some of the men, unhappy with Columbus' demands for fair treatment of Indigenous peoples, demanded that they be permitted to utilize Natives as slaves.
- As more Europeans settled, men insisted on enslaving the Native peoples to mine gold and perform other hard labor. Columbus refused.
- Eventually these men turned against Columbus and successfully persuaded the Spanish monarchy to remove him as governor of the Indies.
- The new governor, Francisco de Bobadilla, allowed for abuse of the Native people.

Betrayal, Mutiny Against Columbus

- Detractors began to organize against Columbus' leadership by promising settlers who joined them that they would advocate to subjugate Native peoples, rape women and keep gold and other treasures.
- Columbus was unprepared for these rebellions and the settlers' demands.
- As a final resort, Columbus chose to execute some of the rebellious men.
- With discord running deep, Columbus was captured by the new governor and tried; later acquitted.



At one point, Columbus wrote to Ferdinand and Isabella to request 60 missionaries to preach Christianity to "arrogant and abusive Spaniards"; and another 60 upstanding men to help him run the colony.

- Excerpt from 'Five Myths About Columbus' by Robert Royal, at kofc.org/columbus



“This is the time to celebrate the making of a new class of American citizens – new immigrants coming in, and the people who have always been here.”

- Proclamation of the holiday.

Columbus Day – A Unifying Holiday

Facts and Key Messages

- Christopher Columbus Day is, first and foremost, a day to celebrate the coming together of different worlds; a watershed moment for our planet with new possibilities.
- Its institution was inspired by one of our country’s first and most cherished mottos: E pluribus unum. From many, one.
- President Benjamin Harrison instituted the first Columbus Day in 1891 to honor the contributions of immigrant and Native Americans.
- It followed violent attacks against Italian and Native Americans (see side column).
- In many ways, we honor Christopher Columbus as we recognize and celebrate Neil Armstrong – for being among the first persons to undertake a very bold voyage – one that exemplifies the human desire to connect and to explore.
- Recognizing the importance of commemorating Native American and Italian communities, Colorado became the first state to declare Columbus Day an official holiday in 1906 with several states following suit. In 1934, October 12 was established as an annual celebration of Columbus by presidential proclamation with Congress declaring the second Monday in October an official federal holiday in 1968.
- This is not the first time we’ve seen a concerted opposition to Columbus Day. The Ku Klux Klan considered attempts to honor Columbus a threat to their vision of a “white and protestant” America.



New Orleans Lynching

On March 14, 1891, a mob of some 10,000 people hunt down and murder 12 Italian Americans in New Orleans – the worst lynching in U.S. history. The lynching takes place less than three months after the horrific Wounded Knee Massacre.

Wounded Knee

With its horrific massacre of women and children, Wounded Knee (December 29, 1890) is a tragic turning point in the history of Native Americans. It marks the end of Native American resistance and the acceptance of reservation life.



- Christopher Columbus is also a symbol for the thousands (if not millions) of immigrants, many from Western and Southern Europe, who left their homes in the hopes of finding a better world – a country of promise and freedom.
- Inspired by this, poor Italian American communities spent years bringing together funds from small donations to eventually build monuments and statues to Columbus that honored their contributions to the fabric of American society.
- Modern-day opponents propagate their own lies. In 1980, Dr. Howard Zinn published *The People's History of the United States*, which presents an inaccurate and distorted depiction of Columbus' voyages and explorations. Sadly, too many people give his work credence and legitimacy.

Conclusion/Summary

No one would dare to say that Christopher Columbus was perfect. But we do have proof that he went to great lengths to treat the locals on this continent fairly (by the standards of his time).

Educating Americans on the atrocities committed during the colonial period of the continent is a good thing – an important thing – but doing so does not give us the right to lay the blame of serious ills at the feet of Columbus or erase Columbus Day.

The overriding scholastic view of Columbus, including by those who were his contemporaries, is that he sought to treat all people with respect.

kofc.org/columbus

“ *If we start cancelling every person in the past because they were imperfect, eventually we're going to cancel everyone.*

– Robert Royal, in *Courage and Conviction: The True Story of Christopher Columbus*

