

WINNING ESSAY



Logan Kneller
Stewartstown, PA

Columbus's Ripple Throughout Italy

Throughout human history, discovery has played a crucial role in our lives. Whether it be the waters of Norway or the forests of Croatia, every new finding slightly benefits the world. The discovery of America by the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus shared this similarity, except for one significant distinction: its profound impact on the world as a whole. Although we tend to think of the country that Columbus sailed for, Spain, as the country that prospered the most from it, there are far more countries that soared above their past selves. One of the most essential and considerable examples is Columbus's homeland: Italy.

Although Italy benefited greatly from America, it was in a state of crisis at the time Columbus encountered it. Lorenzo de Medici, the ruler of the Florentines, died in 1492 (the very same year that Columbus discovered America). He was considered vital in keeping the five major Italian powers in check, and with him gone, they began to fight. Thus, the European struggle over land in the newly discovered America caused Italy to have both internal and external conflict. However, with the discovery of America, this low point was turned into an age known as the Italian High Renaissance, a period of intellectual and cultural change throughout Italy. The new technologies, ideas, and forms of artistic expression sparked countless Italian artists' imaginations. These effects are seen even today: Many famous and historical art pieces, such as the Last Supper, the Creation of Adam, and the Mona Lisa, were created during this time.

Religious beliefs were significantly altered as well. Italy had been almost entirely Catholic for over one thousand years. The Roman Catholic

Church was incredibly powerful, appointing many Italian politicians and even having the Pope as a king. However, with the discovery of America, many people began to rethink the world's origin. The most common thought was that Europe, Asia, and Africa were the only continents on Earth. The finding of America proved this theory wrong, however, so many people began to adopt new religions and practices. The most prevalent new religious movements were Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation, which took power away from the churches and permanently transformed Italy.

Multiple scientific fields in Italy advanced considerably due to the New World. Columbus's voyage showed the people of Europe that they had been ignorant of the world and would have to investigate things beyond what their religious scriptures said. This jump-started the Scientific Revolution, a period in time when Europe began to make extensive discoveries about the world. Many Italian scientists became fascinated with the study of plants and animals from America. This led to the establishment of botanical gardens and scientific societies across Italy. Through science, many Italians found a common interest that they could all appreciate and collaborate upon.

The economic impact that America had on Italy can also not be understated. Initially, the primary benefit for Italy (and all of Europe) was the discovery of new species of potatoes, tomatoes, wheat, tobacco, and maize. Since crops are easily transportable and few are needed to create more, they could easily be transported to and spread throughout Europe. The crops and consequent new foods would help to boost Italy's economy. As more and more ships began to sail to America, valuable and heavy resources could be taken back to Europe cost-effectively. Gold, silver, copper, and other precious materials were returned and distributed across the continent. This, of course, benefited Italy. The new trade routes and resources formed from the new land fueled Italy's merchant class and helped its economy even more. These factors would be critical since Italy still had turmoil, and the economic activity likely eased some of the tension.

Life in Italy became significantly more luxurious after America was discovered, too. The land in America was primarily uninhabited, meaning that large amounts of work could be outsourced. Because of this, most things commercially sold in Italy had prices slashed, enabling Italian prosperity. Additionally, the land allowed Italians to migrate to America for a better life. Although this hurt Italy's workforce, it caused those who stayed to compete with

fewer people for resources and alleviated some stress on the Italian government. Those who left for America had differing levels of success, with some starting a fresh new life and others facing extreme hardships. Unfortunately, almost all of them would face severe racial discrimination from others who did not believe they were “white” enough.

The balance of power would dramatically shift in Europe due to Columbus’s discovery as well. While Italy’s trade was still excellent, other countries such as Spain began to have superior trade because of the new routes, colonies, and trading posts. The intense political battle within Italy was still raging on as well. Although it had many large contributions to the discovery and formation of America, Italy itself would not be politically unified until the late 1800s when Napoleon’s invasion and downfall caused nationalist ideals to spread. As a result, Italy could not capitalize on all the benefits, and it fell behind in the competition for dominance in the New World. However, it was still bettered in countless ways by the discovery of the Americas overall.

From Columbus's journey across the vast Atlantic Ocean in 1492, countless things have changed. His findings permanently transformed Italy, whether religious, scientific, economic, cultural, or political. Even today, America affects and changes Italy in countless ways, from immigration to diplomacy. Through all of the discovery, research, and innovation, Columbus’s odyssey to America has shaped Italy into what it is, what it was, and what it will be for millennia to come.

Bibliography

Cachey, Theodore J. *Italy and the Invention of America* . Notre Dame, Indiana: Michigan State University Press, 2002.

Harari, Yuval N. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* . New York: Harper, 2011.

“How Columbus Sailed Into U.S. History, Thanks To Italians.” National Public Radio, 14 October 2013, www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/14/232120128/how-columbus-sailed-into-u-s-history-thanks-to-italians . Accessed 11 March 2023.

Irving, Washington. *A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. New York: G&C Carwell, 1828.

“Rome and Southern Italy, 1400–1600 A.D.” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History , 2002, www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/?period=08®ion=eust. Accessed 11 March 2023.

Starr-Lebeau, Gretchen D. *American Eras: Early American Civilizations and Exploration to 1600*. Gale Research: 1998.