

Comparing and contrasting views of Christopher Columbus, European Explorers and Native Americans.

- Columbus, the Indians and Human Progress. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (2003), Chapter 1.
- The Age of European Discovery. Schweikart and Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States* (2004), Chapter 1

What do you know about Columbus? Odds are, your ideas may not reflect the latest in historical research, or may be incomplete.

(With thanks to Professor McKay.)

In any discussion of the value of history, it's important to include this important objective: "to build that bridge that links past and present history together." History informs the present, helps us to put order into the chaos going on around us, and to recognize that people who have come before us experienced and overcame many of the same challenges we are experiencing today.

Today we have a particularly pressing need to understand war. Before 9/11, few students had an interest in war. But now there seems to be a pervasive need to understand what causes war, what effects war has on society, what can be done to avoid war, or what can be used to justify our current foreign policy. That students are interested in this topic shows that our present needs determine, in fact dictate, what we consider to be important in the past. And the needs of society at a given time play an important role in how historians interpret the past.

During the 1950's, when the Cold War was just beginning, we as a society had the need to prove how superior our democratic institutions were to the Soviet's. Because historians are part of society, they too had this need, and found themselves writing "consensus history," i.e., they focused on what united Americans, rather than what separated them. But in the 1960's, as the focus changed to civil rights, women's rights, and multiculturalism, we had the need to reveal the injustices of the past and the conflicts that shaped American history. So historians found themselves writing the "new social history," sometimes known as "revisionist" history, i.e., they focused on what divided Americans.

Now you may say "That's crazy. The past is the past. What happened, happened. We can't have two different interpretations of it. One of them has got to be wrong." No, not necessarily. Each interpretation may just be telling part of the story. After all, there are things that unite Americans. But there are also things that divide us. So if we accept both interpretations, we get the total picture. Neither of them is wrong, they just didn't "tell it all," and were giving society what it needed at the time to interpret the past in a way that would help them to deal with the present.

Assignment: Read the Zinn and Schwiekart articles & reaction essay

RUBRIC - REACTION Paper.

Prompt/Task: Compare and contrast the competing views of European explorers and Native Americans as presented in the two papers. To what extent is there validity (truth) in both views?

I. Reaction Paper	Student Name:
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Criteria	Point Value	Total
Cover page included all required elements Your First and Last Name, APUSH, Mr. Radulski, date	5	5
Essay length is 500-600 words. Size 11-12 pitch text and Times New Roman used. That would be about 2 pages typed, doublespaced.	5	10
Introductory paragraph. (1 paragraph) Contrast Zinn's thesis (main argument) with Schwiekart & Allen's (S&A) Thesis (main idea)	10	20
Main Body Paragraphs: (1 paragraph each) *Use the arguments of both Zinn and S&A for each subtopic, contrasting their views *Ensure you have a <u>topic sentence</u> for each paragraph, and provide <u>evidence/arguments</u> to support your paragraphs. *incorporate <i>short</i> quotes from the reading (of no more than 5-7 words) to support your reading. Use only 2-3 per paragraph. 1. How does Zinn portray the villainy of the Spaniards, and Columbus as setting a precedent for following conquistadores? 2. How does S&A's portrait of Columbus and following explorers contradict Zinn's portrayal? 3. What is the legacy of 1492? [How should 1492 be remembered? What were both the immediate effects and the long-term effects of the contact between Europe and the Americas?] Consider: *Compare contrast Columbus/Spanish explorers (zinn v. S&A) *Compare contrast portrayal of Indians(zinn v. S&A) *Is the legacy of Columbus a positive or negative one? *How it could be both?	30	50
Concluding Paragraph (1 paragraph) 1. Your personal response to the readings. (As, or after, you read these, what was your personal reaction to what the author's had to say? How did you feel about this information?) 2. Should Columbus Day be kept as a national holiday?	10	60
		60 Points Total

From: Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (2003), Chapter 1.

Arawak [Taino] men and women, naked, tawny, and full of wonder, emerged from their villages onto the island's beaches and swam out to get a closer look at the strange big boat. When Columbus and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly, the Arawaks ran to greet them, brought them food, water, gifts. He later wrote of this in his log:

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.

These Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were much like Indians on the mainland, who were remarkable (European observers were to say again and again) for their hospitality, their belief in sharing. These traits did not stand out in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, the frenzy for money that marked Western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

Columbus wrote:

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 might give me information of whatever there is in these parts.

The information that Columbus wanted most was: Where is the gold? He had persuaded the king and queen of Spain to finance an expedition to the lands, the wealth, he expected would be on the other side of the Atlantic-the Indies and Asia, gold and spices. For, like other informed people of his time, he knew the world was round and he could sail west in order to get to the Far East.

Spain was recently unified, one of the new modern nation-states, like France, England, and Portugal. Its population, mostly poor peasants, worked for the nobility, who were 2 percent of the population and owned 95 percent of the land. Spain had tied itself to the Catholic Church, expelled all the Jews, driven out the Moors. Like other states of the modern world, Spain sought gold, which was becoming the new mark of wealth, more useful than land because it could buy anything....

There was gold in Asia, it was thought, and certainly silks and spices, for Marco Polo and others had brought back marvelous things from their overland expeditions centuries before. Now that the Turks had conquered Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean, and controlled the land routes to Asia, a sea route was needed. Portuguese sailors were working their way around the southern tip of Africa. Spain decided to gamble on a long sail across an unknown ocean.

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 tide: Admiral of the Ocean Sea. He was a merchant's clerk from the Italian city of Genoa, part-time weaver (the son of a skilled weaver), and expert sailor. He set out with three sailing ships, the largest of which was the *Santa Maria*, perhaps 100 feet long, and thirty-nine crew members.

Columbus would never have made it to Asia, which was thousands of miles farther away than he had calculated, imagining a smaller world. He would have been doomed by that great expanse of sea. But he was lucky. One-fourth of the way there he came upon an unknown, uncharted land that lay between Europe and Asia-the Americas. It was early October 1492, and thirty-three days since he and his crew had left the Canary Islands, off the Atlantic coast of Africa. Now they saw branches and sticks floating in the water. They saw flocks of birds.

These were signs of land. Then, on October 12, a sailor called Rodrigo saw the early morning moon shining on white sands, and cried out. It was an island in the Bahamas, in 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 the Arawak Indians, who swam out to greet them. The Arawaks lived in village communes, had a developed agriculture of corn, yams, cassava. 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 the 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.

On Hispaniola, out of timbers from the *Santa Maria*, which had run aground, Columbus built a fort, the first European military base in the Western Hemisphere. He called it Navidad (Christmas) and left thirty-nine crewmembers there, with instructions to find and store the gold. He took more Indian prisoners and put them aboard his two remaining ships. At one part of the island he got into a fight with Indians who refused to trade as many bows and arrows as he and his men wanted. Two were run through with swords and bled to death. Then the *Nina* and the *Pinta* set sail for the Azores and Spain. When the weather turned cold, the Indian prisoners began to die.

Columbus's report to the Court in Madrid was extravagant. He insisted he had reached Asia (it was Cuba) and an island off the coast of China (Hispaniola). His descriptions were part fact, part fiction:

Hispaniola is a miracle. Mountains and hills, plains and pastures, are both fertile and beautiful ... the harbors are unbelievably good and there are many wide rivers of which the majority contain gold. . . . There are many spices, and great mines of gold and other metals....

The Indians, Columbus reported, "*are so naive and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone....*" 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.*" He was full of religious talk: "*Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities.*"

Because of Columbus's exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread of the Europeans' intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians, after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.

Now, from his base on Haiti, Columbus sent expedition after expedition into the interior. They found no gold fields, but had to fill up the ships returning to Spain with some kind of dividend. In the year 1495, they went on a great slave raid, rounded up fifteen hundred Arawak men, women, and children, put them in pens guarded by Spaniards and dogs, then picked the five hundred best specimens to load onto ships. Of those five hundred, two hundred died en route. The rest arrived alive in Spain and were put up for sale by the archdeacon of the town, who reported that, although the slaves were "*naked as the day they were born,*" they showed "*no more embarrassment than animals.*" Columbus later wrote: "*Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold.*"

But too many of the slaves died in captivity. And so Columbus, desperate to pay back dividends to those who had invested, had to make good his promise to fill the ships with gold. In the province of Cicao on Haiti, where he and his men imagined huge gold fields to exist, they ordered all persons fourteen years or older to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. When they brought it, they were given copper tokens to hang around their necks. Indians found without a copper token had their hands cut off and bled to death.

