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HISTORY

## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. I): Introduction

SEPTEMBER 14, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



*Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally.*

Have you ever — even once — asked yourself where this current, fashionable narrative came from that Christopher Columbus was a racist, rapist, murderer, slave-driver and genocidal maniac? Have you ever looked into finding out the answer to that question? A good chance exists that your answer to one, if not both of those questions, is a resounding “no.” That is precisely what the Columbus detractors are banking on in perpetuating their false narrative against him.

As an attorney, historian and professional researcher, I **have** asked myself that question and **have** looked into it, on a deep, methodical and scholarly level. In fact, I was enlisted to do so by Philadelphia's City Council when they received a petition to eliminate the municipal holiday of Christopher Columbus Day — as over sixty U.S. cities had already done — from a local member of the bar.

He shall remain anonymous in this article — let's call him "Mr. Coarse." But suffice it to say he has characterized himself in a local news-outlet interview as a "Socialist ideolog[ue]" and "aveng[er of his] enslaved ancestors" who, oddly, is admittedly "scared sh\*\*less of statues." In that same interview, he also expressed his opinion that "[t]here are no 'good cops'" and revealed that those who know him understandably may be "surprised to know" his secret: "**I don't hate all white people**".

The splenetic "Mr. Coarse" buttressed his polemic petition with the usual lies about Christopher Columbus being a racist, rapist, genocidal maniac, *et cetera*. He purported to support **those** lies with the usual hackneyed hack-job of out-of-context pseudo-quotes of Columbus's own writings. The reader is undoubtedly familiar with these pseudo-quotes: those so carefully crafted with strategic use of ellipses to twist portions of Columbus's own correspondences to create the false impression that he means the exact **opposite** of what he actually said, and that are plastered ubiquitously across the Big-Tech-controlled internet.

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## “ Christopher Columbus became the first civil rights activist of the Americas and the founder of Western Culture in the New World, making him, beyond cavil, the greatest hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

At the request of City Council to investigate the calumnious claims of "Mr. Coarse," I reread the primary historical sources, this time in their original Fifteenth-Century Spanish. These included the seminal, three-volume *Historia de las Indias* (*History of the [West] Indies*) by Friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who was appointed by both the Crown of Spain and the Church as "Protector of the Indians." De las Casas's account, written contemporaneously with the Spanish settlement of the West Indies — and, importantly, very critically of his own countrymen's violent and anti-Christian deeds in that endeavor — is the closest account in existence to having been recorded by the indigenes themselves. I also read the epistolary account of Columbus's Second Voyage written by Dr. Diego Chanca, effectively the surgeon general of the West Indies, and Columbus's own journals, which have been publicly available in English for nearly two centuries.

All of the primary sources dovetailed in one important regard: they show, unequivocally and irrefutably, that Christopher Columbus was *none* of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him. Rather, in addition to his well-known feat of bringing to light to the rest of the world the existence of the Americas and its inhabitants, Christopher Columbus actively fought *against* the rampant racism, rape, murder, enslavement and genocide committed by his arch-nemeses, the Spanish *hidalgos* (low, landed nobles). Consequently, Christopher Columbus became the first civil rights activist of the Americas and the founder of Western Culture in the New World, making him, beyond cavil, the greatest hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

This is precisely why Columbus's detractors — a sinister axis of cultural majoritarians that includes radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists and globalists — hate him; because Christopher Columbus stands for everything they stand against. That is, he was a devout Catholic who valued and successfully fought for the welfare of all human lives; brought the existence of the Americas to light to the rest of the planet; and established the "trinity" of Western Culture in the Americas: (1) Judeo-Christian ethics and morals; (2) Greco-Roman democracy and law; and (3) the benefits of self-sovereignty, which in turn include civil rights, personal responsibility and the demos of capital.

*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, in this spirit of cultural majoritarianism, has recently and repeatedly attempted several journalistic kill-shots at Christopher Columbus. As my own name surfaced as a local expert in the history of Columbus and his voyages, the *Inquirer* attempted the same at me, claiming that no historians supported my characterization of Columbus as the greatest hero of the post-medieval era and first civil rights activist of the Americas. The *Inquirer* was wrong, of course, and seems to have quietly removed the article from the internet without a formal retraction or apology. To add insult to injury, my multiple correspondences to *Inquirer* Managing Editor of the Op-Ed section, Sandra Shea, requesting to provide an historically-accurate counter-narrative, were repeatedly ignored by her.

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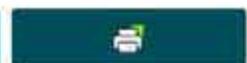
**“ This is precisely why Columbus’s detractors — a sinister axis of cultural majoritarians that includes radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists and globalists — hate him; because Christopher Columbus stands for everything they stand against.**

Yet, anyone who has actually read the primary sources — not the internet’s reimagining of them — concurs with my characterization. For instance, Stanford Professor Emeritus Carol Delaney, who left her tenured university position to dedicate ten years of her life to travel the world in the study of Columbus artifacts in order to write her book *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* — and who is truly an unparalleled world-expert on Christopher Columbus — agrees that all the tired calumny repeatedly levied against him is simply a collection of lies. “[H]e’s been terribly maligned,” she wrote of Columbus, by revisionists who are “blaming [him] for things he didn’t do.” And that, dear reader, is the reason for this exposé.

In the months to come, I, with the help of *Broad + Liberty*, will continue to bring you a series of articles about Christopher Columbus, entitled “Christopher Columbus: The Greatest Hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries as Revealed by the Primary Historical Sources,” to put to rest these lies of the cultural majoritarians. Following this introduction, my first substantive article on the man will chronicle Columbus’s birth and early life, putting a real, human face on the near-mythical historical figure Columbus has become. The subsequent articles will detail his First, Second, Third and Fourth Voyages; the world-changing events they spawned; his lifelong and tireless civil rights activism on behalf of the indigenes of the New World; and his continued efforts to his dying day as their champion.

Should you honor me by continuing to the end of this series, it will conclude with an account of the civil rights legacy his life and efforts spawned through those that proudly modeled themselves after “the illustrious Genoese” Christopher Columbus, the first civil rights activist of the Americas, our first Founding Father and the greatest hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

*Robert Petrone, Esq. is a civil rights author and attorney, and local Philadelphia expert on Christopher Columbus.*



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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. II): Columbus the Man

SEPTEMBER 25, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



Last week, I presented an introduction to this series of articles about Christopher Columbus that included a brief summary of my credentials and sources; the local socio-political factors that make this serial exposé necessary; and the theme of this series. That theme is this: that Christopher Columbus was not only the man who single-handedly ushered humanity out of the Middle Ages and into a new era of intercontinental fraternity by bringing to light to the rest of the world the existence of the American continents, but he was also the Americas' (1) progenitor of Western Culture, (2) first "Founding Father" and (3) first civil rights activist. This astounding list of deeds, which I dare say no one since has matched, makes Christopher Columbus, beyond cavil, the greatest hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries by any standard.

How this unique, self-educated genius managed to defy not only the medieval ideologies of his time, but also the sizable, war-mongering, political forces that opposed him, and accomplished all his unparalleled deeds in the face of them, is revealed by his humble beginnings. A man of no rank and no formal education, Cristoforo Colombo came into the world in the latter half of 1451, the son of poor, Catholic, Genoan wool-weavers. His parents named him, perhaps prophetically, after St. Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, whose most famous legend tells that the surefooted Canaanite crossed a body of water carrying with him the most singular asset of Christendom, the Christ Child himself. Like his namesake, Columbus, too, would carry Christendom across the deep, but a long road lay ahead of him before he could achieve that world-changing feat.

The young Cristoforo Colombo educated himself. He studied the writings of, among others, the Greco-Roman astronomer Ptolemy, the Phoenician geographer Marinus of Tyre, the Greek geographer Strabo, the Roman Philosopher Pliny the Elder, the Spanish scholar St. Isidore, and the French astronomer Pierre d'Ailly. In his seminal, primary historical source, *Historia de las Indias* (translated from the original 15th-Century Spanish as *History of the Indies*), the Protector of the Indians and New-World historian Bartolomé de las Casas contemporaneously recorded the settlement of the West Indies, beginning with a brief biography of Christopher Columbus.

**“ While some scholars mark the end of the Middle Ages at the year 1300 and others at the year 1500, a third school of thought ends the Middle Ages firmly with the date of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage: 1492. Like the birth of Christ — the event that reset the calendar for the Western World — Christopher Columbus was the worldwide singularity that ended the Middle Ages and ushered in the next era of human existence.**

De las Casas's *Historia* was no propaganda fluff piece. He wrote extremely critically of his fellow Spaniards, in particular, the *hidalgos* (the low, landed nobles of Spain's feudal "encomienda" system), and their treatment of the indigenes; so much so that modern Spaniards still regard his candid accounts to be a "black" mark on Spain's history. In his profile of Columbus, however, the otherwise-censorious de las Casas described "the illustrious Genoese" as "good-natured, kind, daring, courageous, and pious," and marveled at his many "acquired qualities," including his masterful calligraphy, arithmetic and drawing; his skill with Latin; his "unusual insight into human and divine affairs;" "good judgment;" "sound memory and eagerness to learn;" intense study; and "proficiency in geometry, geography, cosmography, astrology or astronomy, and seamanship."

De las Casas noted that Columbus "avoided exaggeration" in authoring the many "documents of value" that have themselves become primary historical sources, such as his journals and correspondences with the Crown and Court of Spain. He emphasized Columbus's "over forty years" of experience "in sailing all waters known today" and noted that Columbus's autodidactic efforts included collaboration with scholars among the "Latins and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and many others of many other sects" (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 15). For an historian as hypercritical as de las Casas to cast Christopher Columbus in such a consistently favorable light speaks volumes of Columbus's true character. History reveals Columbus to have been a worldly intellectual who did not discriminate against scholars of any race, religion or creed in working with and learning from them.

But Columbus was more than a mere theorist; he was a *bona fide* adventurer-scholar whose globetrotting, swashbuckling exploits were worthy of the pulp fiction of the early Twentieth Century. As a young man, still studying the arcana of the cartographers and astronomers that preceded him, he embarked on several remarkable maritime adventures that proved him the Indiana Jones of his day, including to Iceland, Ireland and Africa. Not the least of these sojourns included passage on the ship of a Genoan privateer — also named Columbus but of no relation to Christopher — who was fighting on behalf of the *doge* (akin to a “duke”) of Genoa against the Venetians for dominance over the Mediterranean trade routes. The privateer’s ship was burned in a naval battle, and Christopher avoided the scorching, subaqueous sepulcher of Davy Jones by jumping overboard, grasping a floating oar, and swimming **two leagues** to shore — equivalent to **seven miles** for the landlubbers — where he convalesced from paralysis of his legs (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 18).

After a full recovery, the young Columbus traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, where he met and married Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, the daughter of a wealthy Portuguese *hidalgo*, Don Bartolomeu Perestrelo, also an accomplished mariner and explorer. Don Bartolomeu’s widow gifted her son-in-law her late husband’s navigational instruments and maps. Thenceforth, Christopher Columbus joined several Portuguese expeditions, ultimately establishing his early homestead in Puerto Santo of the Madeira Archipelago, an island Don Bartolomé himself had settled. There, Filipa gave birth to her and Christopher’s son Diego, but tragically died in childbirth (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 18).

In the grief of his widowhood, and despite the burdens of single-handedly raising a now-motherless newborn, the newly single father found solace in his staunch devotion to God and the quietude of contemplation of the collective works of the many, multicultural scholars he had studied. His insatiable yearning to return to the open sea inspired Columbus, in the spirit of the burgeoning scientific method, to conceptualize and operationalize a real-world experiment to test his hypothesis that an all-water route to Asia lay across the Atlantic. An “enterprise” of a possible nautical expedition westward to China became Columbus’s passion project. In what would become a dominant theme in Christopher Columbus’s life (and again now, over five centuries after his death), he pursued this endeavor in the face of virtually-universal derision; de las Casas wrote that “[e]veryone laughed at [Columbus] and dismissed [his proposed expedition] as a joke” (*Id.*, 15-16).

Christopher Columbus would not be deterred. He was a man of science in an age of superstition, sovereigns and swords. The Dark Ages had only ended four and one-half centuries prior. While some scholars mark the end of the Middle Ages at the year 1300 and others at the year 1500, a third school of thought ends the Middle Ages firmly with the date of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage: 1492. Like the birth of Christ — the event that reset the calendar for the Western World — Christopher Columbus was the worldwide singularity that ended the Middle Ages and ushered in the next era of human existence.

Next week in *Broad + Liberty*, with the arrival of the Columbus Day weekend, I will present the next installment in this series of the life and legacy of Christopher Columbus, based on the primary historical sources. It will detail his formulation of his scientific hypothesis and his quest for funding of his great experiment, his First Transatlantic Voyage to the Americas. More importantly, the next article and those to follow will leave the reader with no doubt that Christopher Columbus not only was **not** the villain the cultural majoritarians attempt to portray him as, but, in fact, was nothing less than the greatest hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.

*Robert Petrone, Esq. is a civil rights author and attorney, and local Philadelphia expert on Christopher Columbus.*



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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. III): The Scientific Hypothesis

OCTOBER 5, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



A deficit of bravery currently seems to exist in the once-home-of-the-brave, as demonstrated by the unmitigated roughshod run over our history, society and institutions by the sinister axis of cultural majoritarians, comprised of radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists, and globalist elites. The recent, pandemic razing of statutes of American icons in an attempt at *damnatio memoriae*, for instance, began, only a few years ago with statues and memorials of Christopher Columbus, the progenitor of Western culture in the Americas and the first Founding Father.

In Philadelphia, the early-morning-hour vandalizations of both the Columbus statue in Marconi Plaza and the Columbus monument at Penn's Landing on Columbus Day 2018 were synchronous with a third, simultaneous, attack on the History of Italian Immigration Museum, thus proving that the message was more than merely anti-Columbus, but Italophobic at the very least and outright Europhobic at worst. Despite receiving a direct request to do so, the City refused to pursue the vandals, much less denounce the tripartite attack as a hate crime.

Acts of Columbus Day vandalism have persisted in the years since then, and the bigots who perpetrated them have always hidden behind the pretext that "Columbus didn't discover America" but rather supposedly "started the Atlantic slave trade." Not only is neither claim true, as will be demonstrated in this and the following article in this series, but the primary historical sources, which I have discussed in greater detail in my previous articles (and continue to cite below), demonstrate the exact opposite.

