

Socratic Seminar

Topic: October 9 Columbus Day is observed in the United States. Some view Columbus as a murderer and others view him as a hero. Should we celebrate Columbus? Why? Why not?

Task: Answer all questions completely. Be sure to cite your references. Be ready to share the day of the seminar. *All* will share, as the discussion is graded. (See Rubric on the back of the last page.)

1. Why do we celebrate Columbus? Did he really “discover” America?
2. Write down at least 5 points from David E. Stannard’s article, “Genocide in the America’s”.
3. Explain. Why did you choose the points?
4. How is Columbus portrayed in Stannard’s article? List some examples.
4. Write down at least 5 main points in the *Capitalism Magazine* article.

5. Why did you choose those points?

6. How does the author in *Capitalism Magazine*, Michael Berliner, portray Columbus?
Cite examples.

7. How do you account for the differences in the first 2 articles?

8. How does Mario Cuomo feel about Columbus? What about Wilma Mankiller?

9. Which article do you agree with most? Why? Cite your references.

10. Should we just do away with Columbus Day altogether? Why?

David E. Stannard, "Genocide In the America's"

It has become fashionable to acknowledge what for almost five centuries was ignored but what out spoken native people today have made it impossible to disregard – that the voyages of Columbus launched a blood bath – while at the same time explaining away or even justifying the slaughter. Thus, noted anthropologist Marvin Harris describes the post-Colombian devastation, both in the West Indies and throughout the Americas, as accidental, an "unintended consequence" of European exploration. It was disease that killed off the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, disease innocently carried in the breath and on the bodies of the European adventurers. As Alfred Crosby, a leading scholar on the impact of disease in history recently put it, "The first European colonists...did not want the Amerindians to die," but unfortunately the natives "did not wear well."

Like the histories of so many conquering peoples, this is a comforting lie. Epidemic disease undeniably contributed in large measure to the carnage, but in many volumes of testimony the Europeans explorers themselves detail their murderous intentions and actions. In the Caribbean and Meso- and South America they enslaved the native people, chaining them together at the neck and marching them in columns to find gold and silver mines, decapitating any who did not walk quickly enough. They sliced off women's breasts for sport and fed their babies to packs of armored wolfhounds and mastiffs that accompanied the Spanish soldiers. "They would test their swords and their manly strength on captured Indians," wrote a Spanish eyewitness to the massacres, "and place bets on the slicing of heads or the cutting of bodies in half with one blow."

On the island of Espanola under Columbus's government ships 50,000 native people died within a matter of months following the establishment of the first Spanish colony. That is the proportional equivalent of 1.5 million dead Americans today – more than twice the number of U.S. battle deaths in the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam combined. When the Caribbean holocaust exhausted itself around 1535, the extermination, in number of deaths and proportion of the population affected, vastly exceeded that of any of the hideous genocides that have occurred in the twentieth century against Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Ibos, Bengalis, Timorese, Cambodians, Ugandans, and others.

By that time, however, destruction on an even grander scale was under way in Mexico and Central America. In November of 1519, Herando Cortes and accompanying conquistadors became the first Westerners to gaze upon the magnificent Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, an island metropolis far larger and more dazzling than anything they had ever seen in Europe. Less than two years later that incredible city, which had at least five times the population of either London or Serrville at the time, was a smoldering ruin.

Tenochtitlan, with 350,000 resident, had been the jewel of an empire that contained exquisite cities. All were destroyed. Before the coming of the Europeans, central Mexico, radiating out from those metropolitan centers over many tens of thousands of square miles, had contained about 25 million people

almost ten times the population of England at the time. Seventy-five years later hardly more than 1 million were left. And central Mexico, where 95 out every 100 people perished, was typical. In Central America the grisly pattern held and worsened. In western Nicaragua the rate of extermination was 99 per cent – from more than 1 million people to less than 100,000 in just sixty years.

And then the holocaust spread to South America. Before the arrival of the Europeans the of what today are Peru and Chile was somewhere between 9 million and 14 million. A century later it was barely 500,000. In Brazil and the rest of the continent the story was the same.

