

Christopher Columbus - Hero or Villain?

“They...brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks’ bells. They willingly traded everything they owned...They were well built, with good bodies and handsome features...They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane...They would make fine servants...With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.”

Columbus, describing his first encounter with Native Americans

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

...(the Spaniards) grew more conceited every day and after awhile refused to walk any distance...(They) rode the backs of Indians if they were in a hurry or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays...(They) thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades...

...They (Indians) suffered and died in the mines and other labors in desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could turn for help...

...(In 1508) there were 60,000 people living on this island (Hispaniola), including the Indians; so that from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it...”

Bartolome de las Casas, a young priest who participated in the conquest of Cuba and transcribed Columbus’ journal

“He had his faults and his defects, but they were largely the defects of the qualities that made him great - his indomitable will, his superb faith in God and in his own mission as the Christ-bearer to lands beyond the seas, his stubborn persistence despite neglect, poverty and discouragement. But there was no flaw, no dark side to the most outstanding and essential of all his qualities - seamanship.”

Samuel Eliot Morison, in the biography, *Christopher Columbus, Mariner* (1954)