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**“ When the grief of the loss of his beloved wife finally passed, Columbus could tolerate a sedentary life no more. With his five-year-old son in tow, he pounded the proverbial pavements of Europe in search of a royal benefactor willing to fund his “enterprise” of a possible nautical expedition westward to find an all-water route to China. Such an endeavor, should it succeed, would revolutionize trade by creating an alternative to the lengthy and burdensome overland journey of the Silk Road.**

Columbus discovered America in the sense that he brought to light to the rest of the world the existence of the American continents and the Asiatic colonists — known in the United States by the misnomer “*native* Americans” but more accurately described by our Canadian counterparts as the “First Nations” — who had arrived in the Americas via “ice bridges” formed in the Bering Strait during the Ice Age. This installment of the *Broad + Liberty* series of articles “Christopher Columbus, The Greatest Hero of the Fifteenth & Sixteenth Centuries (as Revealed by the Primary Historical Sources)” continues last week’s story of Columbus’s life, focusing on his formulation of his scientific hypothesis and his quest for funding of his great experiment, Columbus’s First Transatlantic Voyage to the Americas.

Last week’s article discussed Columbus’s humble birth to poor Genoan weavers; autodidactic efforts in studying the maps, charts, writings and scientific theories of countless scholars among the “Latinos and Greeks, Jews and Moors, and many others of many other sects” (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 15); and early maritime adventures. It concluded with his marriage to Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, a Portuguese noblewoman who died giving birth to their son Diego. And there this article resumes, with the widowed single-father raising his motherless son alone in their new homestead in Portugal’s Madeira Archipelago, a thousand kilometers out in the Atlantic off the east coast of Europe.

Bankrupted by having had to provide his late wife with a funeral befitting a noblewoman, the lowborn Columbus turned again to his familiar comfort, the sea, yearning again to traverse its waves. He listened eagerly to the Portuguese sailors’ stories and legends of uncharted lands to the west. Columbus had been an early adopter of the theory of the new scientific school that the world was spherical and that but a short stretch of sea lay between Europe and “the Indies,” the medieval term for the lands comprising the Indian subcontinent through Southeast Asia (and today referred to, if a bit archaically, as the East Indies).

When the grief of the loss of his beloved wife finally passed, Columbus could tolerate a sedentary life no more. With his five-year-old son in tow, he pounded the proverbial pavements of Europe in search of a royal benefactor willing to fund his “enterprise” of a possible nautical expedition westward to find an all-water route to China. Such an endeavor, should it succeed, would revolutionize trade by creating an alternative to the lengthy and burdensome overland journey of the Silk Road. In the seminal, primary historical source *Historia de las Indias*, contemporaneous chronicler of the West Indian settlement Bartolomé de las Casas recalled that nearly every royal court in Europe rejected Columbus’s outlandish proposal: “Everyone laughed at [his] enterprise and dismissed it as a joke” (*Id.*, 15-16).

Columbus’s own Genoans refused to consider sponsoring the expedition because the discovery of an all-water route to China would bring an end to their contested monopoly (with the Venetians) over the Mediterranean trade routes to the Silk Road. Columbus succeeded in soliciting the funding of the Crown of Portugal, but it was a ruse: King John II took all of Columbus’s maps and charts, delivered them to a fleet of his own, and had them leave without the Genoan master mariner. By the grace of Providence, however, the Portuguese fleet met a devastating storm, returning to port crippled and unseaworthy, thus alerting Columbus to the chicanery. He took his maps and charts and turned his back on Portugal.

Columbus remained undaunted by the selfish acts of the Genoan and Portuguese Imperialists in his search for capital to fund his scientific experiment. Still determined, he sent his brother Bartolomeo to England to solicit the patronage of King Henry VII and went himself to Spain, his last choice.

Spain had just unified three kingdoms — Aragon, Castile and León — rendering it the first European superpower. But the Crown of Spain initially rejected Columbus’s proposal, despite the backing of Columbus by the Cardinal of Spain, who had met him through Columbus’s landlord and been impressed by his “fair speech and learning” and “good intelligence and great knowledge.” Sixteenth Century historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviendo y Valdés recalls of Columbus, in his *General and Natural History of the Indies*, “his cloak was poor and ragged, [and] he was considered a dreamer” of “fantastic ideas” for which the Spanish royals had no time. They had a bigger concern: Spain had been occupied by murderous Jihadists for eight centuries.

Oviendo writes, “all the Moors in Spain ... had insulted and maltreated Christians since 720 A.D.” For so long had Spain been occupied by Moor slavers that the Spanish language itself — even high Castilian — is today but a pidgin of Latin and Arabic. With the newfound wealth of its three unified kingdoms, however, Spain was finally ready for a *reconquista*, a reconquering of its lands out from under the Jihadists’ near-millennium-long death grip on Europe. Though Columbus intrigued Queen Isabella with his hypothesis of an all-water route to Asia, the court scholars counseled the Crown to reject the proposal for these, more important matters.

Demonstrating the “unusual insight into human ... affairs” and “good judgment” that de las Casas described in his biographical sketch of the man in *Historia de las Indias* (Book I, 15), Columbus changed tacks. While in Spain, Columbus had personally witnessed the Spanish monarchs’ overthrow of the Moorish king, who exited the city gates of Andalusia and kissed their hands in submission as they raised their banners on the Alhambra. Later that month, Columbus suggested to the Spanish Crown an alliance with the “Great Khan” of China, who had made “frequent and vain applications to Rome for men learned in the holy faith who should instruct them in it.” Columbus suggested that the legendary military might of the Great Khan might help launch a two-front attack against the Jihadists, driving them out of Europe altogether and, perhaps even liberating Jerusalem from them for all of Christendom. Queen Isabella personally reconsidered, buoyed, no doubt, by the recent success of the Crown’s *reconquistada* of Grenada.

At the turn of the Twenty-first Century, Stanford University Professor Emeritus Carol Delaney left her tenured university position to dedicate a decade of her life to travel the world in the study of Columbus artifacts and become an unparalleled world-expert on Christopher Columbus. She details this particular angle of Columbus’s persuasion in her book *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (Free Press, July 17, 2012), a must-read for any Columbus historian.

De las Casas, in his Sixteenth-Century *Historia*, recalls that Queen Isabella summoned Columbus back to her Court after he had spent seven years of his life trying to persuade her and her husband. Despite continued discouragement from her advisors, she was swayed by his affability, and finally reconsidered the Crown’s original rejection of his proposal, finally accepting his request for patronage.

Christopher Columbus’s personality, not the plausibility of his plan, prompted the Queen to reconsider. If not for Christopher Columbus, the man, some other nation would have inevitably found the Americas — maybe even the murderous Jihadist slavers that Spain had just driven out of Europe, and Christopher Columbus would not have been present to be the pacifying force he was.

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**“ Apparently, the cultural majoritarians, who still cling to their megalomaniacal vision of monolithic, globalist domination, failed to learn any lesson from imperialism. They failed to learn the lesson from the Peace of Westphalia, negotiated by Catholics and other Christians, whom these same cultural majoritarians hate, that independent nationhood strikes the most effective balance between the chaos of tribalism and the oppression of global empires. As their ignorance of Christopher Columbus demonstrates, they have little interest in or regard for history.**

Using funds from the royal treasury, Queen Isabella purchased from Don Luis de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli, the construction contract Columbus had cannily negotiated for the building of three ships: the *Niña* (its formal name being the *Santa Clara*), the *Pinta* (its formal name being lost to history) and the flagship *Santa María de la Inmaculada Concepción* (nicknamed the *Capitana*, the Captain-ship, or the *Gallega*, the Galician). Isabella personally saw to the completion of the vessels and provided Columbus with only half the “trifle” he requested in funding (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 25-34).

But with this half-a-trifle, Columbus had acquired all the capital he had needed for a bare-boned expedition. He was not motivated by greed. Rather, he was driven by a scientific thirst for the sea, that “eagerness to learn” with which de las Casas had characterized him in his *Historia* (Book I, 15).

And this is precisely why the sinister axis of cultural majoritarians, comprised of radical leftists, post-modernists, neo-Marxists, and globalist elites, hate Columbus; he was a capitalist, ahead of his time, who began the takedown of the Age of Empires. Apparently, the cultural majoritarians, who still cling to their megalomaniacal vision of monolithic, globalist domination, failed to learn any lesson from imperialism. They failed to learn the lesson from the Peace of Westphalia, negotiated by Catholics and other Christians, whom these same cultural majoritarians hate, that independent nationhood strikes the most effective balance between the chaos of tribalism and the oppression of global empires. As their ignorance of Christopher Columbus demonstrates, they have little interest in or regard for history.

Next week in *Broad + Liberty*, with the arrival of Columbus Day weekend, I will present the next installment in this series of the life and legacy of Christopher Columbus, based on the primary historical sources. It will detail his famous First Voyage to the New World, marking his discovery — in the sense of bringing to light to the rest of the world — of the Americas.

*Robert Petrone, Esq. is a civil rights author and attorney, and local Philadelphia expert on Christopher Columbus.*



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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. IV): “The Discovery”

OCTOBER 12, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



*Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally. Part four in a series of seven.*

*By Robert Petrone*

“It was an Italian who began the story of immigration to America,” wrote the Library of Congress of Christopher Columbus. Since that time, so many have immigrated to this, the freest country ever created on earth. And with the most opportunity than any country, the United States now boasts the [largest immigrant population](#) in the world. Indeed, by the 1980s, [more Africans](#) had come to the U.S. voluntarily as immigrants than had ever come as slaves, proving our nation still to be the land of opportunity and of the free, and the endpoint for all modern-day pilgrims of freedom and opportunity.

None of this would have been possible had the American continents not been revealed to the rest of the world by Christopher Columbus. *This* is what we mean when we use the shorthand phrase “Columbus discovered America.” No one ever said or implied that “discovered America” meant “was the first to set foot on the American continents,” not our teachers, not our forebears’ teachers and not the original historians who contemporaneously recorded the settlement of the West Indies.

All accounts of Christopher Columbus’s October 12, 1492, landfall in the West Indies, including his own, have always acknowledged that the Americas were occupied when he arrived. They had been colonized at least thousands of years prior by Asiatic tribes who had crossed what is now the Bering Strait via ice bridges that had formed during the Ice Age. We refer to these people as “Native Americans,” but the semantic gamesmanship Columbus detractors engage

in over the word “discover” is equally applicable to the term “Native Americans.” The Tainos, Caribs, Canibs, and all the tribes of the Americas, North, Central and South, were not natives, but *perhaps* the first nations of the Americas and the first colonizers of the American continents. Technically, no human beings were native to the Americas, nor indeed to any continent aside, perhaps, from Africa, which modern science considers to be the point of origin of *homo sapiens*. Every other continent and the rest of Africa were colonized first by early hominid nomads, then tribes, then empires, then nations. And each group fought with other contemporaneous groups over land. The tribal, Asiatic colonists of the American continents were no exception.

But if one insists on replacing the shorthand statement “Columbus discovered America” with the cumbersome and unnecessary statement “Columbus made landfall in America, long after Asiatic tribes colonized the landmasses and, possibly even after the landfalls of Norsemen, pre-Roman Iberians, Carthaginians and Romans, and brought the existence of the lands and its inhabitants to light to the rest of the world, initiating cultural, economic and political relations between the Old World and the New, and commencing a perpetual exchange of science, technology, law, commerce, art, music, literature and people,” then one is simply being overly technical. Everyone knows we mean *that* when we say, “Columbus discovered America.”

Still, the word “discover” is, technically, etymologically correct. The original fifteenth-century sources used the Spanish verb “descubrir,” meaning to “take off” or “undo” (des-) “the covering of” (*cubrir*, to cover) something, hence the English translation to dis-cover. That is precisely what Columbus did: uncovered the continents of the Americas for the rest of the world by closing that obfuscating distance, revealing the existence of the Americas and its inhabitants to Europe. Immediately, word spread to Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

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**“ This nautical genius, whom Bartolomé de las Casas characterized as ‘the most outstanding sailor in the world, versed like no other in the art of navigation’... laid down compass courses and estimated direction and distance on timeworn charts using nothing more than his own ‘dead reckoning;’ sheer force of will; and, by his own accounts, Divine Providence.’**

No doubt, had Columbus not made landfall in 1492, someone else would have not long after: perhaps the Portuguese, who were making extraordinary nautical progress near the Cape of Africa at that time, where they were kidnapping Africans for slave-trade; or the English, who boasted an impressive, militarized navy under the House of Tudor; or the Moorish Jihadists, who were fleeing Spain after eight hundred years of having occupied Europe and having murdered and enslaved Europeans. Had any of those groups made landfall without Christopher Columbus at the helm, there would have been no check on or resistance to the atrocities these groups would have committed.

The Spanish were just as warlike as the Portuguese, English and Moors, but the Portuguese and English had declined to fund Columbus's expedition, as explained in my previous *Broad + Liberty* article. Columbus never bothered to ask the Moorish Jihadists, who likely would have cut off his head or enslaved him simply for being a Christian. Only the Spanish agreed to let him guide this expedition, and, as this article and my subsequent articles will demonstrate, Columbus was, at all times, a pacifying force in this endeavor.

That endeavor commenced on Friday, August 3, 1492, a half-hour before sunrise. Now bearing the title of respect of *Don* Christopher and the seafaring rank "High Admiral of the Ocean Sea," both of which the Spanish Crown granted him, Columbus boarded his flagship, a carrack or "*nao*," named *La Santa María de la Inmaculada Concepción* and nicknamed the *Capitana* ("Captain's ship") or *Gallega* ("Galician"). Captain Vicente Yáñez Pinzón boarded a caravel nicknamed the *Niña*, its formal name being the *Santa Clara*, and his brother, the treacherous Captain Martin Alonso Pinzón, boarded another, the *Pinta*, its formal name being lost to history.

Exactly seven months earlier, almost to the day, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella had begun their *Reconquista* of Moor-occupied Spain with their now-unified, three-kingdom army. They expelled the Moorish king from Grenada and commenced their Spanish Inquisition against the Jews. Though contract-bound to the service of the King and Queen of Spain, Columbus engaged in a remarkable act of sedition against these two royal, murderous inquisitors; he offered crew positions to Jews fleeing their Inquisition. Columbus had an accomplice on the inside, Luis de San Angel, a Jew who had "converted" and received a position in Ferdinand and Isabella's Court. Columbus's collective crew manifests read like a veritable Schindler's list of lives he had saved. Admiral Columbus began his First Voyage with this, his first deed of civil rights activism, but it would not be his last. He would spend the rest of his life championing the Jews, the tribes of the Americas and the poor, in that order.