The Indians had been given an impossible task. The only gold around was bits of dust garnered from the streams. So they fled, were hunted down with dogs, and were killed.

Trying to put together an army of resistance, the Arawaks faced Spaniards who had armor, muskets, swords, horses. When the Spaniards took prisoners they hanged them or burned them to death. Among the Arawaks, mass suicides began, with cassava poison. Infants were killed to save them from the Spaniards. In two years, through murder, mutilation, or suicide, half of the 250,000 Indians on Haiti were dead.

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....

What Columbus did to the Arawaks of the Bahamas, Cortes did to the Aztecs of Mexico, Pizarro to the Incas of Peru, and the English settlers of Virginia and Massachusetts to the Powhatans and the Pequots.

The Aztec civilization of Mexico came out of the heritage of Mayan, Zapotec, and Toltec cultures. It built enormous constructions from stone tools and human labor, developed a writing system and a priesthood. It also engaged in (let us not overlook this) the ritual killing of thousands of people as sacrifices to the gods. The cruelty of the Aztecs, however, did not erase a certain innocence, and when a Spanish armada appeared at Vera Cruz, and a bearded white man came ashore, with strange beasts (horses), clad in iron, it was thought that he was the legendary Aztec man-god who had died three hundred years before, with the promise to return-the mysterious Quetzalcoatl. And so they welcomed him, with munificent hospitality.

That was Hernando Cortes, come from Spain with an expedition financed by merchants and landowners and blessed by the deputies of God, with one obsessive goal: to find gold. In the mind of Montezuma, the king of the Aztecs, there must have been a certain doubt about whether Cortes was indeed Quetzalcoatl, because he sent a hundred runners to Cortes, bearing enormous treasures, gold and silver wrought into objects of fantastic beauty, but at the same time begging him to go back. (The painter Durer a few years later described what he saw just arrived in Spain from that expedition-a sun of gold, a moon of silver, worth a fortune.)

Cortes then began his march of death from town to town, using deception, turning Aztec against Aztec, killing with the kind of deliberateness that accompanies a strategy--to paralyze the will of the population by a sudden frightful deed. And so, in Cholulu, he invited the headmen of the Cholula nation to the square. And when they came, with thousands of unarmed retainers, Cortes's small army of Spaniards, posted around the square with cannon, armed with crossbows, mounted on horses, massacred them, down to the last man. Then they looted the city and moved on. When their cavalcade of murder was over they were in Mexico City, Montezuma was dead, and the Aztec civilization, shattered, was in the hands of the Spaniards.

John Collier, an American scholar who lived among Indians in the 1920s and 1930s in the American Southwest, said of their spirit: "*Could we make it our own, there would be an eternally inexhaustible earth and a forever lasting peace.*"

probe the *Mundus Novus* [New World] south and west. After returning to Spain yet again, Columbus made two more voyages to the New World in 1498 and 1502.

Whether Columbus had found parts of the Far East or an entirely new land was irrelevant to most Europeans at the time. Political distractions abounded in Europe. Spain had barely evicted the Muslims after the long *Reconquista*, and England's Wars of the Roses had scarcely ended. News of Columbus's discoveries excited only a few merchants, explorers, and dreamers. Still, the prospect of finding a waterway to Asia infatuated sailors; and in 1501 a Florentine passenger on a Portuguese voyage, Amerigo Vespucci, wrote letters to his friends in which he described the New World. His self-promoting dispatches circulated sooner than Columbus's own written accounts, and as a result, the term "America" soon was attached by geographers to the continents in the Western Hemisphere that should by right have been named Columbia. But if Columbus did not receive the honor of having the New World named for him, and if he acquired only temporary wealth and fame in Spain (receiving from the Crown the title Admiral of the Ocean Sea), his place in history was never in doubt. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison, a worthy seaman in his own right who reenacted the Columbian voyages in 1939 and 1940, described Columbus as "the sign and symbol [of the] new age of hope, glory and accomplishment."

