

# IS COLUMBUS A HERO OR A VILLAIN?

*15 Minutes of Freedom by Aaron Ferguson*

Greedy, genocidal glory-hound — these are some of the ways Columbus is described today. But does he deserve the criticism, or is he another victim of revisionism?

## Killing Columbus

At least 33 statues of Columbus have been taken down,<sup>1</sup> and many more have been vandalized.<sup>2</sup> In Boston's North End, his statue has stood unharmed in Columbus Park since 1979, until it was decapitated in 2006, vandalized in 2015, and toppled in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Also in 2020, a petition was started in St. Paul, Minnesota, to replace Columbus' statue with that of Prince, a controversial entertainer whose raunchy music led to legislation requiring a label that says, "Parental Advisory: Explicit Content." The petition said, "We do not believe that Columbus represents the values Minnesotans carry. Rather than glorify a man who wanted to extinguish black and native peoples, we should honor members of our community whose leadership we find inspirational."<sup>4</sup>

Columbus has been honored with names of ships, cities, parks, memorials, universities, countries, and even our capital city — Washington D.C. — is the District of Columbia. Yet his name is under attack. Beginning in 1992 (the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Columbus' landing), several cities and states changed their Columbus Day celebration to Indigenous Peoples Day. On October 8, 2021, Joe Biden issued the first ever White House proclamation of Indigenous Peoples Day, thus erasing what President Franklin Roosevelt established in 1934.<sup>5</sup>

Columbus is now viewed as a villain in America. But why? According to Peta Lindsay of Socialism and Liberation magazine, "To celebrate Columbus is to celebrate a legacy of genocide, slavery, rape, and plunder."<sup>6</sup> Eric Kasum even petitioned Congress and President Obama to remove the holiday forever. "Columbus was a mass murderer, the first slave trader! His acts of cruelty are legendary and unspeakable," Kasum wrote. "His reign of terror is one of the darkest chapters in our history. Why do we celebrate a holiday in honor of this man?"<sup>7</sup>

Then, there is Gary Kennedy of the Town Line Newspaper in Maine. He says, "Columbus was not a hero. He was a cruel, sadistic person. He was a mass killer and the father of the slave trade. His arrival [in 1492] set into motion a relentless wave of murder, rape, pillaging, and slavery that would forever alter the course of history. It's an uncomfortable truth, but it's time to recognize that Columbus was responsible for over three million deaths."<sup>8</sup>

Finally, in 2014, Kshama Sawant said in an interview with the New York Times, "This is about taking a stand against racism and discrimination. Columbus played a pivotal role in the worst genocide mankind has ever known. Why should anyone take pride in honoring a man who brought misery and degradation on the native peoples?"<sup>9</sup>

## The Genesis

The outcry against Columbus is overwhelming, but where is it all coming from? What is the genesis? He has been celebrated in America for a long time, so why do Americans suddenly despise him?

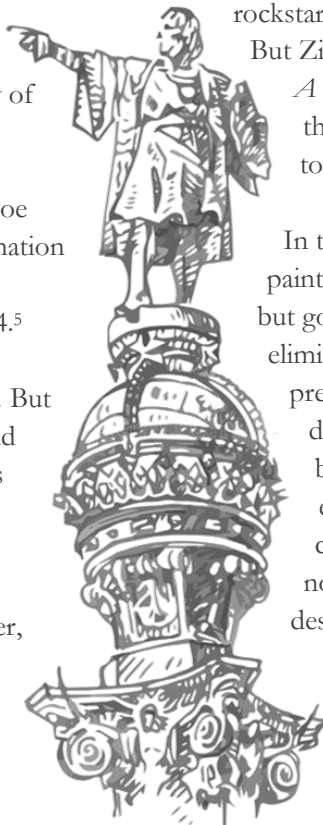
The answers lie in a game-changing book written by Howard Zinn in 1980, *A People's History of the United States*. As of this article (2024), Zinn's award-winning book has sold more than four million copies and has become the gold standard for our public schools and universities. Overnight, this college professor became an academic rockstar. Suddenly, his perspective was in high demand.

But Zinn's perspective is neither academic nor truthful.

*A People's History* is a grand, but shallow, deception that has fooled millions and fueled the movement to tear down statues and rewrite the past.

In the opening chapter of *A People's History*, Zinn paints Columbus as a shady figure who sought nothing but gold and glory, and who was willing to enslave or eliminate anyone to acquire them. His arrival set the precedent for Spanish dominance, debauchery, and death. After reading the chapter, one can't help but believe that Columbus was responsible for the elimination of three million natives. "Nearly every college textbook published in the last two decades now begins, as Zinn did, with the European destruction of the Indians."<sup>10</sup>

By the time they finish the book, Americans hate their country and despise everything it represents. For four decades, the Zinn narrative has run its course and sullied our heritage.



Zinn has been slammed for his distortions by reviewers and historians on both the left and the right.<sup>11</sup> In 2019, Mary Grabar wrote a scathing rebuttal to *A People's History* in her book *Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation Against America*. "Zinn's pervasive influence is a national tragedy," she writes. "*A People's History* is distorted, manipulative, and plain dishonest. It's past time to take a closer look at Zinn's outrageous claims and set the historical record straight."<sup>12</sup>

"Zinn presents himself as a path-breaking truth-teller," says Grabar, but what he presents is "a reversal of perspective, a reshuffling of heroes and villains."<sup>13</sup> But it's this tactic that has led to both the wholesale discounting of our national heroes and the cry for their replacement.

Regarding Columbus, Zinn wrote nine pages in *A People's History*, a brief chapter that tells a spotty, disjointed tale of the explorer's "heinous crimes." For someone whose work has earned such national prominence and become the gold standard for our public schools, Zinn's history is quite shallow. There is a reason for that. Zinn only picked quotes and stories that fit his narrative. He conveniently removed anything that contradicted his perspective.

Such selective retelling of our past highlights an important truth regarding historic revisionism — the primary tool of revisionists (like Zinn) is omission. By omitting truth, revisionists can spin a story to fit their narrative. Furthermore, by omitting parts of our past, revisionists hope that Americans will forget them (and we have). In Zinn's case, his omissions are egregious, "essential to his dishonest retelling of the Columbus story. By carefully selecting passages from his log, Zinn left out passages that contradict the greedy-for-gold genocidal narrative."<sup>14</sup>

For example, "Zinn's most crucial omissions are in the passage which he quotes in the very first paragraph of *A People's History*. There he uses ellipses to cover up the fact that he left out enough of Columbus' words to deceive his readers about what the discoverer actually meant."<sup>15</sup>

Here's the opening quote from Columbus about the Arawak (or Taino) men and women upon his first arrival,

"They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... They would make fine servants... With fifty men, we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want."<sup>16</sup>

The omission right before "They would be fine servants" is particularly dishonest. Here's what Zinn left out from Columbus' log: "I saw some who bore marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to them to ask how this came about. They indicated to me that people from other islands, which are near, wished to capture them, and they defended themselves. I believe that they come here from the mainland to take them as slaves."<sup>17</sup> Zinn's omission

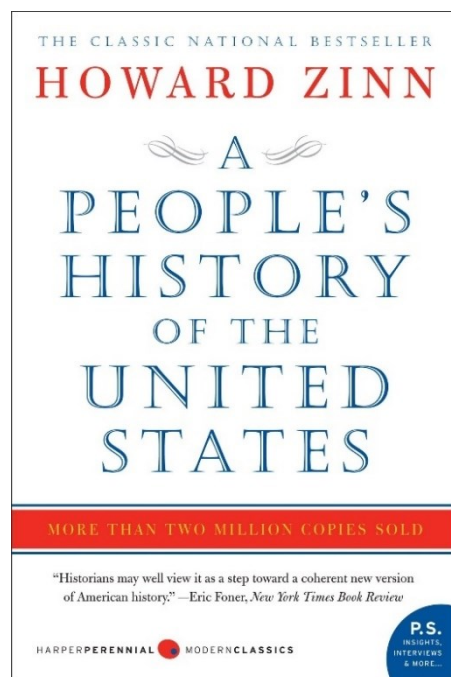
here is intentional dishonesty. The truth is that other tribes (like the Caribs) were mistreating the Arawak (Taino), even trying to kidnap, enslave, or eat them, as the Caribs were known for their cannibalism. Columbus simply exposed this truth, but Zinn removed it.

In his translation of Columbus' log, Robert Fuson wrote, "Those who see Columbus as the founder of slavery in the New World are grossly in error."<sup>18</sup> So then, why would Zinn do this? What was his intent for such blatant deception? Once we expose Zinn's background and beliefs, his purposes become evident.

### Marxist View of History

It is no secret that Karl Marx (the father of modern Communism) and his colleague, Friedrich Engels, who co-authored *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, despised history. To get people to fall for their rhetoric, Marx and Engels undermined their understanding of the past. Marx believed that people without a heritage are easily persuaded to do anything, even upend their society.

However, if people cling to their history and learn from the wisdom of the past, they cannot be easily shaken. That's precisely why Marx despised history and aimed to rewrite it to fit his narrative. Like George Orwell wrote in his book *1984*, Marx believed that he who controls the past, controls the future. Thus, he and Engels took shots at historical figures, like Columbus, as "greedy capitalists." Orwell also wrote that the most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding



of their history. Thus, to destroy America's heritage, as Marx and Engels intended, is to destroy America itself.

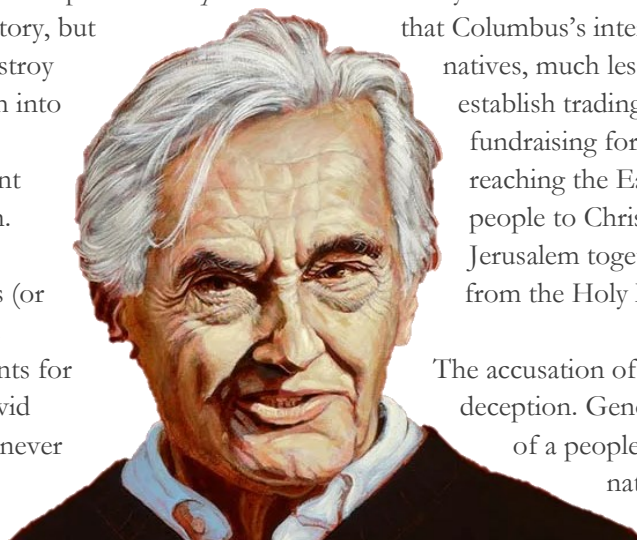
Knowing that Marxists despise history and must rewrite it to move people towards Communism, it is easier to understand the recent shift to destroy America's heroes. But what does all this have to do with Howard Zinn? Zinn (pictured below) was a Marxist. "His formative years were spent at the epicenter of the American Communist Movement, at the time when the Communists were making their biggest inroads into Americans' hearts and minds."<sup>19</sup> At Spelman College, a Christian school founded in 1881, he was more interested in teaching political activism than history. According to Grabar, "Zinn set out to transform the school into a school for protest."<sup>20</sup>

Grabar continues, "Zinn was not much of a scholar or a historian. But he was a brilliant, mesmerizing political activist. He persuaded students to defy their administration and the wishes of their parents."<sup>21</sup> Even at Boston University, "Zinn used his podium to agitate, assigning readings and activities that kept students at a high emotional pitch. Zinn was failing to do what he was paid to do — teach and engage in scholarship."<sup>22</sup>

In 2008, Zinn distributed 4,000 copies of *A People's History* to teachers throughout America. The misinformation taught in schools and colleges has contributed to an emotionally based learning experience, instead of one based on historical facts. In 2016, the Zinn Education Project initiated Abolish Columbus Day, supporting schools and educational institutions in replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day.<sup>23</sup>

Grabar concludes, "Howard Zinn (who died in 2010) was a far-left political activist. The stories he put in *A People's History* weren't balanced factual history, but crude morality tales designed to destroy America's patriotism and turn them into radical leftists."<sup>24</sup> Zinn is another Marxist shock trooper who was bent on destroying America from within.

This debate is not about Columbus (or any historical figure). It's about the Marxist revolution. As SDS (Students for Democratic Society) extremist, David Horowitz, once said, "The issue is never the issue. The issue is the revolution."



## Clearing Columbus' Name

Now that we have unmasked Zinn's charade, what is the truth about Columbus? Was he a villain or a hero? Volumes have been written about his life and adventures, but for the sake of space, let me address the accusations. There are resources listed at the end for further study.

Whether we like Columbus or not, he is the bridge between the Old World (Europe) and the New World (the Americas), the first explorer to brave a "suicidal" transatlantic journey. This was one of the most momentous events in history.<sup>25</sup> After enduring years of rejection from naysayers, Columbus proved them wrong. Not only did he embody the vision and fortitude for such a daring mission, but he also exhibited the courage and determination to complete it. Though Columbus believed that he had discovered a "new" way to reach the East Indies (by going west), he had actually unveiled two continents previously hidden from the Western world.

What he witnessed upon arrival was a primitive civilization, thousands of years behind Europe. Thus, Columbus brought Western Civilization to the Western Hemisphere, with its technology, resources, knowledge, and its most important contribution — Christianity.

Columbus was a deeply religious man. He credited God for the idea to sail west. He believed that his name, Christopher (which means "Christ-bearer") was evidence of God's call on his life to share the gospel in pagan lands. Columbus wanted to be a light to the nations. He named the first island San Salvador, "Holy Savior," and erected large wooden crosses on every island he discovered.

In her book *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem*, Carol Delaney traces how religion drove his voyages. She notes that Columbus's intention was not to enslave the natives, much less colonize them, but rather to establish trading posts for the purpose of fundraising for his majesties. He believed that by reaching the East Indies and converting the people to Christianity, they could liberate Jerusalem together and drive out the Muslims from the Holy Land.<sup>26</sup>

The accusation of genocide is an unfounded deception. Genocide is the planned extermination of a people group. Although 95% of the natives were decimated in a short time, it was because of an

unplanned plague (or pox). Labeling it “genocide” is undeserved and untrue. The same thing happened in Europe centuries earlier. Millions were killed by a great sickness. No one calls that genocide today.