Not all of Columbus's crewmen were fugitive Jews. Most, in fact, were "low men." Unless a captain intended to press men into service against their wills, assembling a crew usually involved setting up at a table in a tavern and taking the names of anyone willing to lay down their life for a long and dangerous ocean voyage. Those that took the job were usually covertly running from something: if not religious persecution, then a death sentence or trial for murder, rape, or some other crime; a debtor seeking significant recompense; or an unhappy family life with a difficult spouse or parent. That meant that most crewmen were secretly troubled, difficult men at best, and hardened criminals at worst. Many who had enlisted for Columbus's crew, moreover, were looking to turn a fast profit in China and then return to Spain to live comfortably, or roister away their fortune along with the rest of their short lives. But beggars could not be choosers, and after begging countless dukes and princes for a decade of his life in a "cloak [that] was poor and ragged," Don Christopher, High Admiral of the Ocean Sea, assembled the ships and men the Crown handed him (Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *General and Natural History of the Indies*).

Admiral Columbus was a seasoned sailor, and knew how to deal with an unruly crew of "low men." On the morning he set sail, he attended Confession and received the Eucharist. His fledgling flotilla departed the port town of Palos (now Palos de la Frontera, Huelva, Andalusia, Spain) on a course for the Canary Islands, a way-station before setting out in earnest for the Indies. He led his crew in prayer every half hour and instructed the youngest sailors to take over that duty for the duration of the voyage. He ended each day with the crew in recitation of the "Our Father," the "Hail Mary," the "Apostles' Creed" and the "Hail, Holy Queen." This display of piety was no show. In his cabin, he privately said his Book of Hours, a collection of prayers and psalms for Catholic devotion.

Columbus and his crew would need the prayers. The Portuguese-ruled Canary Islands were dangerous for him: King John II of Portugal held a grudge against the Admiral, despite himself being the agent of treachery against Columbus. Before Spain agreed to fund the expedition, King John promised to do so, but as a ruse; he stole all of Columbus's maps and charts, delivered them to a fleet of his own, and had them leave without Columbus. A devastating storm crippled the clandestine Portuguese fleet, forcing it to return to port and, thus, alerting Columbus to the chicanery. Columbus took back his maps and charts and took his business elsewhere, much to King John's chagrin.

King John was not the only threat to this expedition. The owner of the *Pinta*, Christobál Quintero, and an accomplice, Gómez Rascón, quickly decided on the third day that they "disliked the voyage," and sabotaged the rudder of the *Pinta* to render it unseaworthy. The other sailors nevertheless fixed it enough to reach the Canary Islands on the seventh day, where they completed the repairs. But while there, Columbus encountered a crew of Portuguese sailors who warned him that the petulant King John had sent bounty hunters to the Canaries to capture him "for taking his venture to Castile." He wasted no time in departing.

On Thursday, September 6, 1492, Admiral Columbus left the farthest stretches of Christendom for the unknown. Facing a powerful nor'easter on his first day of travel from the Canaries, he proceeded with a sense of divine mission, evident in all his logs, journals and correspondences. He recorded his journey meticulously, though he had on board no nautical instruments — no record of even an astrolabe — thanks to the half-a-"trifle" the Crown deigned to spare to fund his voyage.

Columbus was rich in experience, however, with a significant advantage over most sailors of his day — what fifteenth-century historian Gonzalo Fernández de Oviendo y Valdés called, in his *General and Natural History of the Indies*, a "secret of navigation." Columbus had learned, from the Portuguese he had sailed with in his youth, to navigate by taking the altitudes of the sun vis-à-vis the North Star, allowing him to negotiate "very large stretches of sea" while the sailors of other nations "steered as in the Mediterranean, along the shores...hugging the coast." He observed Atlantic wind patterns he called "the prevailing Westerlies." He introduced

the principal of "compass variation," the variation at any point on the surface of the earth between the direction to magnetic and geodetic "true" north. This nautical genius, whom Bartolomé de las Casas characterized as "the most outstanding sailor in the world, versed like no other in the art of navigation" (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, 17), laid down compass courses and estimated direction and distance on timeworn charts using nothing more than his own "dead reckoning;" sheer force of will; and, by his own accounts, "Divine Providence."

Admiral Columbus understandably believed this mission to be guided by Divine Providence because it was full of miracles. First, the majority of the voyage continued over calm seas and under clear skies, save for a single storm and a single, separate encounter with high waves. On the eighth day after departure from Christendom, the flotilla encountered a tern and a tropical bird, neither of which were known to fly more than twenty leagues from land — about a single day's travel at the flotilla's average speed — yet they were still *twenty-four* days from landfall. In the early night of the ninth day from Christendom, they spotted what de las Casas described in his digest of the Admiral's log as "a marvelous streak of fire fall from the sky into the sea four or five leagues away." On the eleventh day, they spotted a crab floating in a morass of seaweed, a sure sign that land was near, yet none was to be found. The crewmen became frightened and depressed. On the twelfth day from Christendom, they spotted a flock of birds, and in the many ensuing days, they saw a host of petrels, doves, frigate-birds, tropic birds, ducks, gulls, turns, river-birds and boobies, none of which were "accustomed to fly more than twenty leagues from land," yet, miraculously, there they were, as if heralds of the impending arrival in the New World, though the three ships were still weeks away from landfall and over four hundred leagues from Christendom. On the fifteenth day, a whale came to greet them in the dead-calm waters. After over two weeks of false hope of imminent landfall, this cetacean chaperone did little to allay the crewmen's growing depression. And the windless waters caused them to fear "that no winds blew in these seas that could carry them back to Spain." Again, as if by Divine Providence, a headwind miraculously appeared, lifting the spirits of the crew.

On the nineteenth day from Christendom, a watchman called out that he had sighted land, but it turned out to be a mirage created by, of all things, a guiding cloud. For twelve more days, the crew suffered, starved and despaired. All these sure signs had still yielded no landfall.

On the thirty-first day since their departure from the Canary Islands, a watchman again claimed to have seen land. So confident was the entire crew that this sighting was no mistake that they raised their standard and fired a Lombard cannon as a signal to port. But no port of the Great Khan, nor indeed of any other, lay ahead. The land they thought they had sighted had disappeared as mysteriously as it had appeared. The crew despaired and could "bear no more." But Admiral Columbus told them there was no use complaining because, he correctly

predicted, they had passed out of the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and reached the sea where landfall would be made. On the penultimate day of travel, they met “rougher seas than any they had met with on the voyage.” But once through them, they found a stick that had been carved with an iron tool and another covered in barnacles. The men rejoiced, fell to their knees in grateful prayer and kept a sharp watch for the islands they now knew for certain were near.

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**“ Referring to the islanders as ‘very intelligent,’ ‘very gentle’ and ‘a very fine people,’ [Columbus] repeatedly advocated Baptizing them; Baptized people could not be enslaved in Christendom.**

At approximately ten o’clock on the night of Tuesday, October 11, 1492, a remarkable miracle transpired for which no explanation has ever been given. Sailor Juan Rodriguez Bermeo of Triana, Spain, spotted a speck of land from the crow’s nest of Admiral Columbus’s flagship. The Admiral saw what he described as a light “like a wax candle that went up and down,” though they were, in fact, too many leagues away to see any landborne source of light, telescopically or otherwise. No record since, historical or scientific, has ever explained the luminous phenomenon, but the three vessels faithfully followed this polestar westward.

Two hours after midnight, on Friday, October 12, 1492, the flotilla arrived off the shore of an island. The Taino colonists called it Guanahani, but the desperate, starving, exhausted, rejoicing Christopher Columbus, as the Crown-appointed “Viceroy of all the lands he should discover,” called it “*San Salvador*,” “Holy Savior.” He named this land, the site of unity between the Old World and the New, of the social singularity that was to change the world forever henceforth, after Jesus.

The crewmen took down all the sails but the mainsail, waiting for daylight. Whenceforth, they took to land on the small island. “Immediately some naked people appeared and the Admiral went ashore” with his caravel captains and “recorder” Rodrigo Escobedo. “Soon many people of the island came up to them” (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Digest of Columbus’s Log Book*). Of that moment, Columbus wrote, “In order to earn their friendship, since I knew they were a people to be converted and won to our holy faith by love and friendship rather than by force, I gave some of them red caps and glass beads which they hung round their necks [and which] pleased them greatly and they became marvelously friendly to us.” Afterwards, he wrote, welcome parties of islanders “swam out to the ship’s boats in which we were sitting, bringing us parrots and balls of cotton thread and spears and many other things, which they exchanged with us for such objects as glass beads, hawks and bells. In fact, they very willingly traded everything they had” (*Id.*). Not only had Columbus succeeded in his trans-Atlantic voyage, proving it could be done, but first contact between the Europeans and the tribes of the West Indies was a rousing success: Christopher Columbus embraced the Tainos in friendship and they him.

The first meeting of the tribes of the New World and the explorers of the Old involved no tribalism, no oppression, and no violence, only love, unity and the brotherhood of their common humanity. How far the modern world has fallen in eschewal of these sacred values to which Columbus adhered so piously and faithfully.

Many modern, and post-modern, revisionist historians misquote Columbus's own journals and correspondences to the Crown to portray him as counseling the Crown to enslave the islanders he found. In fact, in every recorded address to the Crown from the outset, he counseled just the opposite. Referring to the islanders as "very intelligent," "very gentle" and "a very fine people," he repeatedly advocated Baptizing them; Baptized people could **not** be enslaved in Christendom. In fact, he feared, rather, that subjects of the Great Khan would "come from the mainland to capture them for slaves," or that others from other nations or more savage tribes would attempt the same or worse. By this pledge to protect the islanders, Columbus engaged in his first deed of civil rights activism on their behalf; it would not be the last by any stretch.

Similarly, many detractors rely on a mistranslation of the fifteenth-century, Spanish verb "subjugar" to suggest that Columbus exhorted the Crown to "subjugate" the islanders. In fact, Columbus used the verb to exhort the Crown to "make subjects of" — or, in the modern vernacular, to make "citizens" of — the indigenes so that they would enjoy all the rights, privileges and protections of Spanish nationality, including protection from enslavement. He knew the ultimate decision whether to treat the islanders as conquered people or citizens would be up to the Crown, but he repeatedly counseled, sometimes explicitly and sometimes subtly where necessary, that the tribal peoples of the West Indies be given neither lashes nor servitude, but "the love and service of their Highnesses and of the whole Spanish nation" (Letter of Columbus dated February 15, 1493).

In the two months following Columbus's peaceful and propitious first contact with the islanders of Guanahani / San Salvador, he visited at least a dozen more islands, repeatedly and without exception making friends and allies with every single tribe and village he met on every inhabited island he visited. Though all of the islanders, men and women alike, went about unarmed and "naked as their mothers bore them," he ensured no sailor harmed a hair on the head of any of them. Columbus and his crew traded trinkets for the balls of cotton the islanders offered, and Columbus ensured that his men engaged only in fair trade and did not exploit the islanders in their bartering transactions. He insisted his sailors "give[] as much as they were asked" in bargaining with the islanders and got "angry with" the Spaniards if they did not (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Digest of Columbus's Log Book*).

Repeatedly, many of the Taino islanders Columbus encountered recounted tales of savage cannibals from the northwest reaches of the archipelago, the Caribs, who frequently "descended at certain seasons of the year," "robbing and taking all they can," and who "captured [the Taino] people and took them away to be eaten" (*Id.*; Letter of Columbus dated

February 15, 1493). The settlers would later discover that the Caribs were committing many manners of atrocities upon the Tainos, including kidnapping those of Boriquen (modern-day Puerto Rico), castrating and enslaving the boys, eating the men, and raping and impregnating the women only to feast on their newborn babies.

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**“ Few instances of first contact in history have proceeded without bloodshed or loss of life. Admiral Columbus managed to negotiate first contact with at least a dozen tribes of the West Indies — including hostile, cannibalistic canoemen who twice attacked him and his crew — without a single fatality, sowing good will and friendship in every village port.**

Among the many friends Columbus made who warned of the atrocities of the Caribs was his best friend in the New World, Taino *cacique* (king) Guacanagarí. On Christmas Eve, while moored off of Hispaniola (now Cap Haïtien, Haiti), the steersman of the flagship *Santa María*, against Columbus's strict orders, handed the wheel of the vessel to a “ship's boy,” who damaged the rudder on rocks so badly he rendered the ship forevermore unseaworthy. To make matters worse, the treacherous Captain Martin Alonso Pinzón of the *Pinta* mutinously abandoned the flotilla to find gold, leaving Columbus's retinue reduced to but a single ship, the *Niña*. In the mere two-and-a-half weeks they had come to know each other, Guacanagarí so came to love Columbus as to be “proud to call [him] and treat [him] as a brother” (Letter of Columbus dated February 15, 1493). On Christmas Day, Guacanagarí had his entire village empty the shipwreck of the *Santa María* of all the crew's effects, placed them in three houses he had the occupants vacate, and posted armed villagers to guard the sailors' possessions throughout the night. Guacanagarí openly “wept, showing great sorrow at” the disastrous wreck of Columbus's flagship and promised his newfound Genoan friend “he would give [him] everything he had” (Diego Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 33).

In return, in addition to bestowing gifts upon Guacanagarí and his kin, Columbus promised to protect the entire tribe, and indeed the entire island, from the Carib marauders. Even as the crew rested there, Carib canoemen, or some other hostile tribe, arrived on the shoreline and stormed the village. Guacanagarí, aided by Columbus and his men, chased them off without a single fatality. Seeing the threat for himself, and pursuant to a formal treaty he personally drafted, Governor Columbus left behind thirty-seven sailors, supervised by the King's steward and the flotilla's discipline officer, along with provisions, arms and a rowboat to protect the island and its inhabitants from the Caribs.

Admiral Columbus took willing passengers from each tribe he encountered aboard the *Niña* to meet the Crown, one islander even canoeing furiously in pursuit of the departing caravel to implore the Admiral to take him with them so he and his family could appear together before

the Spanish monarchs. "The Admiral was highly delighted by this man's action and ordered that the whole family should be well treated and entertained" (Diego Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 29). As Columbus finally left the coast of Hispaniola, he suddenly reunited offshore with the insincerely-contrite Pinzón, Captain of the *Pinta*, who was chagrined at being found and restored into service. No sooner had the flotilla newly reformed was it attacked again by the Carib canoemen, this time armed with poisoned arrows. Rather than return hostilities, Columbus welcomed the man-eating chieftain, painted head-to-toe in black war-paint, aboard the *Niña*, where, facing down the Admiral, he "made a speech as fierce as his appearance" (*Id.*, Chapter 36). Admiral Columbus served him a meal *not* of human flesh; bestowed gifts upon him; and, through his new Taino translators, worked a diplomatic miracle, completely diffusing the confrontation. Admiral Columbus sent the warrior back to shore, accompanied by a small cadre of sailors, who then bartered with the rest of the war party, whom the leader ordered to lay down their weapons. Whether by planned perfidy or paucity of patience, the war party eventually picked up their arms again and attacked anyway. Yet again, Admiral Columbus chased them off without a single fatality before finally departing the West Indies, and bringing his first sojourn in the Americas to a remarkable, peaceful and successful close.

