

# Christopher columbus and genocide

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



My fellow congressmen and senators, today we convene to discuss the repercussions of events that occurred nearly three-hundred years before our nation's birth; events that, had they not occurred, it is a certainty that the United States of America would not exist as it does today. The event I am speaking about of course is the world famous voyage of the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, and his subsequent discovery of the American continents. One thing that is not disputed by any historian of merit is the fact that Christopher Columbus' landing in the Americas led directly to the European colonization of the area, and this colonization (which Columbus was directly involved in) was brutally exploitative, and fatally devastating to the natives of the area. While Christopher Columbus is a historical figure of great significance in our nations' past who exhibited admirable courage, and leadership aptitude, it must be acknowledged that to celebrate his legacy is to celebrate the subjugation, abuse, and murder of millions of Native Americans. For this reason, I am in support of renaming Columbus Day, however, not to Indian Resistance Day, but to Native American Resistance Day, in order to honor those who lost their country in the process of our gaining our own. First let it be known that Columbus' voyage which culminated in the European discovery of the Americas took place for one explicit purpose, money. It was believed at this time that there was great wealth to be found in Asia. This belief came from land expeditions across what was known as the " Silk Road" a path from Europe to Asia crossing deserts and mountains of the region known as the Middle-East. However, because this land was conquered during this period of time by the Turks, who were not receptive to foreign travelers, the rulers of Europe were

searching for a water route to Asia (Churchill 113). Christopher Columbus estimated that by crossing the Atlantic Ocean, he would be able to reach Asia and thus claim a great deal of wealth for Spain. The Spanish crown financed his journey under the terms that he would be entitled to ten percent of whatever wealth he was able to procure on his journey (Zinn pg. 2). Columbus miscalculated the distance from Europe to Asia by thousands of miles, but approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the way there, his crew saw an island uncharted by European mapmakers of the times, an island in the modern day Bahamas. The people of this island called themselves Arawak, and were known for their generosity. Columbus wrote of them in his diary " They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword and they took it by the edge, cutting themselves out of ignorance...they would make fine servants...with fifty men, we could subjugate them all, and make them do whatever we want (Churchill 3)." This would be a continuing trend in the thoughts and behavior of Columbus in particular, and Spanish explorers in General. Columbus later noticed that many of the Arawaks wore bits of gold in their ear lobes as jewelry. This led Columbus to take a number of natives captive to show him the source of the gold. After being led to streams and rivers with gold particles in the water, Columbus sailed to modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic presumably with dreams of lands flooded with riches. Here, the cruelty of the Spanish explorer would be made dreadfully apparent. Upon reaching Haiti, Columbus sent reports that he had reached Asia and that if a second expedition could be funded, he would bring back to Spain as many slaves and as much gold as they could need. Unfortunately, when he returned to Haiti on his second voyage, he could find little more

gold than the small deposits that could be found in the rivers and streams there. To make up for his claims of boundless gold, he set about with his fortified force of 1200 men and seventeen ships to bring back to Spain a cargo of as many enslaved natives as he could capture and carry. He departed with five-hundred men women and children, all but two-hundred of which died on the voyage to Spain, and once there, the rest were sold to men of the Spanish noble class (Churchill 7). This cargo however was not sufficient to keep Columbus's investors interested for long. When he returned to the new world on his third expedition, Columbus enacted ruthless tactics to make up for his lack-luster second voyage. Columbus told the inhabitants of the Island of Haiti, that everyone fourteen years old and older was responsible for turning over to Spanish custody a certain amount of gold every three months. Those who did were given a copper coin to wear around their necks as a sign they had fulfilled their obligations, those not found wearing a silver coin engraved with the current marking were subject to beatings and mutilations to motivate them to meet their tyrants quota. The Arawaks, realizing that the gold quotas they were given were impossible to fill, attempted to fight back, but against the Spanish with their superior weaponry and warfare tactics, they were decimated by the thousands (Churchill 14). By the year 1500, the Arawak population had been cut in half by a combination of murder, suicide, slavery and disease. By 1505, the Arawaks were enslaved to produce crops exported to Spain, mainly sugar. This form of slavery was so harsh that by 1515, only 50, 000 of a former (in 1492) 250, 000 Arawaks still lived on the island, and by the year 1650 a Spanish census could find no Arawaks living in the area, hence the

exploitative practices administered by Christopher Columbus and continued by his successors successfully eradicated an entire race and culture from the face of the earth (Zinn 115). Because of the magnitude of Christopher Columbus's discovery of a water route from Europe to the Americas, he surely deserves a place in history. However as the result of the unscrupulous practices of slavery, murder, and eventual genocide that he instituted for the sake of gaining wealth for him self and his country, he must not be treated as a heroic figure. Instead, let us take the upcoming holiday of Oct 10, to honor the Native Americans mislabeled " Indians" who lost their land and their lives resisting the system that the misguided Christopher Columbus worked to put in order.