Source #1

"As an Italian sailing for Spain, Columbus was caught in the crossfire among the Spanish crown, its conquistadors and the indigenous peoples. And his political and administrative skills may have fallen far short of his immense maritime abilities.

Yes, Columbus was a complicated icon. As Samuel Eliot Morrison noted, “He had his flaws 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.”

Columbus’ epic feat sparked the bold treks of his fellow Italian navigators: Giovanni da Verrazzano, Giovanni (John) Caboto and Amerigo Vespucci.

Though he never set foot in the heartland of North America, Columbus has long been revered in the United States.

Rosario A. Iaconis is chairman of the Italian Institute of America and an adjunct professor in social sciences at Suffolk County Community College

Source #2

**Columbus and the Indians**

Endless testimonies prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives…. But our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy…

And the Christians, with their horses and swords and pikes began to carry out massacres and strange cruelties against them. They attacked the towns and spared neither the children nor the aged nor pregnant women nor women in childbed, not only stabbing them and dismembering them but cutting them to pieces as if dealing with sheep in the slaughter house. They laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two or could cut off his head or spill out his entrails with a single stroke of the pike. They took infants from their mothers’ breasts, snatching them by the legs and pitching them head first against the crags or snatched them by the arms and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter and saying as the babies fell into the water, “Boil there, you offspring of the devil!” Other infants they put to the sword along with their mothers and anyone else who happened to be nearby. They made some low wide gallows on which the hanged victim’s feet almost touched the ground, stringing up their victims in lots of thirteen, in memory of Our Redeemer and His twelve Apostles, then set burning wood at their feet and thus burned them alive. To others they attached straw or wrapped their whole bodies in straw and set them afire. With still others, all those they wanted to capture alive, they cut off their hands and hung them round the victim’s neck, saying, “Go now, carry the message,” meaning, Take the news to the Indians who have fled to the mountains.

Bartolome de las Casas,

Roman priest who accompanied Columbus on his conquest of Cuba, the abuse and murder of the native population

Source #3

Columbus Should not Be Honored With a National Holiday

When Columbus and his men returned to Haiti in 1493, they demanded food, gold, spun cotton-whatever the Indians had that they wanted, including sex with their women. To ensure cooperation, Columbus used punishment by example. When an Indian committed even a minor offense, the Spanish cut off his ears or nose. Disfigured, the person was sent back to his village as living evidence of the brutality the Spaniards were capable of.After a while, the Indians had had enough. At first their resistance was mostly passive. They refused to plant food for the Spanish to take. They abandoned towns near the Spanish settlements. Finally, the Arawaks fought back. Their sticks and stones were no more effective against the armed and clothed Spanish, however, than the earthlings' rifles against the aliens' death rays in War of the Worlds.

Historian James Loewen Penn State University Professor

Presented to the American Historical Society

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Source #4

These were signs of land. Then, on October 12, a sailor called Rodrigo saw the early morning moon shining of white sands, and cried out. It was an island in the Bahamas, the Caribbean sea. The first man to sight land was supposed to get a yearly pension of 10,000 maravedis for life, but Rodrigo never got it. Columbus claimed he had seen a light the evening before. He got the reward.

So, approaching land, they were met by Arawak Indians, who swam out to great them. The Araaks lived in village communes, had a developed agriculture of corn, yams, cassavas. They could spin and weave, but they had no horses or work animals. They had no iron, but they wore tiny gold ornaments in their ears.

This was to have enormous consequences: it led Columbus to take some of them aboard ship as prisoners because he insisted that they guide him to the source of the gold. He then sailed to what is now Cuba, then to Hispaniola (the island which today consists of Haiti and Dominican Republic). There, bits of visible gold in the rivers, and a gold mask presented to Columbus by a local Indian chief, led to wild visions of gold fields.

Howard Zinn

History is a Weapon

1980

A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES