

## Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, "Indians of the Rio Grande"

---

*Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca came to America as the second in command for Pánfilo de Narváez's expedition to conquer Florida in 1527. Abandoned and shipwrecked with three companions, Cabeza de Vaca made an incredible journey across the American Southwest from 1528 to 1536. Cabeza de Vaca and his companions were captives of several Indian tribes in Texas, but eventually they walked from Texas through New Mexico and Arizona to Mexico. Cabeza de Vaca's detailed descriptions provide important insights into early 16th century native American life and material culture. His stories, told in Mexico City, fueled the Spanish drive for gold and led to Coronado's conquest of New Mexico in 1540. SOURCE: Cabeza de Vaca. Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America, translated and edited by Cyclone Covey (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1961).*

---

The Indians are so accustomed to running that, without resting or getting tired, they run from morning till night in pursuit of a deer, and kill a great many, because they follow until the game is worn out, sometimes catching it alive. Their huts are of matting placed over four arches. They carry them on their back and move every two or three days in quest of food; they plant nothing that would be of any use.

They are very merry people, and even when famished do not cease to dance and celebrate their feasts and ceremonials. Their best times are when "tunas" (prickly pears) are ripe, because then they have plenty to eat and spend the time on dancing and eating day and night. As long as these tunas last they squeeze and open them and set them to dry. When dried they are put in baskets like figs and kept to be eaten on the way. The peelings they grind and pulverize.

All over this country there are a great many deer, fowl and other animals which I have before enumerated. Here also they come up with cows; I have seen them thrice and have eaten their meat. They appear to me of the size of those in Spain. Their horns are small, like those of the Moorish cattle; the hair is very long, like fine wool and like a peajacket; some are brownish and others black, and to my taste they have better and more meat than those from here. Of the small hides the Indians make blankets to cover themselves with, and of the taller ones they make shoes and targets. These cows come from the north, across the country further on, to the coast of Florida, and are found all over the land for over four hundred leagues. On this whole stretch, through the valleys by which they come, people who live there descend to subsist upon their flesh. And a great quantity of hides are met with inland.

We remained with the Avavares Indians for eight months, according to our reckoning of the moons. During that time they came for us from many places and said that verily we were children of the sun. Until then Donates and the negro had not made any cures, but we found ourselves so pressed by the Indians coming from all sides, that all of us had to become medicine men. I was the most daring and reckless of all in undertaking cures. We never treated anyone that did not afterwards say he was well, and they had such confidence in our skills as to believe that none of them would die as long as we were among them....

The women brought many mats, with which they built us houses, one for each of us and those

attached to him. After this we would order them to boil all the game, and they did it quickly in ovens built by them for the purpose. We partook of everything a little, giving the rest to the principal man among those who had come with us for distribution among all. Every one then came with the share he had received for us to breathe on it and bless it, without which they left it untouched. Often we had with us three to four thousand persons. And it was very tiresome to have to breathe on and make the sign of the cross over every morsel they ate or drank. For many other things they wanted to do they would come to ask our permission, so that it is easy to realize how greatly we were bothered. The women brought us tunas, spiders, worms, and whatever else they could find, for they would rather starve than partake of anything that had not first passed through our hands.

While travelling with those, we crossed a big river coming from the north and, traversing about thirty leagues of plains, met a number of people that came from afar to meet us on the trail, who treated us like the foregoing ones.

Thence once there was a change in the manner of reception, insofar as those who would meet us on the trail with gifts were no longer robbed by the Indians of our company, but after we had entered their homes they tendered us all they possessed, and the dwellings also. We turned over everything to the principals for distribution. Invariably those who had been deprived of their belongings would follow us, in order to repair their losses, so that our routine became very large. They would tell them to be careful and not conceal anything of what they owned, as it could not be done without our knowledge, and then we would cause their death. So much did they frighten them that on the first few days after joining us they would be trembling all the time, and would not dare to speak or lift their eyes to Heaven.

Those guided us for more than fifty leagues through a desert of very rugged mountains, and so arid that there was no game. Consequently we suffered much from lack of food, and finally forded a very big river, with its water reaching to our chest. Thence on many of our people began to show the effects of the hunger and hardships they had undergone in those mountains, which were extremely barren and tiresome to travel.

The next morning all those who were strong enough came along, and at the end of three journeys we halted. Alonso del Castillo and Estevanico, the negro, left with the women as guides, and the woman who was a captive took them to a river that flows between mountains where there was a village in which her father lived, and these were the first adobes we saw that were like unto real houses. Castillo and Estevanico went to these and, after holding parley with the Indians, at the end of three days Castillo returned to where he had left us, bringing with him five or six of the Indians. He told how he had found permanent houses, inhabited, the people of which ate beans and squashes, and that he had also seen maize.

Of all things upon earth that caused us the greatest pleasure, and we gave endless thanks to our Lord for this news. Castillo also said that the negro was coming to meet us on the way, near by, with all the people of the houses. For that reason we started, and after going a league and a half met the negro and the people that came to receive us, who gave us beans and many squashes to eat, gourds to carry water in, robes of cowhide, and other things. As those people and the Indians of our company were enemies, and did not understand each other, we took leave of the latter,

leaving them all that had been given to us, while we went on with the former and, six leagues beyond, when night was already approaching, reached their houses, where they received us with great ceremonies. Here we remained one day, and left on the next, taking them with us to other permanent houses, where they subsisted on the same food also, and thence on we found a new custom...

Having seen positive traces of Christians and become satisfied they were very near, we gave many thanks to our Lord for redeeming us from our sad and gloomy condition. Any one can imagine our delight when he reflects how long we had been in that land, and how many dangers and hardships we had suffered. That night I entreated one of my companions to go after the Christians, who were moving through the part of the country pacified and quieted by us, and who were three days ahead of where we were. They did not like my suggestion, and excused themselves from going, on the ground of being tired and worn out, although any of them might have done far better than I, being younger and stronger.

Seeing their reluctance, in the morning I took with me the negro and eleven Indians and, following the trail, went in search of the Christians. On that day we made ten leagues, passing three places where they slept. The next morning I came upon four Christians on horseback, who seeing me in such a strange attire, and in company with Indians, were greatly startled. They stared at me for quite awhile, speechless; so great was their surprise that they could not find words to ask me anything. I spoke first, and told them to lead me to their captain, and we went together to Diego de Alcaraz, their commander.

