

Primary and Secondary Sources- Christopher Columbus

SOURCE ONE: *The Spanish "Requisition"*- an announcement that the Spanish explorers (conquistadors) read to the Indians when they arrived in a new land. Note: it was read in Spanish, even though the Indians did not speak Spanish.

I implore (beg) you to recognize the Church as a lady and in the name of the Pope take the King as lord of this land and obey his mandates. If you do not do it, I tell you that with the help of God I will enter powerfully against you all. I will make war everywhere and every way I can. I will subject you to the yoke and obedience to the Church and majesty. I will take your women and children and make the slaves... The deaths and injuries that you will receive from here on will be your own fault and not that of his majesty nor of the gentlemen that accompany me.

SOURCE TWO: *Columbus' diary*- entry from his 1492 trip (the first trip)- the third day on land

October 14, 1492

They... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things. They willingly traded everything they owned... They were well build with handsome features. They do not bear arms (weapons), and do not know them. I showed them a sword, they took it and cut themselves out of ignorance. They would make fine servants... with fifty men we could subjugate (overpower) them and make them do whatever we want.

SOURCE THREE: "Discovery of America by Christopher Columbus"- A painting by Spanish Artist Salvador Dali, completed in 1959



Zoomed→



SOURCE FOUR: *Columbus' travel diary* from his trip in 1492- the second day on land.

October 13, 1492

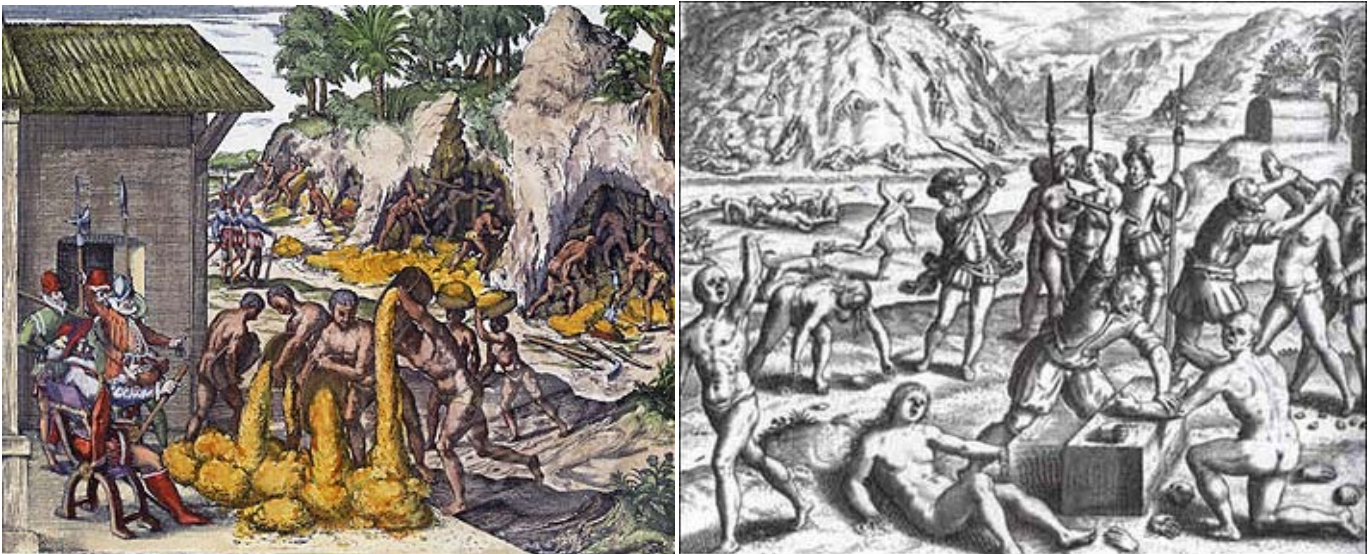
At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, and very handsome. Their hair was not curly but loose and coarse like horse-hair... Their eyes are large and very beautiful. They are not black, but the color of the inhabitants of the Canaries. I... strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of metal hanging at their noses, I gathered... there was a king who possessed great cups full of gold.

SOURCE FIVE: "Columbus and the Indians"-An excerpt from *A Young People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. Copyright: 2009

Columbus' promises [to the King and Queen of Spain, of gold and slaves] won him seventeen ships and more than 1,200 men for his second expedition. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island capturing Indians... Columbus' men searched Haiti for gold, with no success. They had to fill up the ships with something, so in 1495 they went on a great slave raid.

Two hundred slaves [out of 500] died on the voyage to Spain. Too many slaves died in captivity. Columbus was desperate to show a profit on his voyages. He had to make good on his promise to fill the ships with gold. Columbus and his men ordered everyone over the age of 13 to collect gold for them. Indians who did not give gold to the Spaniards had their hands cut off and bled to death.

