

# WINNING ESSAY



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## **Man or Monster**

Christopher Columbus was a man. In fact, he was a hero. There are many secularized, anti-history, anti-Christian, and foolish minds that claim Columbus to be a horrid individual. A monster, without honor, who raped the indigenous people of the Indies in an lustful rage for gold. Because of all the calumny against Columbus, some now consider him to be little more than a genocidal human trafficker. However, is any of it true? Who was Christopher Columbus, and why is there such controversy around him?

Cristoforo Colombo was born sometime in, 1451 A.D., in Genoa Italy. He was born into a peasant Christian family and his father was a wool worker and merchant. He began his sailing career in the Portuguese merchant marine. He based himself, and his brother Bartholomew, in Lisbon Portugal after surviving a shipwreck off Cape Saint Vincent. Both were employed as chart makers, but Columbus principally kept to sailing. In 1482 through 1485, Christopher traded along the Guinea and Gold Coast of Africa, giving him experience in navigation as well as Atlantic wind patterns.

Columbus, in all of his understanding of Behaim's globe, – which was, in Columbus' age, the known arrangement of the world – thought that sailing westward to get to the Indies would be quicker than trying to sail around Africa. Therefore, Columbus, having audiences with King John II of Portugal, and later with the Spanish crown, tried to convince them to support a transatlantic voyage. Christopher's efforts seemed to be in vain. His outlandish claims and aspirations seemed to be foolhardy, and were rejected on multiple occasions. However, Columbus would not give up. Maybe it was

his desire to do his part in spreading Catholicism across the world. It could have been his longing for honor and fame. On the other hand, maybe it was his pure thirst for knowledge and adventure. Whatever the inspiration for his great odyssey, Christopher Columbus' tenacity was on par with that of Odysseus, Thomas Edison, and Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Odysseus was relentless in his dream. Columbus was likewise. Thomas Edison could not give up. Neither could Columbus. And, it did not matter how many times someone spat in the face of Saint Mother Teresa, her mission was to do the will of Christ. Columbus shared the same fire as she, as well as the spark of heroism that each of these great figures possessed. Did this spark alone convince the crowns? Pretty much. After eight years of preparation, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain gave Columbus their royal support in January, 1492. This was through the intervention of the Spanish treasurer, Luis de Santángel, and mostly, as Bartolomé de las Casas – the first resident bishop of the Americas, as well as a Christopher Columbus admirer – asserts that, “it was ultimately Columbus' personality, rather than the probability of his plan, that convinced the queen.”

At that time, the incredible journey of Columbus was just beginning. Little did he know what it would lead to. The great voyage of the Niña, Pinta, and the Santa María, lead by the intrepid Christopher Columbus – now named “High Admiral of the ocean sea and perpetual Governor of the islands and continents that [Christopher Columbus] should discovered” – and the Pinzón brothers, Martín Alonso Pinzón, who served as captain of the Pinta, and Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, who served as captain of the Niña. After the trio pulled together a crew, they left the city of Palos on August 3, 1492, and sailed to the Canary Islands. From there, the adventures left from San Sebastián de la Gomera on September 6, and proceeded to sail straight west. Columbus used the navigation tool of “dead reckoning” – which was done by estimating the speed of the ship and then calculating the time elapsed using a half hourglass – To give a rough estimate of the leagues traveled. Columbus, as a mark to his ability to read the social cues of those under him, would write down the leagues traveled and tell his crew a few leagues less than what they actually traveled, in order to make them seem as though they were not as far away from the mainland as they were. Ironically, the records he gave to his crew were more accurate than what he recorded.

On October 12, land was spotted. “Everyone breathed afresh and rejoiced...” “They shortened the sail, and lay by under the mainsail without bonnets.” After long and tiring weeks of sailing, they finally found land. This is where the controversy starts.

Now that Christopher Columbus and his transatlantic voyage of three ships and ninety men had found land, they had also found people. Because Columbus thought that he had found the Indies, he called the people living there Indians. The controversies rise up over how he treated the Indians. Was he a genocidal conqueror who came to, what he thought, the Indies in a lustful search for gold and spices? No. In actuality, Christopher Columbus thought of the Taino’s – the native inhabitants of the land the party found – as a gentle people. He thought that “[they] could form great friendships.” Christopher thought this because he saw the Tainos as “a people who could be more easily freed and converted to our holy faith by love than by force.” He made friends with them, traded with them, and loved them. He convinced his men, or did his best to, to not take advantage of the Indians. He then consecrated the first island he found to God, by naming it after Jesus Christ: San Salvador. Columbus did take six natives for the King, but so that “they may learn to speak,” not so that he could sell them into slavery. Columbus sailed around the Islands in search of riches to bring back to the King and Queen, but did not find much. He found souls for God and this was a treasure to him. However, not much of a treasure to King Ferdinand. He sailed back to Spain with what he had found and presented it to the royal court. Columbus would later go on three more transatlantic voyages. Unfortunately, Columbus proved not as good of a governor as an admiral. Eventually, because of the slander put on him by Francisco de Bobadilla, Columbus' political rival, Christopher Columbus would end his career, and sail back to Spain in chains. He would spend the rest of his days trying to gain the royalties he should have because of his titles for his children. Christopher Columbus died May 20, 1506, Valladolid, Spain.

In conclusion, Christopher Columbus was a man. In fact, he was a hero. He was tenacious, courageous, faithful, and kind. He had the spark of a hero and the attitude of a saint. He is a man to be honored, not belittled. With characteristics to aspire to. Therefore, those who slander the name of Columbus because of poor reasoning and a cultivated hatred towards Christianity and masculinity, consider that you may have your own voyage to take one day. May it be done with the same spark of courage as Christopher Columbus.

# Bibliography

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