## **Bartolomè de Las Casas, "Of the Island of Hispaniola" (1542)**

*Bartolome de Las Casas served as a Spanish missionary in Latin America. After being ordained as a priest in 1510, he worked to improve the condition of the native peoples and to end their enslavement and forced labor. Las Casas succeeded in converting several tribes, but he failed to establish a model native colony. He subsequently visited Spain to urge government action. He wrote the letter "Of the Island of Hispaniola" to be read at a forum on Spanish colonization called by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Primarily because of his efforts, in 1542 Spain adopted a humanitarian code known as the New Laws to protect native peoples in Spanish colonies. Unfortunately, later governments so altered the New Laws that they proved ineffective.*

---

God has created all these numberless people to be quite the simplest, without malice or duplicity, most obedient, most faithful to their natural Lords, and to the Christians, whom they serve; the most humble, most patient, most peaceful and calm, without strife nor tumults; not wrangling, nor querulous, as free from uproar, hate and desire of revenge as any in the world. . . .

Among these gentle sheep, gifted by their Maker with the above qualities, the Spaniards entered as soon as they knew them, like wolves, tiger and lions which had been starving for many days, and since forty years they have done nothing else but afflict, torment, and destroy them with strange and new, and divers kinds of cruelty, never before seen, nor heard of, nor read of. . . .

The Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began to slaughter and practice strange cruelty among them. They penetrated into the country and spared neither children nor the aged, nor

pregnant women, nor those in child labour, all of whom they ran through the body and lacerated, as though they were assaulting so many lambs herded in their sheepfold.

They made bets as to who would slit a man in two, or cut off his head at one blow: or they opened up his bowels. They tore the babes from their mothers' breast by the feet, and dashed their heads against the rocks. Others they seized by the shoulders and threw into the rivers, laughing and joking, and when they fell into the water they exclaimed: "boil body of so and so!" They spitted the bodies of other babes, together with their mothers and all who were before them, on their swords.

They made a gallows just high enough for the feet to nearly touch the ground, and by thirteens, in honour and reverence of our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles, they put wood underneath and, with fire, they burned the Indians alive.

They wrapped the bodies of others entirely in dry straw, binding them in it and setting fire to it; and so they burned them. They cut off the hands of all they wished to take alive, made them carry them fastened on to them, and said:

"Go and carry letters": that is; take the news to those who have fled to the mountains.

They generally killed the lords and nobles in the following way. They made wooden gridirons of stakes, bound them upon them, and made a slow fire beneath; thus the victims gave up the spirit by degrees, emitting cries of despair in their torture. . . .

## **Christopher Columbus Writes of His First View of the New World in 1492**

*An Italian sailor working for the King and Queen of Spain, Columbus made the first recorded European crossing of the Atlantic. Despite evidence of earlier Scandinavian contact with the northern coast of North America, Columbus's voyage opened up contact between the continents for future European migration. Columbus's mission was twofold: To establish himself as governor-general and viceroy of new lands for Spain, and to open broader diplomatic, commercial, and religious contact for Spain. His journal provides a record of his scientific, spiritual, and imperial explorations.*

---

*SOURCE:* Christopher Columbus, "Journal of the First Voyage to America," in Julius E. Olson and Edward Gaylord Bourne, ed., *The Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot, 985–1503. Original Narratives of Early American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1906).

---

Sunday, Oct. 21st [1492]. At 10 o'clock, we arrived at a cape of the island, and anchored, the other vessels in company. After having dispatched a meal, I went ashore, and found no habitation save a single house, and that without an occupant; we had no doubt that the people had fled in terror at our approach, as the house was completely furnished. I suffered nothing to be touched, and went with my captains and some of the crew to view the country. This island even exceeds the others in beauty and fertility. Groves of lofty and flourishing trees are abundant, as also large lakes, surrounded and overhung by the foliage, in a most enchanting manner. Everything looked

as green as in April in Andalusia. The melody of the birds was so exquisite that one was never willing to part from the spot, and the flocks of parrots obscured the heavens. The diversity in the appearance of the feathered tribe from those of our country is extremely curious. A thousand different sorts of trees, with their fruit were to be met with, and of a wonderfully delicious odour. It was a great affliction to me to be ignorant of their natures, for I am very certain they are all valuable; specimens of them and of the plants I have preserved: Going round one of these lakes, I saw a snake, which we killed, and I have kept the skin for your Highnesses; upon being discovered he took to the water, whither we followed him, as it was not deep, and dispatched him with our lances; he was seven spans in length; I think there are many more such about here. I discovered also the aloe tree, and am determined to take on board the ship to-morrow, ten quintals of it, as I am told it is valuable. While we were in search of some good water, we came upon a village of the natives about half a league from the place where the ships lay; the inhabitants on discovering us abandoned their houses, and took to flight, carrying off their goods to the mountain. I ordered that nothing which they had left should be taken, not even the value of a pin. Presently we saw several of the natives advancing towards our party, and one of them came up to us, to whom we gave some hawk's bells and glass beads, with which he was delighted. We asked him in return, for water, and after I had gone on board the ship, the natives came down to the shore with their calabashes full, and showed great pleasure in presenting us with it. I ordered more glass beads to be given them, and they promised to return the next day. It is my wish to fill all the water casks of the ships at this place, which being executed, I shall depart immediately, if the weather serve, and sail round the island, till I succeed in meeting with the king, in order to see if I can acquire any of the gold, which I hear he possesses. Afterwards I shall set sail for another very large island which I believe to be Cipango, according to the indications I receive from the Indians on board. They call the Island Colba, Cuba, and say there are many large ships, and sailors there. This other island they name Bosio, and inform me that it is very large; the others which lie in our course, I shall examine on the passage, and according as I find gold or spices in abundance, I shall determine what to do; at all events I am determined to proceed on to the continent, and visit the city of Guisay where I shall deliver the letters of your Highnesses to the Great Can, and demand an answer, with which I shall return.

Monday, Oct. 22d. Through the night, and today we remained waiting here to see if the king, or any others would bring us gold or anything valuable. Many of the natives visited us, resembling those of the other islands, naked like them, and painted white, red, black and other colours; they brought javelins and clews of cotton to barter, which they exchanged with the sailors for bits of glass, broken cups, and fragments of earthenware. Some of them wore pieces of gold at their noses; they readily gave them away for hawk's bells and glass beads; the amount collected in this manner, however, was very inconsiderable. Any small matter they received from us, they held in high estimation, believing us to have come from heaven. We took in water for the ships from a lake in the neighbourhood of this cape, which I have named Cabo del Isleo: in this lake Martin Alonzo Pinzon, captain of the Pinta, killed a snake similar to that of yesterday, seven spans long. I ordered as much of the aloe to be collected as could be found.

