

# Columbus and indians essay



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Regarding the article, “ Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress, Dr. Howard Zinn argues that there is another perspective to consider as to Christopher Columbus’ adventures. Dr.

Howard Zinn’s position is that history books have omissions of slavery, death and innocent bloodshed that accompanied the adventures of Christopher Columbus. In the following statements Dr. Howard Zinn describes his perspective; “ The writer began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian Settlement in the Americas. That beginning, when you read Las Casas- even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says or 250, 000, as modern historians calculate) is conquest, slavery, and death.

When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventures, there is no mention of innocent bloodshed, and Columbus Day is a celebration”. In describing his position, Dr. Zinn references Christopher Columbus’ personal log and “ eye witness” accounts of the history of the Indies written by a priest by the name of Bartolome’ De Las Casas. Dr.

Zinn describes De Las Casas as a participant in what he calls the “ conquest” of Cuba. This priest authored 2 volumes on the history of the Indies, and Dr. Zinn supports his arguments in part based on information recorded in De Las Casas’ books. Dr. Zinn begins the article in support of his position by relating a statement Columbus recorded in his log; “ As soon as I arrived in the Indies, on the first island which I found, I took some of the

natives by force in order that they might learn and give me of whatever there is in these parts”.

Dr. Zinn goes on to say that Columbus’ adventures, what he calls “conquest” was motivated by material gain. Dr. Zinn states that what Columbus wanted the Indians to know was that “ the information Columbus wanted the most was; where is the gold”. In support of this statement, Dr Zinn uses another quote from Columbus’ log; “ They brought us parrots, balls of cotton and spears and many other things which they exchanged for the items such as glass beads and hawks’ bells. They were willing to trade everything they owned.

They were will built, with good bodies and handsome features. They would make fine servants.... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want”. In this quote, Dr.

Zinn gives what he believed to be another motivation of Columbus, which was the motivation to make the Indians into slaves for monetary gain. Dr. Zinn believed this to be the motivation of what he termed the “ Europe of the Renaissance”. Dr Zinn states; “ theses traits, speaking of the Arawak, did not stand in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, the frenzy for the money that marketed Western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus. Dr. Zinn references numerous accounts of innocent bloodshed, cruelty and the enslavement of Indians by Columbus and his soldiers from De Las Casa’s books prior to Columbus’ return to Spain.

Dr. Zinn records the following statements from De Las Casa book in which he says; “ Endless testimonies ... prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives. But our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy; small wonder, then, if they tried to kill one of us now and then.

... The admiral, it is true, was blind as those who came after him, and he was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians.

... To please the King, Columbus would have to deliver on his promise to the King to receive the 10% profit that Dr.

Zinn states the King promised to Columbus if he would deliver to the King everything that he promised. Quoting Dr. Zinn, “ In return for bringing back gold and spices, they promised Columbus 10 percent of the profits, governorship over new-found lands, and the fame that would go with a new title: Admiral of the Ocean Sea”. Upon his return to Spain, Dr. Zinn notes that Columbus had no significant amounts of gold, only a few enslaved Indians who survived the voyage to Spain.

It is at this point that Dr. Zinn makes his strongest argument in the article as to why he thinks he’s clear in his position. Dr. Zinn states; “ after his return to Spain from his first voyage and reported to the court at Madrid as to what he had seen, beautiful land, wide rivers where the majority gold was, he also reported there were many spices, and great mines of gold and other metals”  
Dr.

Zinn felt that this report at Madrid represent Columbus' motivation very clearly, to enslave Indians and bring back as much gold to Spain as possible; " He concluded his report by asking for a little help from their Majesties, and in return he would bring them from his next voyage " as much gold as they need ... and as many slaves as they ask. " Dr. Zinn writes that after Columbus's report at Madrid, Columbus returned to the Americas with 17 ships and 1200 men to bring back slaves and as much gold as the king wanted.

According to Dr. Zinn, this is what happened following Columbus' return to the Americas; When it became clear that there was no gold left, the Indians were taken as slave labor on huge estates, known later as encomiendas. They were worked at a ferocious pace, and died by the thousands. By the year 1515, there were perhaps fifty thousand Indians left. By 1550, there were five hundred.

A report of the year 1650 shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island. The chief source — and, on many matters the only source of information — about what happened on the islands after Columbus came is Bartolome' de las Casas, who, as a young priest, participated in the conquest of Cuba". According to Dr. Zinn, Christopher Columbus's words as recorded in his own words coupled with the eye witness accounts' of the history of the Indies as recorded by Priest Bartolome' de las Casas, supports his position that history records; " That beginning, when you read Las Casas- even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says or 250, 000, as modern historians calculate) is conquest, slavery, and death". Dr. Zinn

believes that there is another perspective other than what is said in “ the history books given to children in the United States”.

Works Cited Dr. Howard Zinn Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress A People’s History of the United States. Harper Collins US New edition (February 4, 2003).