

Columbus: Hero or Villain?

Source	View of Columbus (positive or negative)	Evidence that supports view of Columbus (specific quotes from text/video)
From the Journal of Columbus (1492)		
A Historian's Perspective (Howard Zinn)		
Video 1: History vs. Christopher Columbus		
Video 2: A Classic Columbus Cartoon		
Video 3: Reconsider Columbus Day		

The Journal of Columbus (October 11, 1492)

The following excerpt is from a journal entry that Columbus made during his first voyage. He describes an early meeting with Taino people.

“As I saw that they were very friendly to us, and perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force, 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 utmost good will. But they seemed on the whole to me, to be a very poor people...

Weapons they have none, nor are acquainted with them, for I showed them swords which they grasped by the blades, and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron, their javelins being without it, and nothing more than sticks... They are all of a good size and stature, and handsomely formed. It appeared to me that the people are ingenious (clever), and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language.”

A Historian's View: This excerpt is from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, published in 1980.

“The aim was clear: slaves and gold...”

Columbus's men search Haiti for gold, with no success. They had to fill up the ships returning to Spain with something, so in 1495 they went on a great slave raid. Afterward, they picked five hundred captives to send to Spain. Two hundred of the Indians died on the voyage. The rest arrived alive in Spain and were put up for sale.

But too many slaves died in captivity. Columbus was desperate to show a profit on his voyages. In a part of Haiti where Columbus and his men imagined there was much gold, they ordered everyone over the age of thirteen to collect gold for them. Indians who did not give gold to the Spaniards had their hands cut off and bled to death.

The only gold around was bits of gold dust in streams. So they ran away. The Spaniards hunted them down with dogs and killed them. Unable to fight against the Spanish soldiers' guns, swords, armour, and horses, the Arawaks began to commit mass suicide with poison. When the Spanish search for gold began, there were a quarter of a million Indians in Haiti. In two years, through murder or suicide, half of them were dead.

When it was clear that there was no gold left, the Indians were enslaved on the Spaniards' huge estates. They were overworked and mistreated, and they died by the thousands. A century later, no Arawaks were left on the island.

Video 1: History vs. Christopher Columbus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD3dgiDreGc>

Video 2: A Classic Columbus Cartoon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eolZ5E9xtIY>

Video 3: Reconsider Columbus Day <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=il5hwpdJMcg>

Using specific examples from the evidence we have looked at in class, answer the question:

Was Columbus a Hero or Villain?

Write in essay form, using these sentence starters for each paragraph.

Paragraph 1: “**Christopher Columbus was...**”

Paragraph 2: “**Some people consider Christopher Columbus a hero because...**”

Paragraph 3: “**Others consider Christopher Columbus a villain because...**”

Paragraph 4: “**In my opinion, Christopher Columbus is more of a (hero/villain) because....:**

Paragraph 5: “**Based on the evidence above, some people believe that British Columbia should rename their province. I (agree/disagree) with this because...**