Few instances of first contact in history have proceeded without bloodshed or loss of life. Admiral Columbus managed to negotiate first contact with at least a dozen tribes of the West Indies — including hostile, cannibalistic canoemen who twice attacked him and his crew — without a single fatality, sowing good will and friendship in every village port. But Christopher Columbus was no average man. In his *Historia*, Bartolomé de las Casas, official (and vehement) Protector of the Indians, not only described the "illustrious Genoese" as "the most outstanding sailor in the world, versed like no other in the art of navigation, for which divine Providence chose him to accomplish the most outstanding feat ever accomplished in the world until now" (Book I, Chapter 3), but "that most worthy man [who was] second to God but first in the eyes of men" (*Id.*, Chapter 76). And of Columbus's Voyage, de las Casas wrote, "Many is the time I have wished for the eloquence to extol the indescribable service to God and to the whole world which Christopher Columbus rendered at the cost of such pain and dangers, such skill and expertise, when he so courageously discovered the New World" (*Id.*).

Indeed, Christopher Columbus did just that. For all the unfounded accusations levied against him as a racist, rapist, slaver, maimer, murderer and genocidal maniac, the primary sources clearly demonstrate that he not only was none of those things, but precisely the opposite. He prevented the Spaniards under his command from exploiting the tribal peoples of the Americas. For all the bloodshed that ensued in the West Indies after a conspiring cabal of *hidalgos* (landed nobles) took Columbus out of the picture, as will be detailed in my upcoming articles for *Broad + Liberty*, Columbus's presence and leadership caused things go as well as they possibly could have for both the Spanish settlers and the tribes of the Americas.

Christopher Columbus proved it was possible to safely cross the Atlantic Ocean. He blazed trans-Atlantic routes still used by twenty-first-century sailors. He founded the first permanent European settlements in and began the recorded history of the Americas. He initiated more than five hundred years of cultural, economic and political relations between the Old World and the New, commencing an enduring exchange of science, technology, law, commerce, art, music, literature, and *people*, benefiting and enriching the globe from pole to pole.

Our own historical icons commemorated him well for these unparalleled deeds. In 1775, Phillis Wheatley, a fourteen-year-old, free, African-American girl wrote a poem that so moved General George Washington that he distributed it throughout the thirteen Colonies. In it she used "Columbia" as a personification of the American nation. Thereafter, Columbia and Columbus appeared in myriad poems, songs and essays, firmly weaving the intrepid mariner into the fabric of American identity. The Founding Fathers celebrated the 300th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landfall on October 12, 1792, one year after they named the nation's capital after him, adorned with many statues and paintings of him, none of which had been created during his life.

Since then, 144 places in the United States have been named after Christopher Columbus, including cities, counties, towns, bodies of water, and schools. On June 29, 1868, the first Vatican Council petitioned for his sainthood. A generation later, in 1892, President Benjamin Harrison proposed a national celebration, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt institutionalized the holiday in 1937, which we have celebrated annually to this day.

Columbus Day is more than just a commemoration of this mariner, the first founder and first civil rights activist of the Americas. It is a monumentalization of the legacy of his watershed voyage: the European contributions of Greco-Roman democracy and law, Judeo-Christian ethics and morals, and the tenet that all human beings are equal in the eyes of their Creator. We must never forget these sacred principles and, like Christopher Columbus, never fail to practice them in our words, in our deeds and in our government.

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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. V): The Second Voyage

OCTOBER 27, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



*Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally. Part five in a series of eight.*

The New York Times has published a series of articles and essays collectively entitled the “1619 Project,” promoting the jaundiced perspective that American history was not founded on good, true, immutable principles, but on the evils of slavery, bigotry and oppression, which have poisoned every aspect of American society and culture such that all of America’s problems — including, the series posits, traffic patterns — stem from these historic injustices. The 1619 project posits that American history did not begin in 1776, but with the arrival of the first African slaves in the American colonies in 1619.

I propose that one should go back even further. Perhaps we can call this series of articles on Christopher Columbus the “1492 Project” to demonstrate that Columbus’s landfall in the North American Caribbean was really the beginning of the Americas and the establishment of Western Culture in these continents. My “1492 Project” posits that Columbus’s peaceful and amicable first contact with over a dozen tribes in the West Indies on his First Voyage, and his freeing of scores of Taino slaves from Carib captors on his Second Voyage (a civil rights activism that continued, as future articles will demonstrate, on both his remaining voyages) established the Americas as a bastion of goodness from which has sprung the United States,

the freest, most-tolerant, most-successful and wealthiest heterogeneous society in the history of the earth.

My “1492 Project” counterpoint to the “1619 Project” polemic is important because getting our history straight is important. Unlike other countries, Americans are not united by skin color, race, ethnicity, language or religion. As President Abraham Lincoln said in his Gettysburg Address, “We are a people conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all Men are created equal.” Princeton University Professor and Fellow in American Studies Allen C. Guelzo notes that because we are a people united by a principle that is taught to us by our history, we must preserve rather than spoil or despoil that history. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote, in his three-volume book *Gulag Archipelago*, about his years suffering in a Soviet gulag, “The first step a tyrant takes toward enslaving a people is to steal their history, for in that case, no one has anything from the past with which to compare the present, and any horror can be normalized.” To that end, I bring you my next installment in preserving the history of Christopher Columbus, who, in turn, fought tirelessly and to the end against the tyranny of the Spanish *hidalgos*, and to preserve the peaceful tribal peoples of the West Indies.

My last article for *Broad + Liberty*, published on Columbus Day weekend, detailed his first trans-Atlantic voyage; his discovery of the Americas (in the sense of bringing them to light to the rest of the world); and his successful and peaceful first-contact with every single tribe he encountered, including the warlike Caribs who attacked him on sight but whom he still managed to conciliate. This article resumes with Christopher Columbus’s return to Spain with his willing islander passengers and tells the remarkable story of Admiral Columbus’s continued efforts as the first civil rights activist of the Americas, including his life-saving “Underground Railroad” — or perhaps, more aptly, “Underwater Railroad” — by which he sailed from island to island rescuing many Tainos from their man-eating captors.

While moored off the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) during his first sojourn in the West Indies, a ship’s boy took control of the *Santa María’s* wheel against Admiral Columbus’s orders and damaged the flagship so badly on rocks that it was rendered unseaworthy. Columbus also wished to take a cadre of not only willing but eager islanders back to Spain to meet the King and Queen. In order to do so with only the two small, remaining caravels, he left behind thirty-seven sailors to create the first Spanish settlement, Navidad — “Christmas,” named after the day in 1492 that it was founded. He left the settlers with strict orders not to trouble the islanders, and left his discipline officer, Diego de Araña de Córdoba, and the Crown’s steward, Pedro Gutiérrez, behind to ensure that they behaved.

He did bring the eager islanders back to meet the Spanish Crown, but first landed at the Canary Island way-station, under the control of Portugal's King John, and then in Lisbon itself. King John welcomed Columbus with "trumpets, fifes and drums and with a grand escort" (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 41), having relinquished his grudge against the Genoan sailor for turning his back on Portugal and taking his business to Spain. King John did so not because the King's own treachery had prompted Columbus to cease business with Portugal — he had delivered Columbus's maps and charts to his own private flotilla and sent them away without Columbus, a deceit Columbus discovered only when the Portuguese flotilla limped back to port crippled by a storm. Rather, King John and his Portuguese subjects — and indeed all of the world — saw Admiral Columbus's feat as more than merely a victory for Spain, but a *human* achievement.

Similarly, upon Admiral Columbus's return to Spain all of Castile "flooded from all directions to see him; the roads swelled with throngs come to welcome him in the towns through which he passed" (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book I, Chapter 78). The monarchs received him with with great anticipation and Admiral Columbus "praised" the Tainos to the King and Queen. He urged the monarchs that the islanders were "ready to receive the faith" (*id.*). Indeed, the Taino passengers willingly and gratefully received Baptism, rendering them immune from enslavement by any who would seek to apply the *repartamiento* to the tribal people of the West Indies, that part of the feudal "*encomienda*" system that entitled medieval Spanish nobles to subject conquered enemies to servitude.

Admiral Columbus rode in a parade with the monarchs through the streets of Castile, sitting in the seat next to the King that had been previously reserved for the young Prince John. Even as they rode, the King and Queen discussed launching the second expedition, and the contract for it was drafted and signed immediately.

Admiral Columbus embarked on his Second Voyage from the port of Cadiz on September 25, 1493, now fitted with a fleet of seventeen ships, manned by sailors and *hidalgos*, low, landed nobles. After another stop at the Canary Islands way-station, his fleet completed the remainder of the crossing in less than twenty days, arriving on the first Sunday after All Saints Day.

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The Admiral specifically went looking for the islands of the man-eating Caribs, of whom the Tainos constantly complained to Columbus. Dr. Diego Chanca, one of the surgeons of the fleet, wrote in his epistolary account of the Second Voyage, “By the goodness of God, and thanks to the Admiral’s skill and knowledge, we had reached them as directly as if we had been following a known and familiar course.”

On the first inhabited island, Guadalupe, the landing party found a small Taino boy and a group of Taino women whom the Caribs had kidnapped. In the Carib huts, left unoccupied while the Caribs went marauding, the landing party found “great numbers of human bones and skulls” used as “hanging vessels.” Through the Taino translator that had returned to the West Indies with the fleet, the women explained that the Caribs “made war against the neighboring islands” by “raids in their canoes,” shooting serrated arrows tipped with poison. Chanca noted that the Caribs “raid the other islands and carry off all the women they can take, especially the young and beautiful, whom they keep as servants and concubines.” The Caribs “had carried off so many that in fifty houses we found no males and more than twenty of the captives were girls.” Chanca wrote, “These women say they are all treated [by their Carib captors] with a cruelty that seems incredible”: the Caribs murdered and ate the Taino men, raped and impregnated the Taino women, castrated and enslaved Taino boys (whom they later ate when they reached adulthood), and ate not only the remaining Taino children they captured but also the infants to whom the raped sex slaves gave birth.

The crew found corroborating physical evidence of the cannibalism in the huts of the Caribs. In one hut, “the neck of a man was found cooking in a pot.” In another they found “human bones” that “were so gnawed that no flesh was left on them except what was too tough to be eaten” by a human (Letter of Dr. Diego Chanca). In yet another Carib hut on Guadalupe they

found “a human arm [that was] cooking in a stewpot” (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 63). Indeed, if any doubt remained, the Caribs would themselves go on explicitly to confirm that they were cannibals. Dr. Chanca wrote of the Caribs, “They say that human flesh is so good that there is nothing like it in the world” (Letter of Dr. Diego Chanca).

But before any parleys with the Caribs occurred on this voyage, the Admiral's fleet sailed from island to island, passing one that the Taino women from Guadalupe explained “was uninhabited, because the Caribs had removed the entire population.” At every landfall, Admiral Columbus liberated Tainos from the Carib villages, many of which were found empty upon arrival, and many others of which were abandoned by the Caribs upon seeing the landing party approach. Island by island, groups of liberated Taino women and children fled “of their own accord” into the protective aegis of Admiral Christopher Columbus (*id.*). As the fleet was rescuing women and boys from the Carib island of San Martino, a canoe full of both male and female Carib archers returned, and opened fire on the landing party, wounding many and killing one Basque sailor. Although the penalty for such a murder was death, Columbus spared the lives of the captured Caribs, whom he ensured would have their day in court before the Spanish Crown.

The Admiral continued to sail throughout the archipelago, visiting Boriquen (now Puerto Rico), Hispaniola and hundreds of other islands and islets, recording the flora and fauna of each. Once the fleet safely reached Taino lands that the Caribs had not taken over or emptied, Admiral Columbus “put ashore” those of the liberated Tainos who wished to return home, now well-fed and provisioned with clothes and other gifts (*id.*). Before long, Admiral Columbus rescued no less than ten women and an unknown quantity of children and adult, male survivors. Long before Harriet Tubman and Levi Coffin helped African-American slaves escape via the “Underground Railroad” of the United States, Christopher Columbus conducted the first North American Underground Railroad in the Caribbean, freeing Taino slaves from their Carib captors.

But Admiral Columbus could not neglect the nearly forty sailors he had left behind on Hispaniola to found the settlement of Navidad. After freeing the Taino slaves, Christopher Columbus made his way in search of the settlement. The Tainos of Hispaniola flooded the beach and wanted to board the Admiral's ships. Admiral Columbus “kindly received” those he could, but was focused on locating his forty men left behind. A cousin of Guacanagarí, the *cacique* (chieftain) that Admiral Columbus had made fast friends with on the First Voyage, brought the Admiral dire news: the Carib high-king Caonabo and a lesser king, Mayreni, had attacked and burned Navidad and Guacanagarí's village, had wounded Guacanagarí, and had

murdered all of the Spanish settlers in cold blood (Hernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapters 63-64; Letter of Dr. Diego Chanca).

The next morning, Admiral Columbus went to Navidad, and found the observation shelter “burnt, and the village demolished by fire.” He visited Guacanagarí and found him convalescing from a painful leg injury inflicted by one of the Caribs’ stone weapons. The islanders of Hispaniola were still shaken up by the Carib slaughter. Some of the liberated Tainas who had remained on Columbus’s ships now left to join the diminished village at the urging of Guacanagari’s cousin. Their tribe would need to rebuild and would need women to do it (*id.*).

Three months later, Governor Columbus, as he had been titled by the Crown of Spain, began building a new settlement, named Isabela, after the Queen who was so fond of him. He and the crews of his seventeen ships constructed irrigation canals, mills, water wheels and farms with “many vegetables.” Taino *caciques* of many tribes and their womenfolk frequented the settlement bringing yams, “nourishing [and] greatly restor[ing]” the Spaniards, who were grateful for the succor (*id.*). But just as the Europeans had brought diseases to which the islanders of the West Indies had built no immunity (all of which have since been cured by modern science) so, too, did the settlers succumb to diseases transmitted to them by the Tainos (none of which have been cured by modern science, including syphilis). Also, because the Europeans were not accustomed to the tropical climate, the vegetables they grew rotted more quickly than they anticipated. For all of these reasons, as well as “from hard work and the rigors of the voyage” (*id.*), the Spaniards fell deathly sick at Isabela.

