

# WINNING ESSAY



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## **Christopher Columbus: The Man of the New World**

“In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” The memorable mnemonic device is proof of the long-lasting effect that Christopher Columbus impressed upon the world of the fifteenth century and today. Without the expeditions of Christopher Columbus, the whole world, and in particular the Americas, would have been quite different. It was only after Columbus’ discoveries that a slew of explorers began to chase the setting sun across the ocean. As a result, Europeans were given the hopeful chance to immigrate to a new country in search of new freedom and better opportunities. Christopher Columbus initiated an age of expedition, which, both in his day and in modern times, globally affected the transmission of culture and the shaping of Western Civilization.

Christopher Columbus, an Italian from Genoa, sought assistance for his grand voyage from European monarchs. Portugal rejected his idea, but with the end of the Spanish Reconquista, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, inspired by Columbus’ zeal, invested a grandiose amount of wealth and resources into his voyage. Columbus hoped to please his patrons with the discovery of a speedy trade route to India (knowing that such a route would bring about an even greater exchange between Europe and Asia) and the conversion of the indigenous peoples. The king and queen heartily believed in the mission of the courageous explorer, “for Columbus was a man born and driven to discover a new world, and such a discovery was bound to bring transcendent glory, power and wealth to whatever nation made it” (Carroll, Warren H. *The Glory of Christendom: A History of Christendom* 633). At one time, trade was only possible by the Silk Road, the long journey by land from Europe to distant Asian lands. Portugal then established a shipping route by simply sailing around the southern tip of Africa. To surpass the Portuguese, Columbus had to do what no navigator ever dared to

do before: to “set off directly across a broad, unknown sea with no specific knowledge of how far it extended or what lay on the other side” (Carroll, Warren H, “Honoring Christopher Columbus” 1). Columbus revolutionized navigation by sailing into the unknown. He did not find Asia; rather, Columbus made an entirely new discovery— the discovery of a new continent, the discovery of a New World.

Columbus’ 70-day journey across the Atlantic Ocean gave him evidence of a landmass between Europe and Asia. There, he made contact with the natives of the Bahamas, who were a kind people. The first meeting of the two cultures took place, and an informal and subtle exchange began as both noted the talents and manners of each other. Even when his crew tried to exploit the natives, Columbus piously forbade the unfair exchange of their riches for European trinkets. Rather, he hoped to trade with them justly. By creating a mutual trust, the natives then gave advice to help the great explorer discover Cuba and Hispaniola. Christopher Columbus and his European crew left a mark on these “East Indies”, as Columbus referred to them, which changed the way the natives lived forever, giving them the benefits of Christianity, trade, and Western Civilization, as no explorer had done before. While Columbus’ physical discoveries may have been limited to the several islands on which he landed, it was, as one author stated, “not only Hispaniola that Columbus’ great discovery opened up, [but] everything from Point Barrow, Alaska to Cape Horn—a new world. It brought rescue and liberation for the fifteen million Indians of Mexico... [and] it offered new homelands for the peoples of Europe, including the United States of America,” the country which rose up to put down some of the greatest evils of history, such as the German Nazis and the Soviet Communists (Carroll, Warren H. *Isabel of Spain: The Catholic Queen* 230). Columbus himself even “felt that his discovery would influence the destiny of nations” (Deferrari et al. 1). And so, with this first pivotal journey of the famed navigator completed (along with the success of his return voyage to recall the details of his adventure), the seeds of a global cultural revolution were sown, and Columbus’ work paved the way for other explorations and the development of newly discovered lands and societies.

With the groundwork laid for a global change, scores of explorers, such as Amerigo Vespucci and Juan Ponce de Leon, followed the path of Columbus and explored more parts of the New World (Carroll, Anne W. *Christ and the Americas* 13). Because of Christopher Columbus, these explorers embarked on their quests, meaning Columbus’ relatively small but crucial discovery had the impetus to provide for a multitude of other

geographical discoveries. By exploring the New World, European culture, most clearly materialized by language and religion, was transmitted to the Americas and is still detectable today. For example, Columbus and his Spanish crew explored some of Latin America, and, even today, those countries still largely speak Spanish and practice Christianity. This link between the “Old World” and the “New World” of today proves that Columbus’ initial discovery was a cultural catalyst of the most significant proportions.

Unfortunately, many modern thinkers tend to deemphasize the greatness of Christopher Columbus. However, by gathering more accurate information, such myths have been debunked (Ortiz), and Columbus’ historical legacy rests on his navigational expertise, his undaunted courage, and his fervent saintliness. The admirable admiral gained the attention of Spain as a holy missionary, but won support from Spain due to his bold assurance of discovery. Correspondingly, Columbus wrote that the King and Queen of Spain “resolved to send [him]... with a view that [the Indians] might be converted to [Spain’s] holy faith; and... that [he] should go by way of the west, whither up to [his] day, [men did] not know for certain that any one [had] gone” (Columbus 16). The qualities comprising this monumental seafarer destined him to help, quite literally, shape the globe. Nevertheless, an all too large number of historians tend to discredit any discoveries Columbus “made”, and transfer the credit to those Vikings and Islanders who reached a part of the Americas years before Columbus was born. As for the Vikings, Europeans of Columbus’ time held that “Vinland [the Viking settlement on Greenland] existed only in myths” (Davidson 37). While Columbus’ brave new journey gave Europe tangible information confirming the westward land, only his expeditions opened the door for the spread of Western Civilization. Moreover, “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” (Carroll, Warren H. “Honoring Christopher Columbus” 1). It is clear, then, that Columbus was truly the “discoverer” of the Americas, because people were uncertain of any land actually existing across the Atlantic Ocean before Columbus’ adventures. Consequently, the discoverer of the New World ought to be praised and remembered by generations after him for his illustrious feats in spite of nearly impossible odds.

It is with this praise in mind that all Italians, all Europeans, all Americans, and all people should look to Christopher Columbus as a legendary figure, remembering that his great accomplishments revolutionized the Old World and opened up a great New World.

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