Death of the magnitude eventually becomes incomprehensible. Thus the vignette is more revealing, such as the case in Peru of one Roque Martin who in the words of Pedro Ieza de Leon the Spanish chronicler of the conquest kept the quarters of Indians hanging has porch to feed his dogs with, as if they were wild beasts."

All told it is likely that between 60 million and 80 million people from the Andes to Amazon had perished as a result of the European invasion even before the dawning of the seventeenth century. Although much of that ghastly population collapse was caused by the spread of European diseases to which the native peoples had no immunity, an enormous amount of it was mass murder. A good deal, as well, derived from simply working the enslaved native laborers to death....

...On the very day that Columbus finally set forth on his journey that would shake the world, the port of the city he sailed from was filled with ships that were deporting Jews from Spain. By the time the expulsion was complete between 120,000 and 150,000 Jews had been driven from their homes (their valuables, often meager, having first been confiscated) and then they were cast out to sea. As one contemporary described the scene:

"It was pitiful to see their sufferings. Many were consumed by hunger, especially nursing mothers and their babies. Half-dead mothers held dying children in their arms....I can hardly say how cruelly and greedily they were treated by those who transported them. Many were drowned by the avarice of the sailors, and those who were unable to pay their passage sold their children."

This was the world an ex-trader of African slaves named Christopher Columbus and his shipmates left behind as they sailed from the city of Palos in August of 1492. It was a world wracked by disease—disease that killed in massive numbers, but, importantly, that also tended to immunize survivors. A world in which all but the wealthy often could not feed themselves, and in which the wealthy themselves hungered after gold. It was a world, as well, of cruel violence and certainty of holy truth. Little wonder, then, that the first report back from that Atlantic voyage, purportedly to the Orient, caused such sensations across the length and breadth of Europe....

...Ludicrous though this scene may appear to us in retrospect, at the time it was a deadly serious ritual, similar in ways equally ludicrous and deadly to the other famous ritual the Spanish bestowed upon the non-Spanish-speaking people of the Americas, the *requerimiento*.

CAPITALISM MAGAZINE

IN DEFENSE OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

The Christopher Columbus Controversy: Western Civilization vs. Primitivism

by Michael Berliner (October 14, 1999)

Article website address: <http://www.CapMag.com/article.asp?ID=149>

Summary: Did Columbus "discover" America? Yes -- in every important respect.

[CapMag.com] Columbus Day approaches, but to the "politically correct" this is no cause for celebration. On the contrary, they view the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 as an occasion to be mourned. They have mourned, they have attacked, and they have intimidated schools across the country into replacing Columbus Day celebrations with "ethnic diversity" days.

The politically correct view is that Columbus did not discover America, because people had lived here for thousands of years. Worse yet, it's claimed, the main legacy of Columbus is death and destruction. Columbus is routinely vilified as a symbol of slavery and genocide, and the celebration of his arrival likened to a celebration of Hitler and the Holocaust. The attacks on Columbus are ominous, because the actual target is Western civilization.

Did Columbus "discover" America? Yes -- in every important respect. This does not mean that no human eye had been cast on America before Columbus arrived. It does mean that Columbus brought America to the attention of the civilized world, i.e., to the growing, scientific civilizations of Western Europe. The result, ultimately, was the United States of America. It was Columbus' discovery for Western Europe that led to the influx of ideas and people on which this nation was founded -- and on which it still rests. The opening of America brought the ideas and achievements of Aristotle, Galileo, Newton, and the thousands of thinkers, writers, and inventors who followed.

Prior to 1492, what is now the United States was sparsely inhabited, unused, and undeveloped. The inhabitants were primarily hunter-gatherers, wandering across the land, living from hand-to-mouth and from day-to-day. There was virtually no change, no growth for thousands of years. With rare exception, life was nasty, brutish, and short: there was no wheel, no written language, no division of labor, little agriculture and scant permanent settlement; but there were endless, bloody wars. Whatever the problems it brought, the vilified Western culture also brought enormous, undreamed-of benefits, without which most of today's Indians would be infinitely poorer or not even alive.