Though he contracted no known diseases from the Tainos, Governor Columbus too fell sick from the rigors of the voyage, the settlement-building and the differences in climate. *Caciques* of various Taino tribes sent villagers to help the settlers pan for gold, since they understood that the King and Queen who had sent the settlers required it as currency to make the undertaking possible. But many of the *hidalgos* plotted “to raise a revolt [and] load themselves with gold” as they were “exasperated” and “discontented” from “the labor of building the town” (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 51). Some of the *hidalgos* came from long lines of blue-blooded nobles, and had never toiled. But because so few *hidalgos* deigned to depart the comforts of Castile for the tropical frontier of the West Indies, the Crown hatched a hair-brained scheme to make up the difference: it pardoned convicted criminals — murderers, rapists, thieves and other ne’er-do-wells — and granted them noble titles if they agreed to help settle the Caribbean. Though the *hidalgos* — noble-

born and ex-con alike — wanted to force the Tainos to build the settlement for them, Governor Columbus would not permit the use of the labor of the islanders.

So began the discontent that would forever drive a wedge between the entitled, Spanish *hidalgos* and their low-born, foreigner governor. “They had been plotting in secret to renounce the Admiral’s authority [by] taking the remaining ships to return in them to Castile” (*id.*). Beginning a tactic that would persist to this day, the fleet’s accountant, Bernalde Pisa, instigated the plot by writing libelous falsehoods about Governor Columbus to be delivered to the Crown. Despite this heinous act of mutiny by Pisa, Christopher Columbus nevertheless demonstrated himself to be the “kind” and “good-natured” man of mercy de las Casas described him as in his *Historia de las Indias* (Book I, Chapter 3); when he discovered Pisa’s libelous correspondences, out of deference to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, Governor Columbus “punished [Pisa] only by imprisoning him in the ship, intending to return him to Castile with a list of his crimes” (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 51).

Now restored to health, but still distressed about the Carib menace that destroyed the Navidad settlement and threatened the Taino tribes, Columbus left the under-construction Isabela settlement and traveled to Cibao, near the northwest corner of Hispaniola. There, he built a protective fort, Santo Tomás, “with which to keep that country at peace” from Carib marauders and Spanish gold-mongers (*id.*). In this endeavor, Governor Columbus encountered “many Indian villages,” making friends wherever he went (*id.*, Chapter 52). Governor Columbus stationed Captain Pedro Margarit and a few men-at-arms at the completed fort to protect the area from High-king Caonabo’s Carib marauders, and returned to Isabela (*id.*, Chapter 53).

In Columbus’s absence from Fort Santo Tomás, a tribe of islanders robbed Margarit and his men. Margarit captured the robbers and cut off their ears in retaliation. He then brought them to Isabella, before Governor Columbus, for further punishment, but Columbus was horrified by Margarit’s maiming of the islanders. Again, exhibiting the “good judgment” and “unusual insight into human and divine affairs” that de las Casas described of him (*Historia de las Indias*, Book I, Chapter 3), Governor Columbus used the same clever intrigue on the islanders’ chieftain as he often used on the King and Queen of Spain. He told the chieftain that the punishment for the robbers’ crime was death, though Governor Columbus had no intention of ever carrying out that threat. When the chieftain heard the pronouncement, he offered a tearful apology for his villagers’ misdeeds. Columbus immediately set the robbers free into the custody of their chieftain, and announced to Margarit that the matter was settled (*id.*, Chapter 93).

No sooner had Governor Columbus adeptly resolved the Margarit affair did horsemen arrive from Fort Santo Tomás, informing that islanders had surrounded it and attempted to kill its occupants. In Columbus's absence from the fort and without his pacifying presence, the relationship of the settlers there and the nearby islanders soured terribly. De las Casas makes a point to note, "I would not dare blame the admiral's intentions" for the discord, "for I knew him well, and I know his intentions were good" (*id.*). Indeed, Governor Columbus shed no blood over the incident. He sent cavaliers to make only a show of their "arms and horses" as to "instill fear" in the tribal warriors responsible for the siege (*id.*). The tactic successfully scared the warriors off with no fatalities, liberating the besieged Spaniards (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 53).

In the Spring, Admiral Columbus explored the coastline of Cuba, making friends with its inhabitants and gifting them glass beads, hawk bells and brass bells, and other offerings. The *cacique* of the province exhibited great interest in the Catholic Mass the priests conducted, "listen[ing] attentively" and "giv[ing] thanks to God" (*id.*, Chapter 59).

The following month the Admiral arrived at Jamaica. Although the inhabitants attacked on sight, he retreated as a show of peace and good will. Nevertheless, the Jamaican inhabitants attacked again, but the Admiral diffused the conflict with no fatalities. Thereafter, the inhabitants bartered peaceably and one begged to return to Spain with the fleet. Admiral Columbus "ordered that [they] should be well treated," and obliged their request to travel with them. Throughout the entire Second Voyage, whenever the islanders sought to come aboard the ships of the fleet, Admiral Columbus "treated them very courteously" (*id.*, Chapters 54-55).

Meanwhile, Captain Margarit left his post, hijacked one of the seventeen ships, and returned to Castile, leaving Fort Santo Tomás. The islanders, under the command of Chief Guatigana, attacked again the unsupervised fort, murdering ten settlers in cold blood and setting fire to a hospital containing forty patients. Hernando Colón notes that the tribal warriors "would have killed many more if the Admiral had not arrived in time to prevent them" (*id.*, Chapter 61). His men-at-arms caught some of Guatigana's murderous warriors, but again, Governor Columbus exhibited temperance; he did not presume to try, much less punish, the attackers, but rather delivered the prisoners to the Crown to have their day in court.

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**“ Once again, as his Second Voyage drew to a close, Christopher Columbus proved himself yet again to be the first civil rights activist of the Americas — not merely of the Tainos, but of the war-mongering, man-eating Caribs as well.**

Guacanagarí implored Columbus to rescue his kidnapped villager. Though outnumbered five-hundred to one, Columbus hatched a plan to merely frighten the war band into retreat with the ruckus of musket shots. It worked, for a time. Hernando Colón noted, the war band “fled like cowards in all directions,” but the confrontation was not without its fatalities.

Nevertheless, when the men-at-arms returned to the Governor with their prisoners, High-King Caonabo was among them. Caonabo defiantly proclaimed that he had indeed ordered the murder of the forty settlers of Navidad, and boldly announced that he would do the same to the settlers of Isabela. In spite of all of this, Governor Columbus did not harm a hair on the cannibal king’s head. Rather, he sent him back to Spain to have his day in court before the Crown (*id.*).

But again demonstrating that “unusual insight into human...affairs” of which de las Casas wrote, Governor Columbus investigated further into the Santo Tomás massacre. He discovered that the unsupervised settlers had “committ[ed] innumerable outrages for which they were mortally hated by their tribal neighbors.” These outrages brought consequences. “All the caciques and kings” of the region were pressed into a war band led by none other than the cannibal High-king himself, Caonabo, scourge of the Caribbean. Caonabo even attempted to press Guacanagarí’s tribe into service, but Guacanagarí “remained friendly” to the settlers and refused to ally with the cannibal king (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 61). Thus, one of the *cacique* kings in Caonabo’s service murdered one of Guacanagarí’s womenfolk on the spot, and Caonabo himself kidnapped another (*id.*), no doubt to impregnate her and eat her baby as was the Caribs’ want.

By his careful suppression of the cannibal rebellion, Columbus proved that his skills in ship command translated well into governance, despite that he had never held any political office in the past. Thereafter, although the settlers still struggled with food scarcity and disease, “the Christians’ fortunes became extremely prosperous” and peace reigned supreme. “Indeed, the Indians would carry [Columbus] on their shoulders in the way they carry [men of] letters” for the *Pax Columbiana* he established, though the humble “Admiral attributed this peace to God’s providence” (*id.*). In gratitude and brotherhood, the Tainos led the settlers to their own copper mines and revealed to the settlers the locations of precious gemstones such as sapphires, ebony and amber; spices such as incense, cinnamon, ginger and red pepper; and gums and woods such as cedar, brazil-wood and evergreen mulberry (*id.*, Chapter 62).

Now that Columbus had freed the Taino slaves, built the multiple settlements and defeated the Carib marauders, bringing peace and slowly restoring prosperity to the land, he decided to return to Spain to give an account of the entire affair. He suspected that Bernalde Pisa was not the only beleaguered, entitled *hidalgo* writing false complaints about him, and that the

absconder, Pedro Margarit, may well have delivered more libelous correspondences to the Crown from the shifty and shiftless *hidalgos* on the ship he had hijacked.

Admiral Columbus set sail for Spain in two of the remaining sixteen ships of the fleet in March of 1496. After yet another run-in with Carib marauders who attacked him off the coast of Guadalupe, he discovered an island bereft of menfolk, the women of which were skilled archers Columbus described as exceptionally “intelligent” and of great “strength and courage” whom the Caribs descended upon periodically, as the women described, “to lie with them” (*id.*, Chapter 63). Because these women identified as Caribs themselves, the marauders did not eat their babies, but took them to raise as warriors. “As soon as their children are able to stand and walk, they put a bow in their hands and teach them to shoot” (*id.*). These, and a similar all-female tribe on the nearby island of Martinino, formed the basis for the legends of the Amazonians, named for the Greek war-maidens of legend. The name would later be applied to the entire biome of the rainforests of what is now Brazil and the surrounding nations.

Despite all the conflict Christopher Columbus had endured at the hands of the warmongering Caribs, he released Carib prisoners into the warrior-queen’s custody and gave her gifts as a token of good will. The chaste Admiral’s charms affected not only the queens and noblewomen of Europe, but this female *cacique* as well. She “agreed to go to Castile with her daughter” and so “willingly” traveled back to Spain with the fleet (*id.*, Chapter 64).

On April 20, 1496, Admiral Columbus’s fleet disembarked for home. On the long journey, the sailors “were so near starvation that some of them wished to imitate the Caribs and eat the Indians they had aboard” or “throw[] the Indians overboard” to conserve rations, “which they would have done if the Admiral had not taken strict measures to prevent them. For he considered them as their kindred and fellow children of Christ and held that they should be no worse treated than anyone else” (*id.*). Once again, as his Second Voyage drew to a close, Christopher Columbus proved himself yet again to be the first civil rights activist of the Americas — not merely of the Tainos, but of the war-mongering, man-eating Caribs as well. That “unusual insight into human and divine affairs” of his led him to see all the islanders of the Caribbean as people and children of God, and he always treated them as such.

His safe return to Europe on June 9, 1496, demonstrated that his unusual insight was not limited only to human and divine affairs. “From that day onward he was held by the seamen to have great and heaven-sent knowledge of the art of navigation” (*id.*).

In next week's article of my "1492 Project" series, "Christopher Columbus: the Greatest Hero of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (as Revealed by the Primary Sources)," the Admiral's *Pax Columbiana* is shattered by the man whose deeds have, of late, been falsely attributed to the good Admiral Columbus. The *true* terror of the West Indies arrives: the man known to the Jihadist invaders of Europe as their bane and conqueror; to the Spaniards as their war hero of the *Reconquista*, but to the innocent Tainos of the West Indies as the racist, rapist, maimer, murderer and genocidal maniac *Francisco de Bobadilla!* Don't miss it as all Hell is unleashed next week at *Broad + Liberty*.

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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. VI): The Arch-Nemesis Bobadilla

NOVEMBER 19, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally. Part six in a series of eight.

In the last article of my “1492 Project” series in *Broad + Liberty*, titled “The Second Voyage,” I recounted how Christopher Columbus, the High Admiral and Governor of the West Indies, had freed the Taino slaves; overseen the building of multiple settlements in harmonious coexistence with their tribal neighbors; and defeated the Carib marauders, bringing peace and slowly restoring prosperity to the land. He brought to the West Indies what I call the *Pax Columbiana*, as his very name suggests: “Columbo,” Italian for “dove,” the symbol of peace.

This week’s article tells of the shattering of that fragile peace by the true villain of the West Indies whose deeds have, of late, been falsely attributed by revisionist “historians” to the good Admiral Columbus. The *true* terror of the West Indies — the man known to the Jihadist invaders of Europe as their bane and conqueror; to the Spaniards as their war hero of the *Reconquista*, but to the innocent Tainos of the West Indies as the racist, rapist, maimer, murderer and genocidal maniac — was none other than *Francisco de Bobadilla*. To Christopher Columbus, Bobadilla was the mariner-governor’s arch-nemesis.

Even as Governor Columbus had finally brokered peace in the West Indies, a letter he had written to the Crown while still in the throes of the insurgencies of the *hidalgos* (the low, landed Spanish nobles) finally reached Spain. In it, he had requested the Crown send someone to aid him whom the *hidalgos* would respect. The *hidalgos* constantly rebelled against Governor Columbus for a multitude of reasons, including that he was not of noble birth and was a Genoan “foreigner[]” who, in their words, “had no experience of controlling people of quality” — in other words, high-born noblemen such as themselves (Hernando Colón, *Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 85). The self-characterization was ironic; many of them were, in fact, low-born criminals pardoned by the Crown in exchange for their agreement to accept a noble title and settle the tropical frontier of the West Indies.

Mainly, however, the tension arose because Governor Columbus refused to allow the entitled *hidalgos* to enslave the tribal islanders of the West Indies, and forced those same *hidalgos* to build their own settlements. Betrayed by his own mayor, and beleaguered by the hostilities of the conquistadors, Columbus complained to the Crown: “I wanted to escape from governing these dissolute people...full of vice and malice” and “begged Their Highnesses...to send someone at my expense to administer justice” (Letter of Christopher Columbus to Doña Juana de Torres, dated October 1500).

The Crown answered Columbus’s request, unaware that, since receiving the letter, he had actually single-handedly succeeded in suppressing the *hidalgo* rebellions with sheer diplomacy and without arms. As historian Bartolomé de las Casas, who lived through and personally witnessed these events, wrote in his *Historia de las Indias (History of the Indies)*, “by now things were calm, the land was rich and everyone lived in peace” (Book I, Chapter 181), Columbus’s hard-earned *Pax Columbiana*. The monarchs appointed Comendador Francisco de Bobadilla, *reconquistador* and knight of the Order of Calatrava, on May 21, 1499, a dark day in history.