Tuesday, Oct. 23d. It is now my determination to depart for the island of Cuba, which I believe to be Cipango, from the accounts I have received here, of the multitude and riches of the people. I have abandoned the intention of staying here and sailing round the island in search of the king, as it would be a waste of time, and I perceive there are no gold

mines to be found. Moreover it would be necessary to steer many courses in making the circuit, and we cannot expect the wind to be always favourable. And as we are going to places where there is great commerce, I judge it expedient not to linger on the way, but to proceed and survey the lands we met with, till we arrive at that most favourable for our enterprise. It is my opinion that we shall find much profit there in spices; but my want of knowledge in these articles occasions me the most excessive regrets, inasmuch as I see a thousand sorts of trees, each with its own species of fruit, and as flourishing at the present time, as the fields in Spain, during the months of May and June; likewise a thousand kinds of herbs and flowers, of all which I remain in ignorance as to their properties, with the exception of the aloe, which I have directed to-day to be taken on board in large quantities for the use of your Highnesses. I did not set sail to-day for want of wind, a dead calm and heavy rain prevailing. Yesterday it rained much without cold; the days here are hot, and the nights mild like May in Andalusia.

Wednesday, Oct. 24th. At midnight weighed anchor and set sail from Cabo del Isleo of the island of Isabela, being in the North part, where I had remained preparing to depart for the island of Cuba, in which place the Indians tell me I shall find a great trade, with abundance of gold and spices, and large ships, and merchants; they directed me to steer toward the W.S.W., which is the course I am pursuing. If the accounts which the natives of the islands and those on board the ships have communicated to me by signs (for their language I do not understand) may be relied on, this must be the island of Cipango, of which we have heard so many wonderful things; according to my geographical knowledge it must be somewhere in this neighbourhood....

1. *How do Columbus's journal entries reflect the purposes of his mission? Why would Columbus keep a journal? What would he include, or leave out, to affect its later usage?*
2. *What can we tell about the indigenous people Columbus encountered from his journal?*

## **Don Juan de Oñate, Letter from New Mexico to the Viceroy**

*Don Juan de Oñate, a Spanish-American explorer and colonizer, led a group of colonists from Zacatecas in New Spain (now Mexico) to present-day Santa Fe, New Mexico. His colonizing party of 600 persons, including Africans, Indians, priests, and Spanish soldiers, traveled in some 83 wagons and was accompanied by more than 7,000 animals. His expedition was described as a moving village, some four miles long.*

---

From Rio de Nombre de Dios I last wrote to you, Illustrious Sir, giving you an account of my departure, and of the discovery of a wagon road to the Rio del Norte, and of my certain hopes of the successful outcome of my journey, which hopes God has been pleased to grant, may He be forever praised; for greatly to His advantage and that of his royal Majesty, they have acquired a possession so good that none other of his Majesty in these Indies excels it, judging it solely by what I have seen, by things told of in reliable reports, and by things almost a matter of experience, from having been seen by people in my camp and known by me at present.

This does not include the vastness of the settlements or the riches of the West which the natives praise, or the certainty of pearls promised by the South Sea from the many shells containing them possessed by these Indians, or the many settlements called the seven caves, which the Indians report at the head of this river, which is the Rio del Norte; but includes only the provinces which I have seen and traversed, the people of this eastern country, the Apaches, the nation of the Cocoyes, and many others which are daily being discovered in this district and neighborhood, as I shall specify in this letter. I wish to begin by giving your Lordship an account of it, because it is the first since I left New Spain.

I departed, Illustrious Sir, from Rio de Nombre de Dios on the sixteenth of March, with the great multitude of wagons, women, and children, which your Lordship very well knows, freed from all my opponents, but with a multitude of evil predictions conforming to their desires and not to the goodness of God. His Majesty was pleased to accede to my desires, and to take pity on my great hardships, afflictions, and expenses, bringing me to these provinces of New Mexico with all his Majesty's army enjoying perfect health.

Although I reached these provinces on the twenty-eighth day of May (going ahead with as many as sixty soldiers to pacify the land and free it from traitors, if in it there should be any, seizing Humaña and his followers to obtain full information, by seeing with my own eyes, regarding the location and nature of the land, and regarding the nature and customs of the people, so as to order what might be best for the army, which I left about twenty-two leagues from the first pueblos, after having crossed the Rio del Norte, at which river I took possession, in the name of his Majesty, of all these kingdoms and pueblos which I discovered before departing from it with scouts), the army did not overtake me at the place where I established it and where I now have it established, in this province of the Teguas, until the nineteenth day of August of the past year. During that time I travelled through settlements sixty-one leagues in extent toward the north, and thirty-five in width from east to west. All this district is filled with pueblos, large and small, very continuous and close together.

At the end of August I began to prepare the people of my camp for the severe winter with which both the Indians and the nature, of the land threatened me; and the devil, who has ever tried to make good his great loss occasioned by our coming, plotted, as is his wont, exciting a rebellion among more than forty-five soldiers and captains, who under pretext of not finding immediately whole plates of silver lying on the ground, and offended because I would not permit them to maltreat these natives, either in their persons or in their goods, became disgusted with the country, or to be more exact, with me, and endeavored to form a gang in order to flee to that New Spain, as they proclaimed, although judging from what has since come to light their intention was directed more to stealing slaves and clothing and to other acts of effrontery not permitted. I arrested two captains and a soldier, who they said were guilty, in order to garrote them on this charge, but ascertaining that their guilt was not so great, and on account of my situation and of the importunate pleadings of the religious and of the entire army, I was forced to forego the punishment and let bygones be bygones.

Although by the middle of September I succeeded in completely calming and pacifying my camp, from this great conflagration a spark was bound to remain hidden underneath the ashes of the dissembling countenances of four of the soldiers of the said coterie. These fled from me at that time, stealing from me part of the horses, thereby violating not only one but many proclamations which, regarding this matter and others, I had posted for the good of the land in the name of his Majesty.

Since they had violated his royal orders, it appeared to me that they should not go unpunished; therefore I immediately sent post-haste the captain and procurator-general Gaspar Perez de Villagran and the captain of artillery Geronimo Marques, with an express order to follow and overtake them and give them due punishment. They left in the middle of September, as I have said, thinking that they would overtake them at once, but their journey was prolonged more than they or I had anticipated, with the result to two of the offenders which your Lordship already knows from the letter which they tell me they wrote from Sancta Barbara. The other two who fled from them will have received the same at your Lordship's hands, as is just.

I awaited their return and the outcome for some days, during which time I sent my *sargento mayor* to find and utilize the buffalo to the east, where he found an infinite multitude of them, and had the experience which he set forth in a special report. Both he and the others were so long delayed that, in order to lose no time, at the beginning of October, this first church having been founded, wherein the first mass was celebrated on the 8th of September, and the religious having been distributed in various provinces and *doctrinas*, I went in person to the province of Abo and to that of the Xumanas and to the large and famous salines of this country, which must be about twenty leagues east of here.

