

APUSH

Period One- 1491-1607

Lesson: Explain the causes of exploration and conquest of the New World by various European nations.

A Document-Based Thought Exercise: Columbus Reaches the New World, 1492

a. After reading the selection below, discuss the point of view that Columbus has about both the land and the people that he had encountered on his first voyage to the New World.

*I have determined to write you this letter to inform you of everything that has been done and discovered in this voyage of mine.*

*On the thirty-third day after leaving Cadiz I came into the Indian Sea, where I discovered many islands inhabited by numerous people. I took possession of all of them for our most fortunate King by making public proclamations and unfurling his standard, no one making any resistance. The island called Juana, as well as the others in its neighborhood, is exceedingly fertile. It has numerous harbors on all sides, very safe and wide, above comparison with any I have ever seen. Through it flow many very broad and health-giving rivers; and there are in it numerous very lofty mountains. All these islands are very beautiful, and of quite different shapes; easy to be traversed, and full of the greatest variety of trees reaching to the stars. . . .*

*In the island, which I have said before was called Hispana, there are very lofty and beautiful mountains, great farms, groves and fields, most fertile both for cultivation and for pasturage, and well adapted for constructing buildings. The convenience of the harbors in this island, and the excellence of the rivers, in volume and salubrity, surpass human belief, unless one should see them. In it the trees, pasture-lands and fruits different much from those of Juana. Besides, this Hispana abounds in various kinds of species, gold and metals. The inhabitants . . . are all, as I said before, unprovided with any sort of iron, and they are destitute of arms, which are entirely unknown to them, and for which they are not adapted; not on account of any bodily deformity, for they are well made, but because they are timid and full of terror. . . . But when they see that they are safe, and all fear is banished, they are very guileless and honest, and very liberal of all they have. No one refuses the asker anything that he possesses; on the contrary they themselves invite us to ask for it. They manifest the greatest affection towards all of us, exchanging valuable things for trifles, content with the very least thing or nothing at all. . . . I gave them many beautiful and pleasing things, which I had brought with me, for no return whatever, in order to win their affection, and that they might become Christians and inclined to love our King and Queen and Princes and all the people of Spain; and that they might be eager to search for and gather and give to us what they abound in and we greatly need.*

*Christopher Columbus, Report to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, 1493.*

b. Analyze the following points of view about Christopher Columbus. What two differing points of view emerge about Columbus?

1st Point of View:

No people from any other part of the world ever discovered Europe; but Europeans discovered all other parts of the world. In all of history, only the Europeans and the Polynesians of the south Pacific have been true discoverers, sailing for the explicit purpose of finding new lands, trading with their people, and colonizing them. And of all discoverers Christopher Columbus was the greatest, because he accomplished the most against the highest odds. But ultimately the American Indians as well as the Europeans benefited from Columbus' great discovery. An interracial culture developed in much of Latin America, notably in Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. Human sacrifice and cannibalism were ended, and the Indians were almost all converted to Christianity. Large-scale evangelization began with the arrival of a group of Franciscans in Hispaniola in 1500 and continued steadily from then on. Though many Indians were long held in a state of virtual serfdom and some were forced contrary to law to work against their will for long periods of time in gold and silver mines, none were enslaved after the first colonial generation. Spanish law never recognized Indian slavery. And, back in Spain, a prolonged debate at the highest levels of Church and state finally convinced the highest authorities of both—the bishops and the King-Emperor Charles V—that the Indians had souls equal before God to the souls of white men, and rights equal before the law to the rights of any Spaniard. Columbus was a flawed hero—as all men are flawed, including heroes—and his flaws are of a kind particularly offensive to today's culture. But he was nevertheless a hero, achieving in a manner unequaled in the history of exploration and the sea, changing history forever. For some strange reason heroism is almost anathema to our age, at least to many of its most vocal spokesmen. But heroes and the inspiration they give are essential to uplift men and women; without them, faceless mediocrity will soon descend into apathy and degradation. Heroes need not be perfect; indeed, given the fallen nature of man, none can be perfect. It is right to criticize their failings, but wrong to deny their greatness and the inspiration they can give. Christopher Columbus *is* the discoverer of America, and by that discovery ultimately responsible for America's evangelization; and for this we should forever honor him. -- *Honoring Christopher Columbus*, Warren H. Carroll, 1992–

## 2nd Point of View:

When they were allowed to go home, they often found it deserted and had no other recourse than to go out into the woods to find food and to die. When they fell ill, which was very frequently because they are a delicate people unaccustomed to such work, the Spaniards did not believe them and pitilessly called them lazy dogs, and kicked and beat them; and when illness was apparent they sent them home as useless, giving them some cassava for the twenty- to eighty-league journey. They would go then, falling into the first stream and dying there in desperation; others would hold on longer, but very few ever made it home. I sometimes came upon dead bodies on my way, and upon others who were gasping and moaning in their death agony, repeating "Hungry, hungry." In the face of utter hopelessness, the Indians began simply surrendering their lives. Some committed suicide. Many refused to have children, recognizing that their offspring, even if they successfully endured the Spanish cruelties, would only become slaves themselves. And others, wrote Las Casas, saw that without any offense on their part they were despoiled of their kingdoms, their lands and liberties and of their lives, their wives, and homes. As they saw themselves each day perishing by the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Spaniards, crushed to the earth by the horses, cut in pieces by swords, eaten and torn by dogs, many buried alive and suffering all kinds of exquisite tortures . . . [they] decided to abandon themselves to their unhappy fate with no further struggles, placing themselves in the hands of their enemies that they might do with them as they liked. By 1496, we already have noted, the population of Hispaniola had fallen from eight million to between four and five million. By 1508 it was down to less than a hundred thousand. By 1518 it numbered less than

twenty thousand. And by 1535, say the leading scholars on this grim topic, "for all practical purposes, the native population was extinct." In less than the normal lifetime of a single human being, an entire culture of millions of people, thousands of years resident in their homeland, had been exterminated. The same fate befell the native peoples of the surrounding islands in the Caribbean as well. Of all the horrific genocides that have occurred in the twentieth century against Armenians, Jews, Gypsies, Ibos, Bengalis, Timorese, Kampuchians, Ugandans, and more, none has come close to destroying this many- or this great a proportion of wholly innocent people. And then the Spanish turned their attention to the mainland of Mexico and Central America. The slaughter had barely begun. The exquisite city of Tenochtitlan was next. --*American Holocaust* by David Stannard, 1992--