The King and Queen informed Bobadilla of the mutual letters of complaint written by the *hidalgos* and Governor Columbus. The monarchs instructed Bobadilla to conduct an independent investigation of the competing claims; make findings of fact; and, if he found that the wrongdoing really did lie with Columbus, to unseat him and take over as Viceroy, a hereditary title that would be passed down through generations. This was all the ambitious *reconquistador* needed to hear.

The fate of the West Indies made a turn for the worst in late August, 1499, when Comendador Bobadilla set foot on the shore of Hispaniola. He conducted no investigation. He made no findings of fact. All of the primary historical sources agree that his first deed upon landfall was to arrest all three Columbus brothers on sight, shackle them and keep them in the bowels of a prison ship for exile to Spain. Then he commandeered Governor Columbus's house, personal effects and papers, having "kept most hidden" any documents "which would have cleared" the lies that were to follow (*Id.*, Book I, Chapter 181). Bobadilla "began to draw up a case against" the Columbus brothers, "citing as witnesses the Admiral's enemies" among the recalcitrant and rebellious *hidalgos*, "publicly favoring and encouraging anyone who came forward to abuse the prisoners" (*Colón, Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 85).

What followed may seem eerily familiar to the modern reader. "These witnesses were so malevolent and abusive in their declarations that a man would have to be more than blind not to recognize that what they said was prompted by passion, not by truth" (*Id.*).

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Bobadilla took complete control of the settlements. "The day after he arrived he constituted himself governor, appointed officials, performed executive acts, and announced gold franchises and the remission of titles...for a period of twenty years, which is a man's lifetime" (*Id.*). He did so to ingratiate himself with the *hidalgos*. He raised "adherents" by "allying himself with the richest and most powerful" of them. "He gave them Indians to work for them" and required, in return, that the *hidalgos* pay tribute to him, rather than to the Crown. He sold all the known lands and possessions of the Crown in the West Indies by public auction to the *hidalgos*. Of his "companions" he only required payment of one-third of the price.

Bobadilla had “no other aim but to enrich himself and gain the affection of the people” while he could. To that end, he “allowed the ill-disposed mob to speak all kinds of libels against [Columbus and his brothers] in public places.” They went about “posting abusive notices at the street corners.” Bobadilla “showed great delight” at the calumnious exhibitions and “each man did the utmost to rival his neighbor in such displays of effrontery” (*Id.*).

History, it seems, has repeated itself. As modern, entitled, recalcitrant, revisionist-history mobs in the United States — and indeed, so-called “educators” of revisionist history in American universities, high schools and grade schools — have modeled themselves after their lying, 15th-Century *hidalgo* counterparts, they have again wrongly placed Christopher Columbus at the center of their cyclone of slander.

To add insult to injury, even as Christopher Columbus lay shackled and imprisoned in the bowels of the prison ship Bobadilla had commissioned to take him and his brothers back to Spain, Bobadilla gave the ship’s master, one Andres Martín, strict instructions to leave the prisoner in chains. Nevertheless, as the ship sailed, Martín offered to free Christopher Columbus of the manacles, a great testament to how affable a person Columbus was. Christopher Columbus refused. He defiantly declared that “only the monarchs could do this,” and insisted on principle on remaining shackled until he reached the royal Court (Bartolomé de las Casas, Book I, Chapter 181).

With his hands in chains, Christopher Columbus began penning a letter to the Spanish Crown, addressed to his friend, Doña Juana de Torres, the governess of Prince John, for whom his own sons had been made royal pages. He wrote that Bobadilla provoked the settlers, gathered “rebels and other untrustworthy people” and aroused “a quantity of people [who] did not deserve baptismal water before God or the world,” including slavers “who go out to look for women [and] girls [selling them] at a premium” on the slave market (*Id.*); some translations of this passage refer to the enslaved girls as being nine or ten years old, others that there were nine or ten of them currently on sale by the slavers as Columbus was writing his letter of complaint. Columbus would be sure to clarify matters once he appeared before the Crown. As Bobadilla’s prisoner, Columbus learned that Bobadilla “did everything in his power to harm me” and such damage to Hispaniola that “Their Highnesses...would be astonished to find that the island is still standing” (*Id.*).

This was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg; Christopher Columbus truly had no idea of the extent of Bobadilla’s depravity, as the worst of it occurred while the Genoan mariner was being shuttled across the sea back to Europe. Once Bobadilla had removed Christopher Columbus as an obstacle, as the new, self-appointed Viceroy, he unleashed all Hell on the West Indies.

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Viceroy Bobadilla undid all the restraints on the Spanish *encomienda* system that Governor Columbus had effected in his years of reigning in the indolent *hidalgos*. Bobadilla eliminated the *hidalgos*’ requirement to pay all but nominal taxes. He imposed forced labor upon the tribal people as miners and cooks so his fellow *hidalgos* would not have to labor (*Id.*, Book II, Chapter 1). Worse, Bobadilla assigned Indian tribes to [the colonists], thus making [the Spaniards] very happy” (*Id.*).

Young Bartolomé de las Casas, not yet a friar or historian, but still a settler and observer of Bobadilla’s atrocities, witnessed the *comendador* take control of the Crown’s military “force [which] was more than enough...to keep the Indians pacified, had [the *hidalgos*] treated them differently, but also to subdue and kill them all, which is what [Bobadilla’s forces] did.” Bobadilla exonerated and decarcerated all the traitorous *hidalgos* Governor Columbus had imprisoned for sedition and other crimes, most of whom were very violent men. De las Casas wrote, “I saw them a few days later, as if nothing had happened, safe and sound, happy and living as honored members of the community.” He further lamented, “You should have seen those hoodlums, exiled from Castile for homicide with crimes yet to be accounted for, served by native kings and their vassals doing the meanest chores. These chiefs had daughters, wives and other close relations whom the Spaniards took for concubines either with their own consent or by force” (*Id.*). By de las Casas’s accounting “three hundred *hidalgos* lives for several years in a continuous state of sin” after the removal of Columbus as governor, “not counting those other sins they committed daily by oppressing and tyrannizing Indians” under Bobadilla’s tyrannical reign (*Id.*).

In Christopher Columbus’s absence, Bobadilla and his *hidalgos* enslaved, raped and murdered tribal people, sometimes simply on a whim and as cruel jokes. Bobadilla’s men called the Tainos “dogs” and plundered their villages. Now, without Governor Columbus to keep the *hidalgos* in check, “they grew more conceited every day and fell into greater arrogance, presumption and contempt toward these humble people.” Without Christopher Columbus’s humane governance and the strict discipline that he had imposed on the *hidalgos*, they

became “[s]oulless, blind and godless.” They “killed without restraint and perversely abused” the tribal peoples of the West Indies (*Id.*).

Bobadilla and his mob of *hidalgo* “grievance squads” engaged in another tactic the modern reader will recognize. In the words of de las Casas, Bobadilla enacted “the first plan of tyrants: to...continually oppress and cause anguish to the most powerful and to the wisest so that, occupied by their calamities, they lack the time and courage to think of their freedom” and, thus “degenerate[] into cowardice and timidity.” De las Casas posited that “if the wisest of the wise, whether Greek or Roman (history books are full of this), often feared and suffered from this adversity, and if many other nations experienced it and philosophers wrote about it, what could we expect from these gentle and unprotected Indians...?” (*Id.*, parenthetical in the original).

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With Bobadilla’s usurpation from Christopher Columbus of the governance of the West Indies, the *encomienda*, as well as Bobadilla’s own personal brand of murderous tyranny, reigned supreme. De las Casas writes of this dark time, “The Spaniards loved and adored [Bobadilla] in exchange for such favors, help and advice, because they knew how much freer they were now than under Columbus” (*Id.*).

Whereas Christopher Columbus, from the beginning, had always characterized the Tainos to the Crown as “intelligent” and willing and worthy to become Spanish citizens and Christians, with all the rights and privileges attendant thereto, Bobadilla, instead, spread virulent propaganda about the tribal peoples. Bobadilla deceived the monarchs into “believing them to be nonrational animals,” who were “incapable” of receiving citizenship or the faith, and perpetuated this lie “throughout the world” for the sole purpose that he might “keep power over them.” Of this “evil design of those deceivers and counterfeits of truth,” De las Casas lamented, “may he who persists in it burn for such beastly heresy” (*Id.*). De las Casas’s lament merits repeating today.

Drunk with power and with an insatiable thirst for gold that no amount of Taino blood could slake, Bobadilla knew his reign of terror could not last long. In perhaps the most damning statement of record in this history, he explicitly told the *hidalgos*, "Take as many advantages as you can since you don't know how long this will last" (*Id.*). De las Casas heard the statement with his own young ears. When he wrote of it years later in his official capacity as "Protector of the Indians," he punctuated this grizzly account with the following words: "And let this suffice to account for the state of affairs on this island under Bobadilla's government, after he had sent Admiral Columbus as a prisoner to Castile" (*Id.*).

Indeed Bobadilla warned his conspirators to do what they might in what time they had because he knew that his own calumnious writings against Columbus were lies soon to be debunked. He knew that his own deeds as the new Viceroy were nothing short of the most profane wickedness, and that when the Crown heard Christopher Columbus's true accounts, Bobadilla's reign of terror would be terminated.

Indeed, in the letter to Doña Juana, Christopher Columbus had already set forth to set things right, even in chains. He wrote that he relied not only on his faith for assurance and internal strength, but on his confidence in his position and the propriety of his deeds. "Comendador Bobadilla is striving to explain his conduct," he declared in the letter, "but I will easily show him that his scant knowledge, great cowardice and exorbitant greed are the motives that pushed him into it." He added assuredly, "Their Highnesses will know this when they order him to give an account, especially if I am present when he gives it" (*Id.*, Book I, Chapter 181).

Though confident in his rectitude, Christopher Columbus bore no hubris and still wrote with humility about his ability to govern, despite that he had proven himself to be the greatest governor the West Indies had ever seen under Ferdinand and Isabella's rule, if not the greatest governor the West Indies has ever seen. Despite having freed the Taino slaves, built multiple settlements and defeated the Carib marauders, bringing prosperity and a *Pax Columbiana* to the land, he lamented about the naïve trust he had placed in the *hidalgos* to respect his authority. He admonished that he should not be "judge[d] as if I were a governor in Sicily or of a well-regulated town or city" - where the social fabric is intact and the laws "observed in their entirety." Rather, "I should be judged as a captain who left Spain for the Indies" and found himself unwittingly in "a warlike nation [with] no towns or governments," all the while opposed by villainous *hidalgos* and conquistadors who imposed upon him "the ingratitude of injuries" (*Id.*).

These days, Christopher Columbus is judged as neither. The revisionist “historians,” the pseudo-academic re-educators and the mindless “grievance squad” mobs that echo their calumny have conflated the evil deeds of Francisco de Bobadilla, the terror of the West Indies, with Christopher Columbus, the first civil rights activist of the Americas and the pious Genoan who would spare no effort to unseat the *reconquistador* villain and undo his wicked deeds.

In my next article in *Broad + Liberty's* 1492 Project, I will explain how Christopher Columbus managed to defeat Bobadilla’s slander in a court of law, unseat the villainous viceroy, and start the long process of setting things right once again in the West Indies.

*Robert Petrone, Esq. is a civil rights author and attorney, and local Philadelphia expert on Christopher Columbus.*



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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. VII): The First Civil Rights Legislation of the Americas

DECEMBER 8, 2020 ROBERT PETRONE



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Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally. Part seven in a series of eight.

The last *Broad + Liberty* article in our ongoing “1492 Project” series, subtitled “The Arch-Nemesis Bobadilla,” recounted the arrival of the villainous Comendador Francisco de Bobadilla, *reconquistador* and knight of the Order of Calatrava, who, through great deceit, slander and force, arrested and exiled Governor Christopher Columbus for a litany of made-up crimes he did not commit, and sent Columbus back to Spain in chains in the bowels of a prison ship to answer for them. The subtitle of this article, “The First Civil Rights Legislation of the Americas,” refers to how Christopher Columbus not only defeated Bobadilla’s lies that he was a criminal, but realized the greatest of his many achievements for the tribal peoples of the West Indies as the first civil rights activist of the Americas.

Many express surprise at the characterization of Christopher Columbus as the first civil rights activist of the Americas. This may be expected, given the steady diet of falsehoods propagated by Columbus’s detractors, the sinister axis of cultural majoritarians who have fulfilled the promise of Marxist crusader Rudolf Dutschke of a “long march through the institutions” of the West, including academia and, now, state and local government. As a counterpoint to the New York Times’ toxic propaganda series known as the “1619 Project,” this serial exposé by *Broad + Liberty*, which I call the “1492 Project,” seeks to untangle the twisted web of lies being fed to our children in our schools — now as early as grade school — and resulting in the razing of

statues and other monuments dedicated to Christopher Columbus, the first civil rights activist of the Americas.

The previous article detailed Admiral Columbus's slave-freeing sojourn around the West Indies, the first "Underground Railroad" of the Americas ("Underwater Railroad"?) in which he sailed from Caribbean island to Caribbean island delivering Tainos from bondage from the man-eating Caribs who repeatedly descended upon their villages, raping, kidnapping, murdering and eating Tainos. Columbus shuttled to shore those rescued Tainos who wished to remain in the West Indies, and brought back to Spain with him those who wished to be Baptized, rendering them immune to slavery and placing them under the protective aegis of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church.

But these efforts constituted only the first half of Columbus's Second Voyage, and the first half of his civil rights activism during it. The previous article also detailed how Governor Columbus quelled no less than three rebellions by the *hidalgos* (low, landed nobles of Spain who wished to enslave the tribal peoples to build their settlements) — Alonzo de Hojeda, Fray Bernardo Buil and his conspirator Captain Pedro Margarite, and Juan Aguado — and finally brought peace and prosperity to the West Indies. But before he brought this *Pax Columbiana* to the land, while still in the throes of these many rebellions, Governor Columbus had written to the Crown, beseeching them to send him someone the *hidalgos* would respect. On a dark day in history, the Crown sent Francisco de Bobadilla, the true racist, rapist, maimer, murderer, enslaver and genocidal maniac that current revisionist-"historians" incorrectly conflate with Christopher Columbus.

In fact, Columbus and Bobadilla were arch-nemeses. As previously detailed, immediately upon landfall, Bobadilla, seduced by the promise of an easy subjugation of the tribal people of the West Indies and an abundance of gold, shackled Columbus and his brothers on sight and sent them back to Spain in the bowels of a prison ship. He then undid all the restrictions on the *hidalgos* that Governor Columbus had imposed and unleashed a murderous and plunderous reign of terror on the West Indies. Knowing that the truth would soon exonerate Columbus in the Court of the Spanish monarchs, who would undoubtedly unseat the villainous *conquistador*, Bobadilla exhorted his conspirators to "[t]ake as many advantages as you can since you don't know how long this will last" (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 2).

