

Christopher Columbus and the History of Colonial Destruction. An African Perspective

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Global Research, October 11, 2016

Global Research 21 October 2014

Region: [Europe](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

First published in October 2014

In October every second week on Monday, Columbus Day is celebrated in western culture in general and in the America's specifically. This is an American tradition and school children of all ages are taught about his so-called discovery of his New-World. Annual parades are given around the country, and every year dignitaries participate in these festivities.

Unfortunately, most people celebrate his holiday without knowing the truth about Columbus's purpose for taking such risky voyages, and his horrendous behavior against the indigenous population, together with brutality against his own men.

At the other end of the spectrum, Columbus's impact has been most devastating on the indigenous people together with African communities everywhere. For a better understanding, three historical events before Columbus's four voyages are presented, along with the reasons for these voyages.

Three Historical Events:

The first event occurred when the African Berbers/Moors conquered the Iberian peninsula (present-day Portugal and Spain). Back then the conquered territory was identified as Andalusia and at that time was most of Spain, Portugal, parts of France, Italy and Gibraltar. Their conquest began in 711 and lasted up to the fall of Granada on January 2, 1492.

The second event is the conquest of Ceuta an Islamic city in North Africa by the Portuguese in 1415. Notably, that was over three decades before the fall of Constantinople in 1453. In the meantime, Portuguese mariners sailed beyond Cape Bojador, Morocco, for the first time in the 1430s.

By 1445, a trading post was established on the small island of Arguim off the shores of present-day Mauritania. As Portuguese ships continued to explore coastlines and rivers over the following decades, they established trade with the preexisting industries. Portuguese traders procured not only various west African commodities such as ivory, peppers, textiles, wax, grain, copper, as well as captive African slaves for exporting. At this time, these slaves were only used as servants in Europe.

In addition to building trading posts, Portugal established colonies on previous uninhabited islands off the African shores that would later serve as collection points for captive slaves, and commodities to be shipped to Europe, and eventually sent to the colonies in the Americas. After several generations, Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias sailed around

the Cape of Good Hope in 1488, opening up European access to the east Indies.

By the close of the fifteenth century, Portuguese merchants could circumvent commercial, political, and military strongholds in both north Africa and in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Indeed, they were successful in using maritime routes to bypass trans-Saharan overland trade routes controlled by Islamic Ottoman Turks.

The third event occurred in 1453, when the Islamic Ottoman Turks successfully captured Christian Constantinople (present-day Istanbul)—formerly western Europe's main source for spices, silks, paper, porcelain, glass, and other luxury goods produced in India, China, Japan, and the spice islands (present-day Indonesia) collectively these areas were known as the east Indies, and the silk road trade route was shutdown by the Ottoman Turks conquest.

The Fall of Granada in 1492:

Obviously, the passages to the east Indies were denied to the Christian west by the Ottoman Turks who controlled the main overland routes to the Orient. Desert robbers, along with the heat and sand storms, as well as other unforeseen hazards eventually made the trip too dangerous and expensive.

The Portugal's alternate route, by sea, was now in demand. Christopher Columbus spent the better part of his adult life embracing a different navigational solution other than Portugal's already established maritime route. The core of his idea was sailing west across the Atlantic Ocean to the east Indies would be shorter, and quicker. Moreover, knowing modern geography makes his idea a guaranteed failure. In hindsight if his idea was correct, a world of opportunity would open up not only for him but other fortune hunters. Of course, this did not happen.

By the late 13th century, the Spanish Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had reconquer most of the Islamic Berber/Moors controlled territory. In 1479, the two kingdoms were united as a result of the marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile. The last Islamic kingdom, Granada, was lost in 1492. For Christian Spain, this conquest was the most important event in their history. After nearly eight centuries of fighting, the Christian Iberians finally defeated the African Islamic Berbers/Moors. On the second of January, 1492, King Ferdinand together with Queen Isabella rode into Granada victoriously. Columbus was present at that joyful event.

The Spanish monarchy agreed to sponsor his voyage but with stringent modifications. He angrily refused their offer and went to France for financial support. A short time afterward, the king and queen had second thoughts and decided to meet Columbus's demands. Eventually, their courier caught up with him just before he reached France.

Upon his return, he was promised huge amounts of gold plus given the title captain of the ocean seas, along with absolute power as administrator for the future to be colonized New World. Columbus promised to bring back gold, spices, and silks, to spread Christianity, and at the same time charter a quicker route to the east Indies. Consequently, he was outfitted with three ships, the Nina, La Pinta and the Santa Maria.

Columbus's Four Voyages:

This set the stage for his four voyages. All of them had some sort of disaster. Which begin with his maiden voyage in 1492 that was disaster number one. While exploring an uncharted island he name Hispaniola (present-day Dominican and Haitian Republics), on Christmas Day he wrecked his flag ship the Santa María; together with the help of the indigenous Taino people using wreckage from the ship and anything else they could find to built small fortress named La Navidad (Christmas in English). He left 39 men at the fortress, and proceeded to Spain to request funding for another voyage.

Unknowing to Columbus, the left-behind Spaniards began enslaving the Taino women for domestic work, which, after several months, led to armed conflict with the Taino's, who destroyed the temporary settlement, killing them. Upon returning to Spain on the La Niña with a little gold, parrots, spices, and Taino captives that Columbus displayed for the Spanish Monarchy convinced them of the need for a rapid second voyage. He received a great deal of fanfare. Columbus was cheered and followed everywhere he went. After all he was " admiral of the ocean sea " and governor-general of the new lands he discovered.

In reality, he did not bring anything in the way of gold or other valuable items like he promised, and he certainly did not find a shorter route to the east Indies. However, he did display some indigenous Taino's whom was forcibly bought to the Monarchy with a few trinkets of gold. His persuasiveness convinced the Spanish monarchy to finance a second voyage of discovery and colonization; later with the blessing of Pope Alexander VI in the Treaty of Tortillas on June 7, 1494. Which assign spheres of influence in the Americas to Portugal and Spain.

Leaving the Canary's Islands on October 13, 1493, Columbus's second voyage of conquest was outfitted with a huge fleet of 17 ships, domesticated animals, with over 1,000 colonists together with six priests, attack dogs and canons. Notably, from an African perspective, this was the precursor to chattel slavery and colonialism.

Arriving in Hispaniola in late November to find the fort of La Navidad destroyed with no survivors. Immediately, other fortified places were built, including a city, founded on January 2, and named La Isabella in honor of the queen. On February 2 Antonio de Torres left La Isabella with 12 ships, some gold, spices, parrots, and Taino captives (most of whom died en route), as well as the bad news about Navidad and some complaints about Columbus's methods of governance.

Meanwhile, he managed to find a small source of gold on Hispaniola. Columbus forced the natives to work in gold mines as slaves until they died of exhaustion. If a Taino did not deliver his full quota of gold dust by his deadline, soldiers would cut off the man's hands and tie them around his neck to send a message. Slavery was so intolerable to the island people that at one point, 100 of them committed mass suicide. Catholic law forbids the enslavement of Christians, but Columbus solved this problem. Although, priests were available to convert natives into Christians, he simply refused to have them baptize, in all likelihoods never intended to do so.

One of his men, Bartolome De Las Casas, was so mortified by Columbus' brutal atrocities against the native peoples, he became a Catholic priest. He described how the Spaniards under Columbus's command cut the legs off of children who ran from them, to test the sharpness of their blades. According to him, the men made bets as to who, with one sweep of his sword, could cut a person in half.

In a single day, De Las Casas was an eye witness as the Spanish soldiers dismembered, beheaded, or raped 3000 native people. " Such inhumanities and barbarisms were committed in my sight as no age can parallel, " He wrote. " My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature that now I tremble as I write. "

Columbus had been appointed governor and Viceroy of the new lands by the Spanish crown, and for the next year and a half, he attempted to do his job. Although, he was a good ship's captain but an inapt administrator. The one thousand or so colonialist sole purpose was to seek gold, and none was to be found. The gold they had been promised never materialized, and what little gold was discovered was sent to the Spanish crown. In the meantime, supplies began to run out, and it was discord in the colony. Columbus used brutality and cruelty to restore order. With the supplies almost gone in March of 1496, he returned to Spain for more resources to keep the struggling colony from failing.

In Spain this time around he was not met with jubilation, on the contrary, there were skepticism and doubt about his venture. However, he managed to get enough financial support, and his third expedition left on May 30, 1498 with six ships. The fleet split into two squadrons; three ships to sail directly for Hispaniola with supplies to the colonists, and the other three led by Columbus's further exploration of the uncharted islands.

After a short time exploring, Columbus returned to Hispaniola on August 19, 1498, he found open hostility. As a matter of fact, it was civil unrest by the colonist. The constant unrest was resolved when Ferdinand and Isabella appointed Francisco de Bobadilla as royal commissioner, with administrative powers in Hispaniola.

His first order of business was to send the Admiral and his two brothers Bartolome and Diego back to Spain in chains in October of 1500. At this point, he came from being the Admiral of the Oceans seas to a miserable failure. Despite the justifiable charges brought against Columbus and his two brothers, the Spanish Monarchy released them. Considering, he was sending them gold all along, perhaps not as much as he promised but gold non-the-less.

Christopher Columbus made a fourth voyage, to search for the Strait of Malacca to the Indian Ocean. Mindfully, when examining a current map his westward theory was doomed from the beginning; On May 11, 1502, four old ships and 140 men under Columbus's command put to sea from the port of Cadiz. Insultingly, he was forbidden to enter Hispaniola the colony he founded.

He proceeded to explored parts of southern, and central America. However, his ships were damaged by a hurricane and termites. Columbus and his men unable to seek assistances in Hispaniola were stranded on Jamaica for a year before being rescued.

This concludes Columbus four voyages, which were all failures; beginning with wrecking the Santa Maria in Hispaniola, and on the second voyage running out of supplies; and on the third upon his return was arrested together with his two brothers and sent back to Spain in chains. On his fourth voyage, he was not allowed in Hispaniola, although it was the island, he founded. More insulting was he was stranded on Jamaica for a year before returning to Spain.

Contrarily, the Caribbean Islands is often called the west Indies. With certainty, the descendants of the native inhabitants are mistakenly called Indians around the world

because Columbus believed until his death, he was in the east Indies. After 25 years of Spanish occupation, the Taino's populations, numbered several million in 1492, were reduced to about 50,000.

In today's contemporary world, he would be guilty of crimes against humanity with evidence from his diary, as well as, accounts from his own men. In all probabilities, he would be sentenced to death or life in prison.

Conclusion:

Columbus Day, was brought on by the Knights of Columbus, a fraternal service organization. Back in the 1930s, they were looking for a Catholic hero as a role-model. In 1934, as a result of lobbying by the Knights of Columbus, Congress and President Franklin Roosevelt signed

Columbus Day into law as a federal holiday.

In western culture, there are some whom honor and worship him, and others recognized his atrocities, and loathe him. For those that honor and worship him, it might be worthwhile to Google " Columbus slave trade, " it just might change their opinions.

None the less, Columbus Day from an African perspective has a different dynamic altogether. His decade of exploration was founded on the principals of conquering and destroying other culture's economic livelihoods and at the same time enhancing the Spanish crown. The rest of Europe followed these principals resulting in 500 years of their domination. More specifically, it started with Columbus's second voyage in 1493 as previously mentioned.

Shortly after his alleged discovery the world was divided by two European world powers at the time, which was Spain in Portugal. The Roman Catholic Pope was ecstatic over the discovery of the so-called New World by Columbus. The Pope divided the world between Portugal and Spain in the treaty of Tortillas in 1494. Where Portugal was assigned Brazil, both coastal shores of Africa, the southern and eastern shores of Asia, and the east Indies.

On the other hand, Spain was given the Americas, the Philippines, and future lands encountered by Columbus. These two historical events set the precedent of conquering other cultures, which was condoned and embrace by the two super powers then, and later all of Europe.

Within these same scenarios, White-Supremacy evolved based on color. Whereas, white represent supremacy in contrast to people of color whom were deemed inferior, which is the foundation of racism. After 500 years these principals, although modified for all intents and purposes are still prevalent today.

By establishing a permanent foothold based on conquering, Spain took the first steps towards building their mighty empire by destroying indigenous Aztecs, Incas and Mayan cultures, and then a century later the rest of Europe followed using the same conquering techniques. The evidence is 500 years of Western domination.

In the process of profitable plantations during the 1500s, expanded the demand for African slaves in the colonies in the New-World. Trade in slaves soon overshadowed gold as the main export of the area. At this time in history, Portugal's trading post off the shores of

Africa became one of the principal sources of slaves. By the early 16th century, the native slave trade was not sufficient. As they died out, Africans were imported for the plantations in the New-World.

The wealth and the trade it generated by the Spanish conquests were enormous and within Europe was the backbone around which capitalism was built. As the native populations of the Americas were wiped out merchants made more profits by importing Africans and selling them to work the tobacco, sugar, cotton plantations and mines.

Later in the century, England, France, and the Dutch joined in the enslavement of Africans. Notably, Portugal together with Spain already had an established slave trade in Latin America a century before their arrival.

A hidden fact is the majority of the African slaves were sent to Latin America led by Spain and Portugal, whom were influenced by Columbus's enslaving the native Americans. These fact still prevails today where the majority of the slave descendants are in Latin-America.

It would be a gross oversight not to mention Australia, together with Africa. The aborigines of Australia suffered the same fate as the natives in Columbus's so-called New World. Summarily, three continents were destroyed and now being controlled by victors of western culture based on Christopher Columbus conquering principals.

Although, Africa has been colonized and their cultural and economic progress has been altered forever. Colonization was planned during a conference held in Berlin from 1884 until 1885. The purpose of this conference was to use their superiority of weapons to partition Africa. There were six countries evolved led by England, France, Portugal, Spain, Germany and Belgium, partition Africa according to their economic interest.

Due to Columbus's conquering precedent Africa and Australia were also victimized just as the other two continents in his New-World. It can be said with certainty that Christopher Columbus conquering exploits have benefited western culture. At the other ends of the spectrum, to some degree people of color and Africans particularly are at the same time suffering.

Obviously, there are two sides to every story. Specifically, this presentation is from the African communities' perspective. It must be said, collectively, these communities are the victims of slavery as well as colonialism along with other Africans scatter around the world.

Conclusively, for the descendants of the native populations in the New-World, and within the African, communities everywhere together should conclude that Columbus Day is nothing but a huge April Fool's Joke.

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Resources:

Moors in Spain	Stanley-Lane Poole
A short Account of the Destruction of the Indies	Bartolome De Las Casa
American Holocaust	David E Stannard

Christianity Islam and the Negro Race	Edward W. Blyden
African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean	Herbert S Klein, Ben Viinson III
The Afrikan Holocaust	John H. Clarke
Lies My Teach Told Me	James W. Lowen
The Scramble for Africa	Thomas Parkenham
How Europe Undeveloped Africa	Walter Rodney
A people History of the United States	Howard Zinn

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