SOURCE SIX: Thomas de Bry Paintings-*Paintings created in the 1500's to illustrate books about the explorers. De Bry never visited the Americas.*



SOURCE SEVEN: Arawak Resistance- An excerpt from "Lies My Teacher Told Me", copyright: 2007

After awhile, the Natives had had enough. At first their resistance was mostly passive. They refused to plant food for the Spanish to take. They abandoned towns near the Spanish settlements. Finally, the Arawaks fought back. Their sticks and stones were no more effective against the

armed and clothed Spanish, however, than the earthlings' rifles against the aliens' death rays in *War of the Worlds*. The attempts at resistance gave Columbus an excuse to make war. On March 24, 1495, he set out to conquer the Arawaks.

SOURCE EIGHT: Observations by Bartolome de las Casas- *Written after the Spanish priest witnessed the cruelty against the Arawak in the 1500s.*

As for the newly born, they died early because their mothers, overworked and famished [starving], had no milk to nurse them. And for this reason, while I was in Cuba, 7,000 children died in three months. Some mothers even drowned their babies from sheer desperation... In this way, husbands died in the mines, wives died at work, and children died from lack of milk... My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write...

SOURCE NINE: Observations by Bartolome de las Casas- *Written after the Spanish priest witnessed the cruelty against the Arawak in the 1500s.*

Since the Admiral [Columbus] perceived that daily the people of the land were taking up arms, ridiculous weapons in reality [wooden spears and bows]... he hastened [hurried] to proceed to the country and disperse and subdue, by force of arms, the people of the entire island... For this he chose 2000 foot soldiers and 20 cavalry [soldiers on horses], with many crossbows and small cannon, lances, and swords, and a still more terrible weapon against the Indians, in addition to the horses: this was 20 hunting dogs, who were turned loose and immediately tore the Indians apart.

SOURCE TEN: Understanding History through Columbus- *An excerpt from "Lies My Teacher Told Me", copyright: 2007*

Columbus' "second voyage marks the first [clash] between European and Indian societies. The clash of cultures echoes down through five centuries." These are not just details about Haiti between 1493 and 1500. They are facts important to understanding American history.

The [violent] methods that Columbus used were his legacy. He and Spain wanted to take over new land. Being violent worked. After 1500, Portugal, France, Holland, and England joined in conquering the Americas. These nations were at least as brutal as Spain. The English, unlike the Spanish, did not use Native labor, but just forced them out of the way.

SOURCE ELEVEN: Samuel Eliot Morison- *An excerpt from "A Young People's History of the United States", by Howard Zinn, copyright: 2009*

Morison (the most famous historian to write about Columbus) did not lie about Columbus. He did not leave out the mass murder. But he mentioned the truth quickly and then went on to other things. By burying the fact of genocide in a lot of other information, he seemed to be saying that the mass murder wasn't very important in the big picture. At the end of the book, Morison summed up his idea of Columbus as a great man. Columbus' most important quality, Morison said, was his seamanship.

SOURCE TWELVE: "Columbus and the Indians"-An excerpt from *A Young People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. Copyright: 2009. This excerpt retells forms of Indian resistance and Columbus' reaction to this.

The Indians had been given an impossible task. 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. When they took prisoners, they hanged them or burned them to death. Unable to fight against the Spanish soldiers' guns, swords, armor, and horses, the Arawaks began to commit mass suicide with poison.

SOURCE THIRTEEN: A Historian's Job- An excerpt from "*A Young People's History of the United States*", by Howard Zinn, copyright: 2009

A historian must pick and choose among facts, deciding which ones to put into his or her work, which ones to leave out, and which ones to place at the center of the story. Every historian's own ideas and beliefs go into the way he or she writes history. In turn, the way history is written can shape the ideas and beliefs of the people who read it. Writing history is a matter of taking sides. A view of history like Morison's, a picture of the past that sees Columbus and others like him as great sailors and discoverers, but says almost nothing about their genocide, can make it seem as though what they did was right.

SOURCE FOURTEEN: Paraphrased information from "Lies My Teacher Told Me", Copyright: 2007

Although not the first European to explore North America and South America, Columbus is recognized as "THE FIRST" because of the lasting impacts he made. Columbus successfully crossed the Atlantic four times. Unlike La Salle, who got lost on his second voyage, Columbus and his men were able to continuously find the same islands, which show expertise in navigation and sea travel.

Because of Columbus, and his decision to bring gold, slaves, and goods across the Atlantic, from the Caribbean to Europe, trans-Atlantic trade began. It is sometimes called the "Columbian Trade" because Columbus started this process. Part of this trans (cross)-Atlantic trade was the slave trade.

Columbus also made it a "norm" to go to an unknown place and take land, money and labor from the native people. While not a positive choice, this model of conquest was used and is still used by many today.

Finally, from the point of view of the European nations who benefited from Columbus and other explorers, his trips were successful. This is because their countries grew in wealth and land. He helped add even more power to these countries.