From there I crossed over to the west through the province of Puaray to discover the South Sea, so that I might be able to report to your Lordship. When Captain Villagran arrived I took him for this purpose.

What more in good time it was possible to accomplish through human efforts is in substance what I shall set forth in the following chapter. For this purpose it shall be day by day, and event by event, especially regarding the death of my nephew and *maese de campo*, who, as my rear-guard, was following me to the South Sea. His process, along with many other papers, I am sending to your Lordship. To despatch them earlier has been impossible. I have, then, discovered and seen up to the present the following provinces:

The province of the Piguis, which is the one encountered in coming from that New Spain; the province of the Xumanas; the province of the Cheguas, which we Spaniards call Puaray; the province of the Cheres; the province of the Trias; the province of the Emmes; the province of the Teguas; the province of the Picuries; the province of the Taos; the province of the Peccos; the province of Abbo and the salines; the province of Juni; and the province of Mohoce.

These last two are somewhat apart from the rest, towards the west, and are the places where we recently discovered the rich mines, as is attested by the papers which your Lordship will see there. I could not work or improve these mines because of the death of my *maese de campo*, Joan de Zaldivar, and of the rectification of the results of it, which I completed at the end of last month. Nor could I complete my journey to the South Sea, which was the purpose with which I went to the said provinces, leaving my camp in this province of the Teguas, whence I am now writing.

There must be in this province and in the others abovementioned, to make a conservative estimate, seventy thousand Indians, settled after our custom, house adjoining house, with square plazas. They have no streets, and in the pueblos, which contain many plazas or wards, one goes from one plaza to the other through alleys. They are of two and three stories, of an *estado* and a half or an *estado* and a third each, which latter is not so common; and some houses are of four, five, six, and seven stories. Even whole pueblos dress in very highly colored cotton mantas, white or black, and some of thread—very good clothes. Others wear buffalo hides, of which there is a great abundance. They have most excellent wool, of whose value I am sending a small example.

It is a land abounding in flesh of buffalo, goats with hideous horns, and turkeys; and in Mohoce there is game of all kinds. There are many wild and ferocious beasts, lions, bears, wolves, tigers, *penicas*, ferrets, porcupines, and other animals, whose hides they tan and use. Towards the west there are bees and very white honey, of which I am sending a sample. Besides, there are vegetables, a great abundance of the best and greatest salines in the world, and a very great many kinds of very rich ores, as I stated above. Some discovered near here do not appear so, although we have hardly begun to see anything of the much there is to be seen. There are very fine grape vines, rivers, forests of many oaks, and some cork trees, fruits, melons, grapes, watermelons, Castilian plums, *capuli*, pine-nuts, acorns, ground-nuts, and coralejo, which is a delicious fruit, and other wild fruits. There are many and very good fish in this Rio del Norte, and in others. From the ores here are made all the colors which we use, and they are very fine.

The people are in general very comely; their color is like those of that land, and they are much like them in manner and dress, in their grinding, in their food, dancing, singing, and many other things, except in their languages, which are many, and different from those there. Their religion consists in worshipping idols, of which they have many; and in their temples, after their own manner, they



worship them with fire, painted reeds, feathers, and universal offering of almost everything they get, such as small animals, birds, vegetables, etc. In their government they are free, for although they have some petty captains, they obey them badly and in very few things.

We have seen other nations such as the Querechos, or herdsmen, who live in tents of tanned hides, among the buffalo. The Apaches, of whom we have also seen some, are innumerable, and although I heard that they lived in rancherías, a few days ago I ascertained that they live like these in pueblos, one of which, eighteen leagues from here, contains fifteen plazas. They are a people whom I have compelled to render obedience to His Majesty, although not by means of legal instruments like the rest of the provinces. This has caused me much labor, diligence, and care, long journeys, with arms on the shoulders, and not a little watching and circumspection; indeed, because my *maese de campo* was not as cautious as he should have been, they killed him with twelve companions in a great pueblo and fortress called Acóma, which must contain about three thousand Indians. As punishment for its crime and its treason against his Majesty, to whom it had already rendered submission by a public instrument, and as a warning to the rest, I razed and burned it completely, in the way in which your Lordship will see by the process of this cause. All these provinces, pueblos, and peoples, I have seen with my own eyes.

There is another nation, that of the Cocoyes, an innumerable people with huts and agriculture. Of this nation and of the large settlements at the source of the Rio del Norte and of those to the northwest and west and towards the South Sea, I have numberless reports, and pearls of remarkable size from the said sea, and assurance that there is an infinite number of them on the coast of this country. And as to the east, a person in my camp, an Indian who speaks Spanish and is one of those who came with Humaña, has been in the pueblo of the said herdsmen. It is nine continuous leagues in length and two in width, with streets and houses consisting of huts. It is situated in the midst of the multitude of buffalo, which are so numerous that my *sargento mayor*, who hunted them and brought back their hides, meat, tallow, and suet, asserts that in one herd alone he saw more than there are of our cattle in the combined three ranches of Rodrigo del Rio, Salvago, and Jeronimo Lopez, which are famed in those regions.

I should never cease were I to recount individually all of the many things which occur to me. I can only say that with God's help I shall see them all, and give new worlds, new, peaceful, and grand to his Majesty, greater than the good Marquis gave to him, although he did so much, if you, Illustrious Sir, will give to me the aid, the protection, and the help which I expect from such a hand. And although I confess that I am crushed at having been so out of favor when I left that country, and although a soul frightened by disfavor usually loses hope and despairs of success, it is nevertheless true that I never have and never shall lose hope of receiving many and very great favors at the hand of your Lordship, especially in matters of such importance to his Majesty. And in order that you, Illustrious Sir, may be inclined to render them to me, I beg that you take note of the great increase which the royal crown and the rents of his Majesty have and will have in this land, with so many and such a variety of things, each one of which promises very great treasures. I shall only note these four, omitting the rest as being well known and common:

First, the great wealth which the mines have begun to reveal and the great number of them in this land, whence proceed the royal fifths and profits. Second, the certainty of the proximity of the South Sea, whose trade with Pir?, New Spain, and China is not to be depreciated, for it will give birth in time to advantageous and continuous duties, because of its close proximity, particularly to China and to that land. And what I emphasize in this matter as worthy of esteem is the traffic in pearls, reports of which are so certain, as I have stated, and of which we have had ocular experience from the shells. Third, the increase of vassals and tributes, which will increase not only the rents, but his renown and dominion as well, if it be possible that for our king these can increase. Fourth, the wealth of the abundant salines, and of the mountains of brimstone, of which there is a greater quantity than in any other province. Salt is the universal article of traffic of all these barbarians and their regular food, for they even eat or suck it alone as we do sugar. These four things appear as if dedicated solely to his Majesty. I will not mention the founding of so many republics, the many offices, their quittances, vacancies, provisions, etc., the wealth of the wool and hides of buffalo, and many other things, clearly and well known, or, judging from the general nature of the land, the certainty of wines and oils.

In view, then, Illustrious Sir, of things of such honor, profit, and value, and of the great prudence, magnanimity, and nobility of your Lordship, who in all matters is bound to prosper me and overcome the ill fortune of my disgrace, I humbly beg and supplicate, since it is of such importance to the service of God and of his Majesty, that the greatest aid possible be sent to me, both for settling and pacifying, your Lordship giving your favor, mind, zeal, and life for the conservation, progress, and increase of this land, through the preaching of the holy gospel and the founding of this republic, giving liberty and favor to all, opening wide the door to them, and, if it should be necessary, even ordering them to come to serve their king in so honorable and profitable a matter, in a land so abundant and of such great beginnings of riches. I call them beginnings, for although we have seen much, we have not yet made a beginning in comparison with what there is to see and enjoy. And if the number should exceed five hundred men, they all would be needed, especially married men, who are the solid rock on which new republics are permanently founded; and noble people, of whom there is such a surplus there. Particularly do I beg your Lordship to give a license to my daughter Mariquita, for whom I am sending, and to those of my relatives who may wish so honorably to end their lives.

For my part, I have sunk my ships and have furnished an example to all as to how they ought to spend their wealth and their lives and those of their children and relatives in the service of their king and lord, on whose account and in whose name I beg your Lordship to order sent to me six small cannon and some powder, all of which will always be at the service of his Majesty, as is this and everything else. Although on such occasions the necessities increase, and although under such circumstances as those in which I now find myself others are wont to exaggerate, I prefer to suffer from lack of necessities rather than to be a burden to his Majesty or to your Lordship, feeling assured that I shall provide them for many poor people who may look to me if your Lordship will grant the favor, which I ask, of sending them to me.

To make this request of you, Illustrious Sir, I am sending the best qualified persons whom I have in my camp, for it is but reasonable that such should go on an errand of such importance to the service of God and his Majesty, in which they risk their health and life, looking lightly upon the great hardships which they must suffer and have suffered. Father Fray Alonso Martinez, apostolic commissary of these provinces of New Mexico, is the most meritorious person with whom I have had any dealings, and of the kind needed by such great kingdoms for their spiritual government. Concerning this I am writing to his Majesty, and I shall be greatly favored if your Lordship will do the same. I believe your Lordship is under a loving obligation to do this, both because the said Father Commissary is your client as well as because of the authority of his person and of the merits of his worthy life, of which I am sending to his Majesty a special report, which your Lordship will see if you desire, and to which I refer. In his company goes my cousin, Father Fray Cristobal de Salazar, concerning whom testimony can be given by his prelate, for in order not to appear an interested witness in my own cause I refrain from saying what I could say with much reason and truth. For all spiritual matters I refer you to the said fathers, whom I beg your Lordship to credit in every respect as you would credit in person. I say but little to your Lordship as to your crediting them as true priests of my father Saint Francis. With such as these may your Lordship swell these your kingdoms, for there is plenty for them to do.

For temporal matters go such honorable persons as Captain and Procurator-general Gaspar Perez de Villagran, captain of the guard, Marcos Farfan de los Godos, and Captain Joan Pinero, to whom I refer you, as also to the many papers which they carry. In them your Lordship will find authentic information regarding all that you may desire to learn of this country of yours.

I remain as faithful to you, Illustrious Sir, as those who most protest. Your interests will always be mine, for the assurance and confidence which my faithfulness gives me is an evidence that in past undertakings I have found in your Lordship true help and love; for although when I left I did not deserve to receive the *cédula* from my king dated April 2, I shall deserve to receive it now that I know that I have served him so well.

And in order to satisfy his royal conscience and for the safety of the creatures who were preserved at Acóma, I send them to your Lordship with the holy purpose which the Father Commissary will explain, for I know it is so great a service to God that I consider very well employed the work and expense

which I have spent in the matter. And I do not expect a lesser reward for your Lordship on account of the prayers of those few days. Honor it, Illustrious Sir, for it redounds to the service of God. May He prosper and exalt you to greater offices. In His divine service, which is the highest and greatest I can name, I again beg for the aid requested, much, good, and speedy-priests as well as settlers and soldiers.

## Jacques Cartier: First Contact with the Indians (1534)

*Jacques Cartier was responsible for France's early possession of Canada, landing at Cape Gaspé while on a mission for King Francis I in 1534. Cartier's search for a route to the Western Sea led him to discover and later explore in depth the Saint Lawrence River. Despite several voyages to Canada, however, Cartier's dreams for riches were never fulfilled. For a multitude of reasons, including wars at home, the French lost interest in Canada and didn't return until the 17th century. Cartier's detailed description of the native peoples was probably expanded from his ship's log.*

---

The Cape of the said South land was called The Cape of Hope<sup>(1)</sup>, through the hope that there we had to finde some passage. The fourth of July we went along the coast of the said land on the Northerly side to find some harborough, where wee entred into a creek altogether open toward the South, where there is no succour against the wind: we thought good to name it S. Martines Creeke. There we stayed from the fourth of July until the twelfth: while we were there, on Munday being the sixth of the moneth, Service being done, wee with one of our boates went to discover a Cape and point of land that on the Westerne side was about seven or eight leagues from us, to see which way it did bend, and being within halfe a league of it, wee sawe two companies of boates of wilde men going from one land to the other: their boates were in number about fourtie or fiftie. One part of the which came to the said point, and a great number of men went on shore making a great noise, beckening unto us that wee should come on land, shewing us certaine skinnes upon pieces of wood, but because we had but one onely boat, wee would not goe to them, but went to the other side lying in the See: they seeing us flee, prepared two of their boats to follow us, with which came also five more of them that were comming from the Sea side, all which approached neere unto our boate, dancing, and making many signes of joy and mirth, as it were desiring our friendship, saying in their tongue Napeu tondamen assurtah,<sup>(2)</sup> with many other words that we understood not. But because (as we have said) we had but one boat, wee would not stand to their courtesie, but made signes unto them that they should turne back, which they would not do, but with great furie came toward us: and suddenly with their boates compassed us about: and because they would not away from us by any signes that we could make, we shot off two. pieces among them, which did so terrifie them, that they put themselves to flight toward the sayde point, making a great noise: and having staid a while, they began anew, even as at the first to come to us againe, and being come neere our boat wee strucke at them with two lances, which thing was so great a terrour unto them, that with great haste they beganne to flee, and would no more follow us.

*How the said wilde men comming to our ships, and our men going toward them, both parties went on land, and how the saide wilde men with great joy began to trafique with our men.*

The next day part of the saide wilde men with nine of their boates came to the point and entrance of the Creeke, where we with our ships were at road. We being advertised of their comming, went to the point where they were with our boates: but so soone as they saw us, they began to flee, making signes that they came to trafique with us, shewing us such skinnes as they cloth themselves withall, which are of small value. We likewise made signes unto them, that we wished them no evill: and in signe thereof two of our men ventured to go on land to them, and carry them knives with other Iron wares, and a red hat to give unto their Captaine. Which when they saw, they also came on land, and brought some of their skinnes, and so began to deale with us, seeming to be very glad to have our iron ware and other things, stil dancing with many other ceremonies, as with their hands to cast Sea water on their heads. They gave us whatsoever they had, not keeping any thing, so that they were

constrained to go back againe naked, and made signes that the next day they would come againe, and bring more skinnes with them.

*How that we having sent two of our men on land with wares, there came about 300. wilde men with great gladnesse. Of the qualitie of the countrey, what it bringeth forth, and of the Bay called Baie du Chaleur, or The Bay of heat.*

Upon Thursday being the eight of the moneth, because the winde was not good to go out with our ships, we set our boates in a readinesse to goe to discover the said Bay, and that day wee went 25. leagues within it. The next day the wind and weather being faire, we sailed until noone, in which time we had notice of a great part of the said Bay, and how that over the low lands, there were other lands with high mountaines: but seeing that there was no passage at all, wee began to turne back againe, taking our way along the coast: and sayling, we saw certaine wilde men that stood upon the shoare of a lake, that is among the low grounds, who were making fires and smokes: wee went thither, and found that there was a channell of the sea that did enter into the lake, and setting our boats at one of the banks of the channell, the wilde men with one of their boates came unto us, and brought up pieces of Seales ready sodden, putting them upon pieces of wood: then retiring themselves, they would make signes unto us, that they did give them us. We sent two men unto them with hatchets, knives, beads, and other such like ware, whereat they were very glad, and by and by in clusters they came to the shore where wee were, with their boates, bringing with them skinnes and other such things as they had, to have of our wares. They were more than 300. men, women, and children: Some of the women which came not over, wee might see stand up to the knees in water, singing and dancing: the other that had passed the river where we were, came very friendly to us, rubbing our armes with their owne handes, then would they lift them up toward heaven, shewing many signes of gladnesse: and in such wise were wee assured one of another, that we very familiarly began to trafique for whatsoever they had, til they had nothing but their naked bodies; for they gave us all whatsoever they had, and that was but of small value. We perceived that this people might very easily be converted to our Religion. They goe from place to place. They live onely with fishing. They have an ordinarie time to fish for their provision. The countrey is hotter than the countrey of Spaine, and the fairest that can possibly be found, altogether smooth, and level. There is no place be it never so little, but it hath some trees (yea albeit it be sandie) or else is full of wilde come, that hath an eare like unto Rie: the come is like oates, and smal peason as thicke as if they had bene sowed and plowed, white and red gooseberies, strawberries, blackberies, white and red Roses, with many other floures of very sweet and pleasant smell. There be also many goodly medowes full of grasse, and lakes wherein great plentie Of salmones be. They call a hatchet in their tongue Cochi, and a knife Bacon: we named it The bay of heat.

*Of another nation of wilde men: of their manners, living and clothing.*

Being certified that there was no passage through the said Bay, we hoised saile, and went from S. Maitines Creeke upon Sunday being the 12. of July, to goe and discover further beyond the said Bay, and went along the sea coast Eastward about eighteene leagues, till we came to the Cape of Prato, (3) where we found the tide very great, but shallow ground, and the Sea stormie, so. that we were constrained to draw toward shore, between the said Cape and an Iland lying Eastward, about a league from the said Cape, where we cast anker for that night. The next morning we hoised saile to trend the said coast about, which lyeth North Northeast. But there rose such a stormie and raging winde against us, that we were constrained to come to the place againe, from whence we were come: there did we stay all that day til the next that we hoised up saile, and came to the middest of a river five or sixe leagues from the Cape of Prato Northward, and being overthwart the said River, there arose againe a contrary winde, with great fogges and stormes. So that we were constrained upon Tuesday being the fourteenth of the moneth to enter into the river, and there did we stay till the sixteenth of the moneth looking for faire weather to come out of it: on which day being Thursday, the winde became so raging that one of our ships lost an anker, and we were constrained to goe up higher into the river seven or eight leagues, into a good harborough and ground that we with our boates found out, and through the evill weather, tempest, and darkenesse that was, wee stayed in the saide harborough till the five and twentieth of the moneth, not being able to put out: in the meane time wee sawe a great multitude of wilde men that were fishing for mackerels, whereof there is great store. Their boates were about 40, and the persons what with men, women, and children two hundred, which after they had hanted our

company a while, they came very familiarly with their boats to the sides of our ships. We gave them knives, combes, beads of glasse, and other trifles of small value, for which they made many signes of gladnesse, lifting their hands up to heaven dancing and singing in their boates. These men may very well and truely be called Wilde, because there is no poorer people in the world. For I thinke all that they had together, besides their boates and nets, was not worth five souce. (4) They goe altogether naked saving their privities, which are covered with a little skinne, and certaine olde skinned that they cast upon them. Neither in nature nor in language, doe they any whit agree with them which we found first: their heads be altogether shaven, except one bush of haire which they suffer to grow upon the top of their crowne as long as a horse taile, and then with certaine leather strings binde it in a knot upon their heads. They have no other dwelling but their boates, which they turne upside downe, and under them they lay themselves all along upon the bare ground. They eate their flesh almost raw, save onely that they heat it a little upon imbers of coales, so doe they their fish. Upon Magdalens day we with our boates went to the bancke of the river, and freely went on shore among them, whereat they made many signs, and all their men in two or three companies began to sing and dance, seeming to be very glad of our comming. They had caused all the young women to flee into the wood, two or three excepted, that stayed with them, to ech of which we gave a combe, and a little bell made of Tinne, for which they were very glad, thanking our Captaine, rubbing his armes and breasts with their hands. When the men saw us give something unto those that had stayed, it caused al the rest to come out of the wood, to the end that that they should have as much as the others: These women are about twenty, who altogether in a knot fell upon our Captaine, touching and rubbing him with their hands, according to their manner of cherishing and making much of one, who gave to each of them a little Tinne bell: then suddenly they began to dance, and sing many songs. There we found great store of mackrels, that they had taken upon the shore, with certaine nets that they made to fish, of a kinde of Hempe that groweth in that place where ordinarily they abide, for they never come to the sea, but onely in fishing time. As farre as I understand, there groweth likewise a kind of Millet as big as Peason, like unto that which groweth in Bresil, which they eate in stead of bread. They had great store of it. They call it in their tongue Kapaige. They have also Prunes (that is to say Damsins) which they dry for winter as we doe, they call them Honesta. They have also Figs, (5) Nuts, Apples, and other fruits, and Beans, that they call Sahu, their nuts Cahehya. If we shewed them any thing that they have not, nor know not what it is, shaking their heads, they will say Nohda, which is as much to say, they have it not, nor they know it not. Of those things they have, they would with signes shew us how to dresse them, and how they grow. They eate nothing that hath any taste of salt. They are very great theeves, for they will filch and steale whatsoever they can lay hold of, and all is fish that commeth to net.

*How our men set up a great Crosse upon the poynt of the sayd Porte, and the Captaine of those wild men, after a long Oration, was by our Captain appeased, and contented that two of his Children should goe with him.*

Upon the 25 of the moneth, wee caused a faire high Crosse to be made of the height of thirty foote, which was made in the presence of many of them, upon the point of the entrance of the sayd haven, (6) in the midst whereof we hanged up a Shield with three Floure de Lucis in it, and in the top was carved in the wood with Anticke letters this posie, Vive le Roy de France. Then before them all we set it upon the sayd point. They with great heed beheld both the making and setting of it up. So soone as it was up, we altogether kneeled downe before them, with our hands toward Heaven, yeelding God thanks: and we made signes unto them, shewing them the Heavens, and that all our salvation dependeth onely on him which in them dwelleth: whereat they shewed a great admiration, looking first one at another, and then upon the Crosse. And after wee were returned to our ships, their Captaine clad with an old Beares skin, with three of his sonnes, and a brother of his with him, came unto us in one of their boates, but they came not so neere us as they were wont to doe: there he made a long Oration unto us, shewing us the crosse we had set up, and making a crosse with two fingers, then did he shew us all the Countrey about us, as if he would say that all was his, and that wee should not set up any crosse without his leave. His talke being ended, we shewed him an Axe, faining that we would give it him for his skin, to which he listned, for by little and little hee came neere our ships. One of our fellowes that was in our boate, tooke hold on theirs, and suddenly leapt into it, with two or three more, who enforced them to enter into our ships, whereat they were greatly astonished. But our Captain did straightwaies assure them, that they should have no harme, nor any injurie offred them at all, and entertained them very friendly, making them eate and drinke. Then did

we shew them with signes, that the crosse was but onely set up to be as a light and leader which wayes to enter into the port, and that wee would shortly come againe, and bring good store of iron wares and other things, but that we would take two of his children with us, and afterward bring them to the sayd port againe: and so wee clothed two of them in shirts, and coloured coates, with red cappes, and put about every ones necke a copper chaine, whereat they were greatly contented: then gave they their old clothes to their fellowes that went backe againe, and we gave to each one of those three that went backe, a hatchet, and some knives, which made them very glad. After these were gone, and had told the newes unto their fellowes, in the afternoone there came to our ships sixe boates of them, with five or sixe men in every one, to take their farewels of those two we had detained to take with us, (7) and brought them some fish, uttering many words which we did not understand, making signes that they would not remove the crosse we had set up.

*How after we were departed from the sayd porte, following our voyage along the sayd coast, we went to discover the land lying Southeast, and Northwest.*

The next day, being the 25 of the moneth, we had faire weather, and went from the said port: and being out of the river, we sailed Eastnortheast, for after the entrance into the said river, the land is environed about, and maketh a bay in maner of halfe a circle, where being in our ships, we might see all the coast sayling behind, which we came to seeke, the land lying Southeast and Northwest, the course of which was distant from the river about twentie leagues.

## **Privileges and Prerogatives Granted by Their Catholic Majesties to Christopher Columbus : 1492**

*The meaning of Columbus's 1492 voyage is highly contested. On the one hand, it is witness to the tremendous vitality of late Medieval and Early Modern Europe. On the other hand, the direct result of this and later voyages was the virtual extermination, by ill treatment and disease, of the vast majority of the native inhabitants and the enormous growth of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It might not be fair to blame Columbus for all of the destructive policies that followed his voyages, but because all sides treat him as a symbol, the issue cannot be avoided.*

---

FERDINAND and ELIZABETH, by the Grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, of Leon, of Arragon, of Sicily, of Granada, of Toledo, of Valencia, of Galicia, of Majorca, of Minorca, of Sevil, of Sardinia, of Jaen, of Algarve, of Algezira, of Gibraltar, of the Canary Islands, Count and Countess of Barcelona, Lord and Lady of Biscay and Molina, Duke and Duchess of Athens and Neopatria. Count and Countess of Rousillion and Cerdaigne, Marquess and Marchioness of Oristan and Gociano, &c.

For as much of you, Christopher Columbus, are going by our command, with some of our vessels and men, to discover and subdue some Islands and Continent in the ocean, and it is hoped that by God's assistance, some of the said Islands and Continent in the ocean will be discovered and conquered by your means and conduct, therefore it is but just and reasonable, that since you expose yourself to such danger to serve us, you should be rewarded for it. And we being willing to honour and favour You for the reasons aforesaid: Our will is, That you, Christopher Columbus, after discovering and conquering the said Islands and Continent in the said ocean, or any of them, shall be our Admiral of the said Islands and Continent you shall so discover and conquer; and that you be our Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour in them, and that for the future, you may call and stile yourself, D. Christopher Columbus, and that your sons and successors in the said employment, may call themselves Dons, Admirals, Vice-Roys, and Governours of them; and that you may exercise the office of Admiral, with the charge of Vice-Roy and Governour of the said Islands and Continent, which you and your Lieutenants shall conquer, and freely decide all causes, civil and criminal, appertaining to the said employment of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, as you shall think fit in justice, and as the Admirals of our kingdoms use to do; and that you have power to punish offenders; and you and your