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**“ Finally Bobadilla, the terror of the West Indies, was no more. His plot to remove Christopher Columbus as an obstacle to the tyranny of the *hidalgos* was short-lived, and Christopher Columbus and the tribal peoples of the West Indies emerged victorious.**

As Bobadilla expected, Christopher Columbus's next act of civil rights activism was the undoing of the villainous *conquistador*. And that is where this latest article resumes, with Christopher Columbus cementing his role in history as the first civil rights activist of the Americas.

With his hands in chains aboard the prison ship, Columbus penned a letter to Doña Juana de Torres, the governess of Prince John of Spain. He wrote that Bobadilla “did everything in his power to harm me” and such damage to Hispaniola that “Their Highnesses...would be astonished to find that the island is still standing” (*Id.*, Book I, Chapter 181). He listed all of Bobadilla's treachery that he knew about, which was barely the beginning of the hellfire Bobadilla was unleashing in Columbus's absence. He promised that he would see to the unseating of Bobadilla and restore order to the West Indies.

Christopher Columbus made good on that promise. Once he returned to Castile, he presented his own case before the Crown, refuting Bobadilla's slander and revealing Bobadilla's misdeeds. Based on Columbus's testimony and the evidence he was able to provide, the Crown, now fully seeing the *hidalgos'* plot for what it was, released Columbus of his shackles and dismissed the false charges against Columbus as calumny. Pursuant to the evidence Columbus had presented regarding Bobadilla's lies and earliest misdeeds, the Crown deposed Bobadilla from the viceroyalty of the West Indies. Though Bobadilla had done a great deal of damage to the tribal peoples and the West Indies in the time it took for Columbus to get back to Spain and conclude the legal proceedings, finally Bobadilla, the terror of the West Indies, was no more. His plot to remove Christopher Columbus as an obstacle to the tyranny of the *hidalgos* was short-lived, and Christopher Columbus and the tribal peoples of the West Indies emerged victorious.

But Columbus wanted nothing more to do with governing the *hidalgos* of the West Indies. He told the Crown, “I wanted to escape from governing these dissolute people...full of vice and malice” (Letter of Christopher Columbus to Doña Juana de Torres, dated October 1500). Thus, rather than re-seat Columbus in a governorship he no longer wanted, the Crown replaced Bobadilla with a new governor, Nicolás de Ovando, Knight of Alcántara, and Comendador of Lares.

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**“ Columbus carefully drafted a petition to the Crown that he hoped would protect the tribal peoples from any further depredations by Spanish governors: a petition for the first civil rights legislation of the Americas.**

Having learned from the tyranny of Bobadilla, Columbus was skeptical of Ovando. Columbus remained in Spain while the newly-appointed Governor Ovando and the newly-frocked Friar Bartolomé de las Casas — who would eventually pen this history he was witnessing in real time — traveled back to the West Indies. Columbus carefully drafted a petition to the Crown that he hoped would protect the tribal peoples from any further depredations by Spanish governors: a petition for the first civil rights legislation of the Americas.

This act by Christopher Columbus marked a milestone not only in the life of this Genoan mariner and not only in the history of the Americas, but in the history of worldwide civil rights. Historian and translator Andrée M. Collard noted that Christopher Columbus ignited what was to be the undoing of the feudal *encomienda* system, sparking the spread of “the enlightened Spanish legal tradition” first set forth in “the *Siete Partidas*” (*Historia de las Indias*, editor’s “Introduction”), a seven-part (as the name implies) Castilian statutory code first compiled in the thirteenth century during the reign of Alfonso X, establishing a uniform body of normative rules for the kingdom akin to the *Magna Carta* or the American Bill of Rights. Christopher Columbus sought to extend these civil rights protections to the tribal people of the West Indies.

The monarchs read Columbus’s petition for the civil rights legislation, and agreed with him. They granted his petition and promulgated the first civil rights legislation of the Americas. This royal decree from King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella included “a very specific clause” at Christopher Columbus’s behest: “all the Indians of Hispaniola were to be left free, not subject to servitude, unmolested and unharmed and allowed to live like free vassals under law just like any other vassal in the Kingdom of Castile” (Book II, 83). Whatever treachery the *hidalgos* might plan this time under Ovando’s governorship, Christopher Columbus saw to it that the tribal peoples of the West Indies would now have the protection of law as mandated by two kings, the worldly *and* the heavenly.

And with that crowning deed accomplished, Columbus and the monarchs could now turn to planning Columbus’s fourth — and final — voyage. Though Ferdinand and Isabella made clear it was to be solely for the purpose of exploration, Columbus would defy his benefactors one

last time in the name of civil rights. In the next “1492 Project” article at *Broad + Liberty*, I will recount Columbus’s final confrontation in the West Indies for civil rights, “In the Court of Ovando.”

*Robert Petrone, Esq. is a civil rights author and attorney, and local Philadelphia expert on Christopher Columbus.*



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## Robert Petrone: Christopher Columbus is the greatest hero of the 15th & 16th centuries (pt. VIII): The Final Voyage to Freedom

© JANUARY 12, 2021 1 ROBERT PETRONE



*Christopher Columbus was none of the epithets with which his detractors repeatedly characterize him — and all of the historical resources show this unequivocally. Part eight in a series of eight.*

With great gratitude to the readers who have persisted throughout the long and complicated history of the settlement of the West Indies to this, the final installment of the *1492 Project*, I commend you. You have done what the cultural majoritarians (such as the splenetic “Mr. Coarse” I mentioned in my first article) had hoped you would not: you have examined the content recounted in the primary sources in great detail; learned the intricate story of the West Indies; and seen the falsehood of the broad-brushed, bumper-sticker-ready, meme-driven, revisionist, conflated version of events pushed by the cultural majoritarians, Marxists, race-baiters, hate-mongers and other detractors of the man who was, in fact, the first civil rights activist of the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

And the hate-mongering cultural majoritarians and their ilk have themselves noticed. You may have observed that since the publication of this serial exposé, the anti-Western polemicists have dialed back their vitriolic rhetoric. No longer have they been claiming that Columbus was an evildoer; rather, they have noticeably backpedalled, claiming merely that his statues and memorials should be razed because he is “a symbol of oppression.” But now you, dear reader, know the truth: to call him a symbol of the very things he fought against is akin to calling Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King a “symbol of racism,” or calling Ghandi a “symbol of

violence.” It is the kind of inversive wordplay the hate-mongers have always employed to sow dissension and foment internecine violence and destruction.

You have seen — and the cultural majoritarians can no longer deny — that the primary sources unequivocally establish that Christopher Columbus succeeded in a nigh-impossible trans-Atlantic voyage that no one thought possible with nary a nautical instrument at his disposal; provided Jews with crew positions that allowed them to flee the Spanish Inquisition; brought to light to the rest of the world the existence of the Americas; established peaceful first contact with the islanders (both the friendly and otherwise); freed Taino slaves from cannibalistic Carib captors in the first Underground Railroad of the Americas; brought Christianity to the willing; created the first permanent European settlements in the Americas; forged lifelong friendships with Taino chieftains; protected the islanders from enslavement by the *hidalgos* (low, landed nobles) who wanted to enforce Spain’s feudal *encomienda* system on them; defeated all the slander levied against him by the resentful *hidalgos* in a court of law; defeated multiple rebellions by the *hidalgos* using arbitration rather than armaments; brought a *Pax Columbiana* to the West Indies in which “things were calm, the land was rich and everyone lived in peace;” unseated the villainous Viceroy Bobadilla who unleashed a reign of terror on the West Indies; and successfully lobbied for the first civil rights legislation of the Americas ensuring that “all the Indians of Hispaniola were to be left free, not subject to servitude, unmolested and unharmed and allowed to live like free vassals under law just like any other vassal in the Kingdom of Castile.” And Admiral Columbus still had one voyage to the Indies left before his story ended. That story is the subject of this article.

Although Christopher Columbus was no villain — much less the racist, rapist, maimer, murderer and genocidal maniac that the anti-Western cultural majoritarians would like you to believe he is — Viceroy Francisco de Bobadilla, knight of the *Reconquista*, was all of those things. Fortunately, Christopher Columbus ensured that Bobadilla’s reign of terror was short-lived. Unfortunately, once he secured Bobadilla’s removal from office, Columbus no longer wished to return to the governorship over the “dissolute [*hidalgos*,] full of vice and malice,” so the crown appointed Nicolás Ovando, another military knight like Bobadilla, to replace Bobadilla (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Books I, II & III, *passim*; *Digest of Columbus’s Log Book* and collective epistles of Christopher Columbus, *passim*; Hernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, *passim*).

Ovando was no better than Bobadilla. In many ways, he was even worse. This time, Christopher Columbus had ensured that legislation was in place to protect the Tainos and other tribal islanders from harm, but Ovando largely ignored the legislation, in defiance of both divine and Spanish law. While Christopher Columbus was far away in Castile, Ovando

availed himself of the lack of supervision and accountability that Columbus's presence had always ensured. Like Bobadilla, Ovando took the opportunity to murder and enslave the tribal islanders, including their chieftains and their families, but to a greater degree and for a longer period of time than Bobadilla had (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Books II & III, *passim*; *Digest of Columbus's Log Book* and collective epistles of Christopher Columbus, *passim*; Hernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, *passim*).

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“ [D]espite the ‘Big Lie’ of the cultural majoritarians, the primary historical sources show that by his deeds, his motives and his efforts – realized and unrealized – Christopher Columbus was unmistakably, far and away, and by any standards, the single greatest hero of human rights of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Columbus seethed in Spain over Ovando's misdeeds, not the least of which included ignoring of the civil rights legislation for which he had so persistently fought and the atrocities Ovando continued to inflict upon the tribes. Chomping at the proverbial bit to return to the West Indies, Admiral Columbus negotiated yet another contract with the Crown of Spain for his Fourth Voyage. In the wake of Christopher Columbus's hard-earned success in lobbying for the legislation protecting the tribal islanders, the Crown was well aware of his attachment to them, and his feelings about Ovando's oppressive reign. Ovando, however, had at least satisfied the complaints of the recalcitrant *hidalgos* (by giving them free rein to exploit the islanders) and that was one headache of which the Crown was glad to relieve themselves (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Books II & III, *passim*; *Digest of Columbus's Log Book* and collective epistles of Christopher Columbus, *passim*; Letter of the Crown of Spain, dated March 14, 1502; Hernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, *passim*).

On March 14, 1502, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella personally wrote Christopher Columbus a letter of apology for the treatment he sustained at the hands of Bobadilla urged him to press on with another Caribbean expedition. They knew the idealistic Admiral Columbus once again would want to free any slaves he found in the Caribbean, as he did on his Second Voyage, and bring them back to Spain for Baptism (because Baptized people could not be enslaved in Catholic Europe), but they knew his doing so would stir up Ovando and the *hidalgos* again. They commanded Admiral Columbus to bring none of the *hidalgos'* slaves, or those of any Portuguese slavers, back to Spain for liberation. In fact, the Crown gave Columbus explicit instructions to avoid Ovando altogether — not even to land on the island of Hispaniola, the seat of Ovando's court. Rather, they instructed the Admiral to sail in further exploration of the Caribbean *only*. The monarchs wanted no more trouble in the West Indies

(Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 4; Letter of the Crown of Spain, dated March 14, 1502; Hernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 87).

But Christopher Columbus was destined to protect the tribes of the Caribbean, and a higher monarch saw to it that he had one last chance to manifest that destiny. Columbus set sail to the West Indies for the last time on March 14, 1502, with a flotilla of only four ships — a drastic departure from the seventeen the Crown provided him on his Second Voyage — crewed by a total of only 150 men, including his thirteen-year-old son Hernando (who would grow to be an historian and biographer), Christopher's brother Bartolomeo (who was resistant to taking the voyage) and the less-than-loyal Captain Francisco de Porras (as a favor to Porras's brother-in-law, Royal Treasurer Alonso de Morales).

Despite harsh vernal winds and storms in the Caribbean, Admiral Columbus explored extensively, begrudgingly obeying the Crown's mandate to stay away from Ovando's court in Hispaniola. He made first landfall in Cariay (now the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua). The islanders received him warmly, regaling him with stories of fields of gold in nearby Veragua (now Veraguas, Paraguay), and escorting him to their chieftain. The chieftain, perhaps in an act genuinely-intended, if misplaced, generosity, perhaps with evil intent, sent to the Admiral's cabin "two magnificently attired girls, the elder of whom could not have been more than eleven [years old] and the other seven." They "had magic powders concealed about them" — narcotics — and attempted to drug and seduce the Admiral with behavior "so shameless that they might have been whores." Columbus was immediately horrified and sent them away. So as not to offend them — as Columbus understood that the tribal islanders had vastly different mores than the Europeans, he "ordered that they should be given some of [the ship's] trinkets and send them back to land immediately" (Christopher Columbus's Letter to the Sovereigns of Spain, dated July 7, 1503).

Christopher Columbus was no debaucher. After his first wife, Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, died giving birth to their first (and, for her, *only*) son Diego, the widowed Columbus began canvassing Europe, with his young son in tow, looking for a patron to fund his First Voyage, eventually winning over the Crown of Spain. In the nearly eight years he spent in that country pitching his expedition to the monarchs, he met a noblewoman of the Castilian Court, Beatriz Enríquez de Arana. Though he never married Beatriz — she was a noble and he was not — she did bear him a son, Hernando, who had accompanied the Admiral on the Fourth Voyage. Columbus, a devout Catholic, strove to practice — and demanded his sailors strive to practice — the three "counsels of perfection" of Christianity: obedience, poverty and chastity (though the roughneck sailors were far less adherent than he). He obeyed the moral code of the Bible, he sought not riches (in fact, he died devastatingly in debt to the Crown for failing to mine

enough gold to slake the insatiable greed of the monarchs), and he remained faithful to the mother of his new child. While many Spanish settlers contracted syphilis (among many other diseases the Europeans had never encountered) from the islander women who, unfettered by European mores, willingly engaged in coitus indiscriminately, Columbus did not contract any sexually-transmitted diseases. This encounter in Cariay demonstrates why, and demonstrates his upstanding moral character.

Admiral Columbus made the second landfall of his Fourth Voyage in Ciguare (now Guatemala), home of ancient Mayan cities. There, as always, he established peaceful first contact and trade with the tribal occupants (Christopher Columbus's Letter to the Sovereigns of Spain, dated July 7, 1503).

