

Christopher Columbus : Hero or ? villain ?

* Read each passage and answer the questions. Then decide if Columbus was a positive or negative person for history

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS KEPT VERY DETAILED JOURNAL ENTRIES THROUGHOUT HIS ENTIRE VOYAGE. HERE IS A SELECTION FROM THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1492.

“ I presented them with some red caps, and strings of beads to wear upon the neck, and many other trifles of small value, wherewith they were much delighted, and became wonderfully attached to us. Afterwards they came swimming to the boats, bringing parrots, balls of cotton thread, javelins, and many other things which they exchanged for articles we gave them, such as glass beads, and hawk's bells; which trade was carried on with the utmost good will. ”
Thursday, 11 October

- Christopher Columbus, 1492

1. DESCRIBE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS SELECTION?

2. IF THIS IS ALL YOU KNEW ABOUT COLUMBUS, WHAT MIGHT YOU THINK OF HIM?

BELOW IS THE REMAINING SELECTION FROM THE FIRST SOURCE ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1492 (THE UNDERLINED SECTION IS FIRST SOURCE).

66 I, in order that they might develop a very friendly disposition towards us, (because I knew that they were a people who could better be freed and converted to our Holy Faith by love than by force), gave to some of them red caps and to others glass beads, which they hung on their necks, and many other things of slight value, in which they took much pleasure. They remained so much our [friends] that it was a marvel, later they came swimming to the ships' boats in which we were, and brought us parrots and cotton thread in skeins and darts and many other things, and we swapped them for other things that we gave them, such as little glass beads and hawks' bells. Finally they traded and gave everything they had, with good will; but it appeared to me that these people were very poor in everything...they bear no arms, nor know thereof; for I showed them swords and they grasped them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have not iron. Their darts are a kind of rod without iron, and some have at the end a fish's tooth and others, other things. [The people] are generally fairly tall and good looking, well built. I saw some who had marks of wounds on their bodies, and made signs to them to ask what it was, and they showed me that people of other islands, which are near, came there and wished to capture them, and they defended themselves. And I believed and believe that people do come here from the mainland to take them as slaves. They ought to be good servants and of good skill, for I believe that they would easily be made Christians, because it seemed to me that they belonged to no religion. I, please Our Lord, will carry off six of them at my departure to Your Highnesses, that they may learn to speak. I saw no animal of any kind in this island, except parrots. ”

1. LIST 4 FACTS ABOUT THE NATIVE PEOPLES COLUMBUS MET ON THIS ISLAND.

- 1.) _____
- 2.) _____
- 3.) _____
- 4.) _____

2. LIST 3 OPINIONS COLUMBUS HAS ABOUT THE NATIVE PEOPLES HE ENCOUNTERED.

- 1.) _____
- 2.) _____
- 3.) _____

3. DOES COLUMBUS CONSIDER THESE PEOPLE TO BE HIS EQUAL? WHY OR WHY NOT?

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. ”

- Joel Barlow, The Vision of Columbus (1787)

1. ACCORDING TO BARLOW, WHAT ARE SOME OF COLUMBUS' POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS?

2. WHAT ARE COLUMBUS' ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

BARTOLOME DE LAS CASAS WAS A YOUNG PRIEST WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE CONQUEST OF CUBA. HE WAS EVENTUALLY COMPELLED TO OPPOSE THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED AGAINST THE NATIVES.

“...(the Spaniards) grew more conceited every day and after awhile refused to walk any distance...(They) rode the backs of Indians is they were in a hurry or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays...(They) thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades...

...They (the Spaniards) took infants from their mothers' breasts, snatching them by the legs and pitching them headfirst against the crags (a rock face) or snatched them by the arms and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter and saying as the babies fell into the water, "Boil there, you offspring of the devil!"

- Bartolome De Las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, (1552)

1. ACCORDING TO DE LAS CASAS, WHAT ATROCITIES DID THE SPANISH COMMIT?

2. DO YOU CONSIDER DE LAS CASAS TO BE A RELIABLE SOURCE? WHY OR WHY NOT?

ON OCTOBER 10, 1492, JUST BEFORE LANDING IN THE AMERICAS, CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS WROTE ABOUT THE STRUGGLES HE AND HIS CREW FACED:

“ They [the crew] could stand it no longer. They grumbled and complained of the long voyage, and I reproached them for their lack of spirit, telling them that, for better or worse, they had to complete the enterprise on which the Catholic Sovereigns [Isabel and Fernando] had sent them. I cheered them on as best I could, telling them of all the honors and rewards they were about to receive. I also told the men that it was useless to complain, for I had started out to find the Indies and would continue until I had accomplished that mission, with the help of Our Lord. ”

- Christopher Columbus, 1492

1. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE COLUMBUS' LEADERSHIP QUALITIES?

2. AFTER EXAMINING ALL SOURCES, IS IT POSSIBLE TO VIEW COLUMBUS AS BOTH A HERO AND A VILLAIN? WHY OR WHY NOT?

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.

- Warren Carroll, Honoring Christopher Columbus, (1992)

1. IN YOUR WORDS, WHAT IS WILLIAM CARROLL TALKING ABOUT? PLEASE REREAD WHAT HE SAYS IF YOU ARE UNSURE!

2. DO YOU AGREE WITH CARROLL’S CLAIM? WHY OR WHY NOT?
