

The Legacy of Columbus

In the years and centuries since Christopher Columbus's historic journeys, people still debate the legacy of his voyages. Some argue they were the heroic first steps in the creation of great and democratic societies. Others claim they were the beginnings of an era of widespread cruelty, bloodshed, and epidemic disease.

Document 1

Samuel Eliot Morison

Morison, a strong supporter of Columbus, laments that the sea captain died without realizing the true greatness of his deeds.

One only wishes that the Admiral might have been afforded the sense of fulfillment that would have come from foreseeing all that flowed from his discoveries; that would have turned all the sorrows of his last years to joy. The whole history of the Americas stems from the Four Voyages of Columbus; and as the Greek city-states looked back to the deathless gods as their founders, so today a score of independent nations and dominions unite in homage to Christopher, the stout-hearted son of Genoa, who carried Christian civilization across the Ocean Sea.

1. Is this a primary or secondary source? Why?
2. What is the legacy of Columbus, according to Morison?
3. What evidence from the document supports your answer to #2?

Document 2

Bartolome de Las Casas

Las Casas was an early Spanish missionary who watched fellow Spaniards unleash attack dogs on Native Americans.

Their other frightening weapon after the horses: twenty hunting greyhounds. They were unleashed and fell on the Indians at the cry of "Tomalo!" [Get them!]. Within an hour they had preyed on one hundred of them. As the Indians were used to going completely naked, it is easy to imagine what the fierce greyhounds did, urged to bite naked bodies and skin much more delicate than that of the wild boars they were used to... This tactic, begun here and invented by the devil, spread throughout these Indies and will end when there is no more land nor people to subjugate and destroy in this part of the world.

1. Is this a primary or secondary source? Why?
2. According to Las Casas, what is Columbus's Legacy?
3. What evidence from the document supports your answer to # 2?

Document # 3

Suzan Shown Harjo

Harjo, a Native American, disputes the benefits that resulted from Columbus's voyages and the European colonization of the Americas that followed.

Columbus Day, never on Native America's list of favorite holidays, became somewhat tolerable as its significance diminished to little more than a good shopping day. But this next long year [1992] of Columbus hoopla will be tough to take amid the spending sprees and horn blowing to tout a five-century feeding frenzy that has left Native people and this red quarter of Mother Earth in a state of emergency. For Native people, this half millennium of land grabs and one-cent treaty sales has been no bargain.

1. Is this a primary or secondary source? Why?
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3. What evidence from the documents supports your answer to # 2?

The 'Columbian Exchange': How Discovering the Americas Transformed the World

By Johann Grolle

Writer Charles C. Mann argues that no other person changed the face of the Earth as radically as Christopher Columbus did.

Columbus' arrival in the Americas sparked the globalization of animals, plants and microbes. A recent book takes a closer look at how items from the New World, such as potatoes, guano and rubber, quickly and radically transformed the rest of the planet.

No other person, Mann suggests, changed the face of the Earth as radically as Columbus did. Columbus' crossing of the Atlantic, Mann says, marked the start of a new age, not only for the Americas but also for Europe, Asia and Africa.

It was the dawn of the era of global trade. Oceans no longer represented barriers to people, goods, animals, plants and microbes. It was as though Pangaea, the supercontinent that broke apart some 150 million years ago, had been reunited in a geological blink of the eye.

Before the ships *Niña*, *Pinta* and *Santa Maria* set sail in 1492, not only was the existence of the Americas unknown to the rest of the world, but China and Europe also knew little about one another. A century later, the world looked very different. Spanish galleons sailed into Chinese harbors bearing silver mined by Africans in South America. Spanish cloth merchants received Chinese silk in exchange, delivered by middlemen in Mexico. And wealthy people looking for relaxation -- whether in Madrid, Mecca or Manila -- lit up tobacco leaves imported from the Americas...

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2. What is the legacy of Columbus, according to Mann?
3. What evidence from the document supports your answer to #2?