Once Columbus blazed the trail, other Spanish explorers had less trouble obtaining financial backing for expeditions. Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (1513) crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean (as he named it). Ferdinand Magellan (1519-22) circumnavigated the globe, lending his name to the Strait of Magellan. Other expeditions explored the interior of the newly discovered lands. Juan Ponce de León, traversing an area along Florida's coast, attempted unsuccessfully to plant a colony there. Pánfilo de Narváez's subsequent expedition to conquer Tampa Bay proved even more disastrous. Narváez himself drowned, and natives killed members of his expedition until only four of them reached a Spanish settlement in Mexico.

Spaniards traversed modern-day Mexico, probing interior areas under Hernando Cortés, who in 1518 led a force of 1,000 soldiers to Tenochtitlán, the site of present-day Mexico City. Cortés encountered powerful Indians called Aztecs, led by their emperor Montezuma. The Aztecs had established a brutal regime that oppressed other natives of the region, capturing large numbers of them for ritual sacrifices in which Aztec priests cut out the beating hearts of living victims. Such barbarity enabled the Spanish to easily enlist other tribes, especially the Tlaxcalans, in their efforts to defeat the Aztecs.

Tenochtitlán sat on an island in the middle of a lake, connected to the outlying areas by three huge causeways. It was a monstrously large city (for the time) of at least 200,000, rigidly divided into nobles and commoner groups. Aztec culture created impressive pyramid-shaped temple structures, but Aztec science lacked the simple wheel and the wide range of pulleys and gears that it enabled. But it was sacrifice, not science, that defined Aztec society, whose pyramids, after all, were execution sites. A four day sacrifice in 1487 by the Aztec king Ahuitzotl involved the butchery of 80,400 prisoners by shifts of priests working four at a time at convex killing tables who kicked lifeless, heartless bodies down the side of the pyramid temple. This worked out to a "killing rate of fourteen victims a minute over the ninety-six hour bloodbath." In addition to the abominable sacrifice system, crime and street carnage were commonplace. More intriguing to the Spanish than the buildings, or even the sacrifices, however, were the legends of gold, silver, and other riches Tenochtitlán contained, protected by the powerful Aztec army.

Cortés first attempted direct assault on the city and fell back with heavy losses, narrowly escaping extermination. Desperate Spanish fought their way out on Noche Trieste (the Sad Night), when hundreds of them fell on the causeway. Cortés's men piled human bodies—Aztec and European alike—in heaps to block Aztec pursuers, then staggered back to Vera Cruz. In 1521 Cortés returned with a new Spanish army, supported by more than 75,000 Indian allies. This time, he found a weakened enemy who had been ravaged by smallpox, or as the Aztecs called it, the great leprosy. Starvation killed those

Aztecs whom the disease did not. "They died in heaps, like bedbugs" wrote one historian. Even so, either disease nor starvation accounted for the Spaniards' stunning victory over the vastly larger Aztec forces, which can be credited to the Spanish use of European-style disciplined shock combat and the employment of modern firepower. Severing the causeways, stationing huge units to guard each, Cortés assaulted the city walls from thirteen brigantines (boats) the Spaniards had hauled overland, sealing off the city. These brigantines proved "far more ingeniously engineered for fighting on the Aztecs' native waters than any boat constructed in Mexico during the entire history of its civilization." When it came to the final battle, it was not the brigantines, but Cortés's use of cannons, muskets, harquebuses, crossbows, and pikes in deadly discipline, firing in order, and standing en masse against a murderous mass of Aztecs who fought as individuals rather than a cohesive force that proved decisive.

Spanish technology, including the wheel-related ratchet gears on muskets, constituted only one element of European military superiority. They fought as other European and land armies found in formation, with their officers open to new ideas based on practicality, not theology. Where no Aztec would dare approach the godlike Montezuma with a military strategy, Cortés debated tactics with his lieutenants routinely, and the European way of war endowed each Castilian soldier with a sense of individual rights, civic duty, and personal freedom nonexistent in the Aztec kingdom. Moreover, the Europeans sought to kill their enemy and force his permanent surrender, not forge an arrangement for a steady supply of sacrifice victims. Thus Cortés captured the Aztec capital in 1521 at a cost of more than 100,000 Aztec dead, many from disease resulting from Cortés's cutting the city's water supply....

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