Admiral Columbus made his third landfall on the Epiphany, January 6, 1503, in Veragua (Veraguas, Panama). There, the Admiral encountered diverse tribes, two of which were tribes of cannibals who frequently attacked other tribes. As always, the Admiral established peaceful first contact with the *quibian* (chieftain) of one of these warlike tribes, though the *quibian* proved somewhat mercurial. The *quibian's* son acted belligerently and even threatened to kill the leader of the landing party, Captain Diego Mendez. Nevertheless, Mendez, a trusted emissary of the insightful Columbus, won over the young warrior, "and [they] ate and drank in love and camaraderie and remained friends" thereafter. Nevertheless, the *quibian* launched a "thousand warriors" unprovoked against the flotilla at the Yebra River (now the Belén River), as Captain Mendez described it, to "burn our ships and kill us all." Admiral Columbus did not act rashly — and never aggressively — "but discussed with [Mendez] how [to] make certain of these people's intentions." The *quibian* made them known: in Columbus's absence — the Admiral was always a pacifying influence — the *quibian* sent four hundred warriors to attack the landing party unprovoked, and Mendez and his men fought defensively only, ending the conflict after only seven to ten fatalities on each side. Admiral Columbus "was quite delighted to hear" that the matter was resolved with such celerity and relatively little loss of life. Despite the unprovoked attack by the *quibian*, Admiral Columbus wrote a letter to the Crown in July of that year counseling the monarchs against the "seiz[ure]" or "plunder" of the Veraguan tribe that attacked him, but rather urged "fair dealings" with the Veraguans. Once again, Christopher Columbus demonstrated his love of the tribal islanders, going as far as to turn the proverbial cheek to even their unprovoked hostilities (*Id.*; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Christopher Columbus's persistent tenderness and altruism toward even the most hostile of islander tribes stemmed not only from his unwavering devotion to the divine mandates of Catholicism. He also had a much more terrene motivation: he had hoped the Spanish settlements he established "would be an example to others" from Spain and other nations who might follow. He lamented that Bobadilla and Ovando had perverted his vision into such "a bad example, detrimental to both trade and justice in the world" (Christopher Columbus's Letter to the Sovereigns of Spain, dated July 7, 1503).

By April 1503, the ships of the flotilla were so worm-ridden and unseaworthy, Admiral Columbus had to retire two of them, halving his flotilla. By May, he had restrained himself enough, and finally set sail for Hispaniola to confront Viceroy Nicolás de Ovando in his own court. Just as in the previous year, the springtime Caribbean tides again tossed his remaining ships for over a month, stripping them of rigging and framework and filling their holds with seawater. The Admiral decided on a desperate and dangerous tack that would require a great display seamanship, and he rose to the occasion: with the tides and the winds against him, in late June of 1503, Admiral Columbus "safely grounded" the two ships on the nearest island, Jamaica. Once again, without exception, he established peaceful and friendly first contact with the islanders. Three tribes on that island fed and traded with his crew, though eventually the food ran short and the Admiral and his crew began to starve (*Id.*, Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapters 30 ff.; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

To make matters worse, Columbus refused to let his sailors leave their ships for fear they would molest the women of the island. He kept personal watch over his men. Starving for food and fornication, the concupiscent Captain Francisco de Porras led not one but two mutinies, attempting to kidnap and enslave several islanders in the process. Admiral Columbus and those crewman still loyal to him — including the valorous Captain Mendez — defeated the mutineers, arrested them and put an end to their plot. Once again Christopher Columbus demonstrated his wise leadership at great cost and hardship to himself. Admiral Columbus later admitted "he had never expected to leave Jamaica alive." Once again, Christopher Columbus had suffered personally, to near death, to protect the islanders of the Caribbean (Letter of Christopher Columbus, July 7, 1503; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536) (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapters 30 ff.; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Captain Mendez then volunteered to take a death-defying canoe journey to Hispaniola to inform Viceroy Ovando of the shipwreck of the flotilla in Jamaica. Mendez's adventures on this trip are worthy of their own chapter in this series, but beyond the scope of this one. Suffice it to say, that after great peril, including an unprovoked attack by tribal sea raiders and starvation from depletion of provisions, Captain Mendez ultimately arrived alive in Hispaniola and gained an audience with the Viceroy. Undoubtedly fearful that Admiral Columbus would unseat him for his treachery as the Admiral had done to former-Viceroy Bobadilla, Ovando let more than a year pass in delay, keeping the Admiral languishing and starving on Jamaica, plainly in the hopes he would perish there. While he waited, Admiral Columbus penned a letter to the Crown calling for them to "punish" Ovando for his many misdeeds, adding persuasively, "It would be a most virtuous deed and a famous example if you were to do this, and would leave to Spain a glorious memory of your Highnesses as grateful and just princes" (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapters 30 ff.; Letter of Christopher Columbus, July 7, 1503; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Though Viceroy Ovando "kept [Captain Mendez] with him for seven months" while he waged a murderous war against the tribes of Jaragua (the westernmost chiefdoms of Hispaniola), Mendez spread the word to the locals and the clergy of Admiral Columbus's plight. The priests exerted their spiritual influence to overcome the Viceroy's nefarious political machinations. Ovando "finally relented only because people were talking in Santo Domingo and missionaries there were beginning to reprehend in in their sermons" (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 36; Letter of Christopher Columbus, July 7, 1503; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Help finally arrived on June 27, 1504. Ships from Hispaniola shuttled Columbus, his crew and the arrested mutineers not to Santo Domingo, the seat of the Viceroy's court, but to "the small island we call Beata, not far from Hispaniola." The trip was perilous. "Unfavorable winds and currents made the navigation arduous." The murderous Ovando was not above selecting the least favorable time of year for sailing to reduce the chances that Admiral Columbus would arrive alive. But Ovando's constant skullduggeries were no match for Christopher Columbus. Once in Beata, Admiral Columbus waited for the strength of the currents to subside and personally sailed to Hispaniola against the mandate of the Crown and their Viceroy (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 36; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Christopher Columbus confronted Nicolás Ovando in the Viceroy's own court with a long list of grievances, not the least of which involved Ovando's continued mistreatment of the tribal peoples in the face of the civil rights legislation for which Columbus had successfully petitioned the Crown. Ovando put on a show of welcoming the Admiral with "a false smile and a pretense of friendship" but gave him no quarter. Ovando "released Porras," the mutineer and "tried to punish those who had been responsible for his imprisonment" — to wit, Admiral Columbus and his still-loyal crewmen. Ovando and his *hidalgo* minions mocked Christopher Columbus behind his back, pretending not to understand his speech due to his Genoan accent. Columbus accomplished little in this, his last sojourn to Hispaniola, but headed back to Spain with a civil rights mission (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Chapter 36; Letter of Christopher Columbus, July 7, 1503; Testament of Diego Mendez, dated June 6, 1536).

Christopher Columbus was less than two years away from death when he departed Hispaniola for the last time on September 12, 1504. In his own words to the Crown, "I came to serve at the age of twenty-eight and today I have not a hair on my head that is not gray. My body is sick and wasted." He spent most of his last return voyage to Spain "confined to his bed by gout." However, even in his winter years, he proved himself an indomitable sailor. The ship hit "a most violent storm" a third of the way across the Atlantic, stripping its rigging and breaking the mast into four pieces. Despite the pain of his gout, he jerry-rigged a sail "with material from the forecastles undone for that purpose. Later, another storm broke the mizzenmast." In the words of historian and Protector of the Indians Bartolomé de las Casas, "indeed it seemed the Fates were against the Admiral, pursuing him relentlessly throughout his life with hardship and affliction. He navigated this way another 700 leagues until God willed he reach the port [of Spain] whence he went to Seville to rest a few days" (Letter of Christopher Columbus, July 7, 1503; Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Chapter 36).

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## “ Christopher Columbus made his final voyage in 1506, not to the Caribbean, but to his celestial resting place among the stars that had guided his navigation in life

In Seville, Admiral Columbus learned to his great grief that Queen Isabella, his most ardent supporter, had died that same month. As he had returned to his benefactors, she had returned to her Maker. The widowed King Ferdinand, always jealous of Columbus, paid little attention to the Genoan mariner thereafter. But Columbus spent the last two years of his life persistently reporting to the King in epistolary memoranda the many misdeeds of Ovando, including reports of the Viceroy's constant murder and other mistreatment of the tribal peoples of the Caribbean (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 37; Hernando Colon, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 108).

Columbus condemned the Spanish slavers who subverted his own efforts to aid the tribal peoples of the Caribbean. He explained to the King that he gave passage to the islanders from Hispaniola to Castile “for the purpose of instructing them in our Faith, our customs, crafts and trades, after which [Columbus] intended to reclaim them and return them to their lands so they could instruct others.” He complained that the Spaniards, instead, “sold” the people into servitude. “[B]ut either [King Ferdinand] did not believe [Columbus] or had other important things to attend to; the fact is that he paid no attention” (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapters 37 ff.).

Though, to his dying day, Christopher Columbus hounded the King with these epistles, he did not live to see the eventual unseating of Ovando. De las Casas writes that “the Admiral’s gout grew worse from the vigors of winter, aggravated by the mental state of desolation” at the insouciant King’s disregard. Ferdinand’s abdication of his throne to his son-in-law Philip I of Burgundy did little to sooth Columbus’s soul; though King Philip proved less dismissive than his predecessor, Philip survived Columbus by only four months. De las Casas writes, “I believe that had the Admiral and King Philip lived longer, justice would have been done.” Christopher Columbus made his final voyage in 1506, not to the Caribbean, but to his celestial resting place among the stars that had guided his navigation in life. De las Casas reported of the Admiral, “He devotedly received the holy sacraments, for he was a good Christian, and died in Valladolid, on the day of the Ascension, the twentieth of May, 1506, pronouncing his last words: ‘Into Thy hands, oh God, I commend my soul,’” the final words, too, of the crucified Christ. Though King Philip gave Christopher Columbus a hero’s burial in the Cathedral of Seville, de las Casas noted that the Admiral “died dispossessed of the status and fame he had won at the cost of incredible pain, dispossessed ignominiously and unjustly imprisoned without due process, judged by people seemingly acting as if they lacked reason, as if they were mad, stupid and absurd and worse than barbaric brutes” (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 38; Hernando Colon, *The Life of the Admiral*, Chapter 108). It seems, quite evidently, that history repeats itself today.

Yet terrestrial death did not terminate Christopher Columbus’s civil activism. In his will, he bequeathed his estate to his sons and brothers on the stipulation “that his heir increase the value of his estate and use the income thereof to serve the King and for the propagation of the Christian religion, setting aside ten percent of it as charity for the poor” (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book II, Chapter 38).

More importantly, Christopher Columbus's lifetime of civil rights activism inspired one young man, who grew up in the Spanish settlements of Hispaniola under Governor Columbus's benevolent administration and would later take the vows of a Dominican friar, assume the official mantle of "Protector of the Indians" conferred to him by the Church and Crown, and eventually pen the decades-long history of the settlement of the Caribbean in his three-volume *Historia de las Indias*: Friar Bartolomé de las Casas. Pope Julius II sent Dominican friars to establish churches in the West Indies; they, like Columbus, spoke out against the *encomienda* system and the enslavement and oppression of the tribal peoples. Unlike Governor Columbus, however, who held and used his gubernatorial authority to protect the tribal peoples and restrain the conquistadors and settlers, the Dominican friars held no authority, save spiritual, over the settlers. The friars availed themselves of what influence they possessed by preaching sermons at Mass condemning the *hidalgos* for oppressing and enslaving the tribal peoples (Bartolomé de las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Book III, Chapters 1-4).

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas took his role as "Protector of the Indians" seriously. Even as the *conquistador* Hernán Cortés began what de las Casas's *Historia* described as a "violent" and "tyrannical" conquest of Mexico, the Friar followed in the footsteps of Christopher Columbus. De las Casas persistently petitioned King Ferdinand to fund the creation of a religious brotherhood funded by the royal treasury to enforce the civil rights legislation for which Christopher Columbus had successfully lobbied. As the King had done with Columbus's petitions for the civil rights legislation, he granted de las Casas's petition as well (*Id.*, Chapters 114, 130, 138 and 217).

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas and his band of mendicant brothers traveled the settlements of the New World, ministering to the aggrieved tribal peoples, preaching sermons to the *hidalgos* of the evils of slavery, and enforcing the civil rights legislation Christopher Columbus had secured. As with Christopher Columbus, de las Casas's civil rights efforts earned him the enmity of the *hidalgos*. However, in time, de las Casas succeeded in putting an end to the enslavement of the tribal peoples of the New World (the Portuguese would not start the African slave trade until 1516), to Ovando's war against the tribes, and to the Viceroy's reign of terror. When peace finally fell once again between the settlers and the tribal peoples, the survivors intermarried and the Latino race was born. Modern Latinos would not exist if not for Christopher Columbus's civil rights activism, continued, after his death, by Bartolomé de las Casas. De las Casas wrote of his own deeds, "This was one of the most outstanding events that occurred in Spain: that a poor clergyman with no estate and no outside help other than God's, persecuted and hated by everybody (the Spanish in the Indies spoke of him as one who was bent on destroying them and Castile), should come to have such

influence on a King...and to be the cause of so many measures discussed throughout this History" (*Id.*, Book III, *passim*; Chapter 138, parenthetical in original).

De las Casas's description of his own success, surely by no coincidence, paralleled his portrayal of the greatest hero of the fifteenth and sixteenth Centuries: Christopher Columbus, the low-born and humble Genoan sailor who was hated by the Spanish *hidalgos* for actively opposing their *encomienda* system and for restraining their greed, sloth and mistreatment of the tribal peoples of the West Indies during his nearly eight-year term as governor there. Though Christopher Columbus had been dead more than a decade by the time of the events closing the final volume of de las Casas's *Historia de las Indias*, the narrative echoed Christopher Columbus's legend and legacy as the Biblical David versus Goliath; the low-born, self-made defender of the downtrodden; and the first civil rights activist of the Western Hemisphere and the New World.

De las Casas's accounts demonstrate indisputably the reason why the Crown of Spain gave Christopher Columbus a majestic burial and monument in the Cathedral of Seville; the Founding Fathers of the United States named the nation's capital after him; American Presidents William Henry Harrison and Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted Columbus Day holidays celebrated annually to this day; and one hundred forty-four places in the United States have been named after Christopher Columbus, including cities, counties, towns, bodies of water, and schools. That reason is this: despite the "Big Lie" of the cultural majoritarians, the primary historical sources show that by his deeds, his motives and his efforts – realized and unrealized – Christopher Columbus was unmistakably, far and away, and by any standards, the single greatest hero of human rights of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

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