Columbus should be honored, for in so doing, we honor Western civilization. But the critics do not want to bestow such honor, because their real goal is to denigrate the values of

Western civilization and to glorify the primitivism, mysticism, and collectivism embodied in the tribal cultures of American Indians. They decry the glorification of the West as "Eurocentrism." We should, they claim, replace our reverence for Western civilization with multi-culturalism, which regards all cultures as morally equal. In fact, they aren't. Some cultures are better than others: a free society is better than slavery; reason is better than brute force as a way to deal with other men; productivity is better than stagnation. In fact, Western civilization stands for man at his best. It stands for the values that make human life possible: reason, science, self-reliance, individualism, ambition, productive achievement. The values of Western civilization are values for all men; they cut across gender, ethnicity, and geography. We should honor Western civilization not for the ethnocentric reason that some of us happen to have European ancestors but because it is the objectively superior culture.

Underlying the political collectivism of the anti-Columbus crowd is a racist view of human nature. They claim that one's identity is primarily ethnic: if one thinks his ancestors were good, he will supposedly feel good about himself; if he thinks his ancestors were bad, he will supposedly feel self-loathing. But it doesn't work; the achievements or failures of one's ancestors are monumentally irrelevant to one's actual worth as a person. Only the lack of a sense of self leads one to look to others to provide what passes for a sense of identity. Neither the deeds nor misdeeds of others are his own; he can take neither credit nor blame for what someone else chose to do. There are no racial achievements or racial failures, only individual achievements and individual failures. One cannot inherit moral worth or moral vice. "Self-esteem through others" is a self-contradiction.

Thus the sham of "preserving one's heritage" as a rational life goal. Thus the cruel hoax of "multicultural education" as an antidote to racism: it will continue to create more racism.

Individualism is the only alternative to the racism of political correctness. We must recognize that everyone is a sovereign entity, with the power of choice and independent judgment. That is the ultimate value of Western civilization, and it should be proudly proclaimed.

This editorial is copyrighted by the Ayn Rand Institute and is reproduced here with ARI's permission. Visit their MediaLink at <http://www.aynrand.org/medialink/>.

About the Author: Dr. Berliner is the senior advisor to the Ayn Rand Archives. He was the executive director of the Ayn Rand Institute from its founding to January 2000.

CAPITALISM MAGAZINE

IN DEFENSE OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

Copyright 2005-1997 Capitalism Magazine. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

Mario Cuomo, Scholastic Update, Sept. 20 1991

In my family, Columbus has always been viewed as hero, as in many other Italian homes. (Columbus was born in Italy) Having October 12 as national holiday has given many Italian great pride.

I think we should all recognize, though, that not all groups are going to feel the same way about Columbus. But I think it is also unfair to conclude that...Columbus is unworthy of being hailed as a great explorer, as a man who introduced an old world to anew one. He started a democratic system that we still hold on today, even though it wasn't perfect and still isn't perfect.

Wilma Mankiller, Scholastic Update, Sept. 20 1991

People have to realize that many Native Americans view America's worshipping Columbus as an insult. Even though the comparison may seem strange to some, many see him as a pre-colonial day Hitler. He not only stripped native Americans of their land, but their culture and livelihood.

Samuel Eliot Morison, Admiral of the Ocean Sea, 1942

Christopher Columbus belonged to an age that was past, yet became the sign and symbol of [a] new age of hope, glory, and accomplishment. His medieval faith impelled him to a modern solution: expansion. If the Turk could not be pried loose from the Holy Sepulchre by ordinary means, let Europe seek new means overseas; and he Christopher the Christ-bearer, would be the humble yet proud instrument of Europe's regeneration. So it turned out, although not as he anticipated. The equipment and superabundance of stout-heartedness, gave Europe new confidence in herself, more than doubled the area of which, planted with great seed, have now sprung up to the fructification of the world".

In his faith, his deductive methods, of reasoning, his unquestioning acceptance of the current ethics, Columbus was a man of the Middle Ages, and in the best sense. In his readiness to translate thought into action, in lively curiosity and accurate observation of natural phenomena, in his joyous sense of adventure and desire to win wealth and recognition, he was a modern man. This dualism makes the character and career of Columbus a puzzle to the dull-witted, a delight to the discerning. It unlocks most of the so-called Columbus "mysteries", "questions", and "problem", which were neither mysteries, questions, nor problems to his contemporaries, but recent creations of dull pedants without faith who never tasted of sea adventure".

Hans Konig, Columbus: His Enterprise, 1991

It lies within our comfortable liberal tradition that we don't like events to be depicted in stark colors. We like shadings. We particularly don't like things or people to be written up as all bad. Everything has its nuances, we claim. Only fanatics and extremists fail to see that.

.... Well, fanatical and extreme as it may be, I find it very hard to think of any shadings or nuances in a character portrait of Christopher Columbus.

Grant him the originality and fierce ambition needed to set that western course. But what else is there to say? Here was a man greedy large ways, and in small ways- to the point where he took for himself the reward for first sighting land from the Pinta lookout. Cruel in petty things, as when he set a dying monkey with two paws cut off to fight a wild pig; cruel on a continental scale, as when he set in motion what de las Casas called "the begging of the bloody trail of conquest across the Americas"

1492 Privileges and Prerogatives Granted to Columbus

For years Columbus had been trying to find someone to finance his idea. He wanted to sail westward to reach India. Finally King Ferdinand Queen Isabella of Spain agreed to help him Here is an excerpt from the terms they agreed to.

For as much of you. Christopher Columbus are going by our command, with some of our vessels and men, to discover and subdue some island and continent in the ocean, and it is hoped that by God's assistance, some of the said islands and continent in the ocean will be discovered and conquered by your means and conduct, therefore it is but just and reasonable, that since you expose yourself to such danger to serve us, you should be rewarded for it. And we being willing to honour and favour you for the reasons aforesaid; Our will is, that you Christopher Columbus, after discovering and conquering the said islands ocean or any of them, shall be our admiral of the said islands and continent you shall so discover and conquer; and that you be our admiral, viceroy, and governor in them, and that for the future, your may call and style yourself D. Cristobol Colon, and that your sons and successors in the said employment, may call themselves dons, admirals, viceroys, and governors of them. [Privileges and Prerogatives Granted to Columbus, April 30, 1492].

Class Discussion Rubric

	5	4	3	2	1
Quality of Comments	Timely and appropriate comments, thoughtful and reflective, responds respectfully to other student's remarks, provokes questions and comments from the group	Volunteers comments, most are appropriate and reflect some thoughtfulness, leads to other questions or remarks from student and/or others	Volunteers comments but lacks depth, may or may not lead to other questions from students	Struggles but participates, occasionally offers a comment when directly questioned, may simply restate questions or points previously raised, may add nothing new to the discussion or provoke no responses or question	Does not participate and/or only makes negative or disruptive remarks, comments are inappropriate or off topic
Resource/Document Reference	Clear reference to text being discussed and connects to it to other text or reference points from previous readings and discussions	Has done the reading with some thoroughness, may lack some detail or critical insight	Has done the reading; lacks thoroughness of understanding or insight	Has not read the entire text and cannot sustain any reference to it in the course of discussion	Unable to refer to text for evidence or support of remarks
Active Listening	Posture, demeanor and behavior clearly demonstrate respect and attentiveness to others	Listens to others most of the time, does not stay focused on other's comments (too busy formulating own) or loses continuity of discussion. Shows consistency in responding to the comments of others	Listens to others some of the time, does not stay focused on other's comments (too busy formulating own) or loses continuity of discussion. Shows some consistency in responding to the comments of others	Drifts in and out of discussion, listening to some remarks while clearly missing or ignoring others	Disrespectful of others when they are speaking; behavior indicates total non-involvement with group or discussion