Lieutenants exercise the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, in all things belonging to the said offices, or any of them; and that you enjoy the perquisites and salaries belonging to the said employments, and to each of them, in the same manner as the High Admiral of our kingdoms does. And by this our letter, or a copy of it signed by a Public Notary: We command Prince John, our most dearly beloved Son, the Infants, Dukes, Prelates, Marquesses, Great Masters and Military Orders, Priors. Commendaries, our Counsellors, Judges, and other Officers of Justice whatsoever, belonging Courts, and Chancery, and Constables of Castles, Strong Houses, and others; and all Corporations, Bayliffs, Governours, Judges, Commanders, Sea Officers; and the Aldermen, Common Council, Officers, and Good People of all Cities, Lands, and Places in our Kingdoms and Dominions, and in those you shall conquer and subdue, and the captains masters, mates, and other officers and sailors, our natural subjects now being, or that shall be for the time to come, and any of them that when you shall have discovered the said Islands and Continent in the ocean; and you, or any that shall have your commission, shall have taken the usual oath in such cases, that they for the future, look upon you as long as you live, and after you, your son and heir, and so from one heir to another forever, as our Admiral on our said Ocean, and as Vice-Roy and Governour of the said Islands and Continent, by you, Christopher Columbus, discovered and conquered; and that they treat you and your Lieutenants, by you appointed, for executing the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, as such in all respects, and give you all the perquisites and other things belonging and appertaining to the said offices; and allow, and cause to be allowed you, all the honours, graces, concessions, preeminences, prerogatives, immunities, and other things, or any of them which are due to you, by virtue of your commands of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and Governour, and to be observed completely, so that nothing be diminished; and that they make no objection to this, or any part of it, nor suffer it to be made; forasmuch as we from this time forward, by this our letter, bestow on you the employments of Admiral, Vice-Roy, and perpetual Governour forever; and we put you into possession of the said offices, and of every of them, and full power to use and exercise them, and to receive the perquisites and salaries belonging to them, or any of them, as was said above. Concerning all which things, if it be requisite, and you shall desire it, We command our Chancellour, Notaries, and other Officers, to pass, seal, and deliver to you, our Letter of Privilege, in such form and legal manner, as you shall require or stand in need of. And that none of them presume to do any thing to the contrary, upon pain of our displeasure, and forfeiture of 30 ducats for each offence. And we command him, who shall show them this our Letter, that he summon them to appear before us at our Court, where we shall then be, within fifteen days after such summons, under the said penalty. Under which same, we also command any Public Notary whatsoever, that he give to him that shows it him, a certificate under his seal, that we may know how our command is obeyed.

GIVEN at Granada, on the 30th of April, in the year of our Lord, 1492.-

I, THE KING, I, THE QUEEN.

By their Majesties Command,

John Coloma

Secretary to the King and Queen.

Entered according to order.

RODERICK. Doctor.

SEBASTIAN DOLONA,

FRANCIS DE MADRID,

Councillors.

Registered

# When Historians Disagree

## How Should Columbus be Remembered?

For most of American history, Christopher Columbus was remembered as a hero, the man who “discovered America” based on his world-changing voyage across the Atlantic and landfall in the Americas on October 12, 1492. More recent historians have begun to challenge this version of the role for which Columbus should be remembered. No one challenges the importance of the new contact between the people of Europe and the people of the Americas that was established as a result of the voyage of Columbus or the exchange of people, plants, animals, diseases and ideas—the so-called Columbian exchange—that resulted. But many recent historians are challenging other aspects of the memory of Columbus. Of course, whether he “discovered” America depends completely on one’s perspective. For most people of Europe, Columbus did “discover” a new continent even though his goal had been to sail across the Atlantic to reach an old one—his goal was Asia, not some new land. For the native peoples of the Americas, however, Columbus did not “discover” anything. They were not waiting to be discovered. And the soldiers, explorers, and microbes that contact with Europe brought to these people seemed more like an invasion than any discovery. Harvard professor Samuel Eliot Morison was among those who saw Columbus as a hero, as did many in Morison’s day. Morison did not hesitate to note the sometimes brutal ways that Columbus treated the native people whom he met in the lands he found but for Morison that was not the point of the story. And as a highly respected historian of early European settlement in New England and the official historian of the United States Navy during World War II, Morison’s accounts of the life and work of Columbus, published in 1942 and 1954 represent the consensus of his era. Among recent historians, however, as the earlier consensus has disappeared, different voices look at Columbus from many different perspectives but no one equals Howard Zinn in their critique of the impact of the man and his “discovery” not only on the first people of the Americas but on the subsequent telling of American history.

Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1942, pp. 669-670.

America would eventually have been discovered if the Great Enterprise of Columbus had been rejected; yet who can predict what would have been the outcome? The voyage that took him to “The Indies” and home was no blind chance, but the creation of his own brain and soul, long studied, carefully planned, repeatedly urged on indifferent princes, and carried through by virtue of his courage, sea-knowledge and indomitable will. No later voyage could ever have such spectacular results, and Columbus’s fame would have been secure had he retired from the sea in 1493. Yet a lofty ambition to explore further, to organize

Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States, 1492-Present*, New York: HarperCollins, 1980, 1999, pp. 9-10.

To emphasize the heroism of Columbus and his successors as navigators and discoverers, and to deemphasize their genocide, is not a technical necessity but an ideological choice. It serves—unwittingly—to justify what was done.

My point is not that we must, in telling history, accuse, judge, condemn Columbus *in absentia*. It is too late for that; it would be a useless scholarly exercise in morality. But the easy acceptance of atrocities as a deplorable but necessary price to pay for progress (Hiroshima and



the territories won for Castile, and to complete the circuit of the globe, sent him thrice more to America. These voyages, even more than the first, proved him to be the greatest navigator of his age, and enabled him to train the captains and pilots who were to display the banners of Spain off every American cape and island between Fifty North and Fifth South. The ease with which he dissipated the unknown terrors of the Ocean, the skill with which he found his way out and home, again and again, led thousands of men from every Western European nation into maritime adventure and exploration. And if Columbus was a failure as a colonial administrator, it was partly because his conception of a colony transcended the desire of his followers to impart, and the capacity of natives to receive, the institutions and culture of Renaissance Europe.

Vietnam, to save Western civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary, to save socialism; nuclear proliferation, to save us all)—that is still with us. One reason these atrocities are still with us is that we have learned to bury them in a mass of other facts, as radioactive wastes are buried in containers in the earth. We have learned to give them exactly the same proportion of attention that teachers and writers often give them in the most respectable of classrooms and textbooks. This learned sense of moral proportion, coming from the apparent objectivity of the scholar, is accepted more easily than when it comes from politicians at press conferences. It is therefore more deadly...

My viewpoint, in telling the history of the United States, is different: that we must not accept the memory of states as our own ... And in such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people, as Albert Camus suggested, not to be on the side of the executioners.