At one point, Columbus (pictured) was forced to leave 39 men behind (one of his ships hit a reef) while he went to Spain for supplies. When he returned, his men were dead, their bodies still strewn about the village. After investigating, he found that his men mistreated the Tainos and deserved their fate. Columbus did not retaliate but rather treated the natives fairly. Later, during a war with another tribe, Columbus captured 500 prisoners of war (not slaves). All were released after the war.<sup>27</sup>

So, what about these crimes that Columbus committed? All of them are based on the reports of three men — Bartolome de las Casas, Fransisco Roldan, and Fransisco Bobadilla. Las Casas was a Spanish priest who advocated for the respectful treatment of the native people. Though he is often cited as the source of the alleged cruelties of Columbus, the truth is that Las Casas was complimentary of Columbus. It was his men that Las Casas despised, not the Admiral.<sup>28</sup>

However, both Roldan and Bobadilla despised Columbus and envied his fame, as well as his status as Governor of the new settlement (Hispaniola). Both worked to undermine his authority. Roldan rebelled against Columbus’ orders and established the *encomienda* system which enslaved the natives. Bobadilla worked a deal with the King to investigate Columbus for “bad behavior.” Bobadilla immediately jailed Columbus and deported him to Spain in disgrace, after he named himself Governor, of course. All charges against Columbus were dismissed once the King discovered Bobadilla’s mischief. The point is that most of the accusations repeated today are based on the charges brought by these two deceitful, worthless politicians.

As for the “new world,” Columbus found that slavery, cannibalism, and human sacrifice were in place. He did his best to discourage, and even stop, these tribal practices. As far as Columbus’ relationship with the Arawak or Taino people, he befriended and protected them. In fact, they wanted to join forces with the Spanish, to defeat their

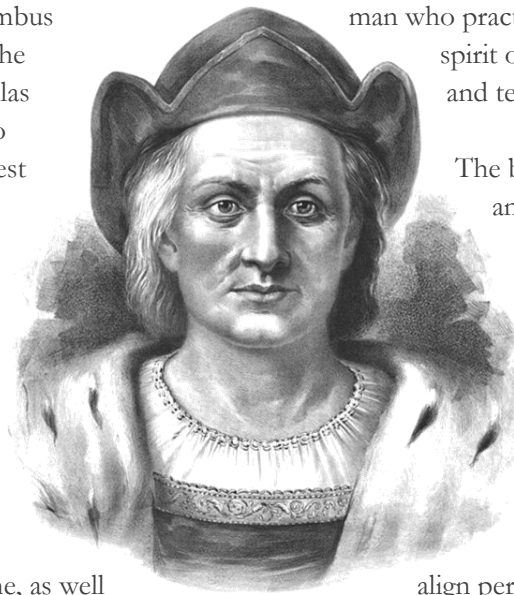
enemies, the Caribs. They also desired to return with Columbus to Spain (some of which he obliged). But he sternly warned his men to treat the natives with dignity, and if anyone disobeyed, Columbus executed them. Once, when investigating the Caribs, he found Taino people enslaved and abused. Columbus fought to free them and return them to their home island.

In *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem*, Delaney writes, “The present perspective that dominates the contemporary view holds Columbus responsible for consequences he did not intend, expect, or endorse.” Drawing from her rigorous study of Columbus, Delaney concludes that the Grand Admiral was “very much on the side of the Indians.”<sup>29</sup> That’s the real Columbus, the man we celebrate. And this man who practically defines our understanding of the spirit of discovery is himself worth rediscovering and teaching with both truth and objectivity.<sup>30</sup>

The bottom line is that we may owe Columbus an apology.<sup>31</sup> We have allowed the condemnation of someone in history when we don’t know or understand the context of his story. As Selwyn Duke explains, “Only the unwise condemn a dead man’s insight, or foresight, through the lens of their hindsight. It’s important to be suspicious when a historical figure’s story is entirely rewritten in a way that just so happens to align perfectly with the spirit of the age (which today is political correctness).”<sup>32</sup>

But what about Indigenous Peoples Day? There is nothing wrong with recognizing and celebrating the heritage of Native Americans, but we must see through the charade. This debate is not about Columbus or indigenous people. Remember, “The issue is never the issue. The issue is the revolution.” The Native Americans are being used in the oppressor-and-oppressed narrative, to destroy someone who was their friend and advocate. Simply put, the Marxists have distracted us from what’s really happening.

Duke summarizes it best, “Although Columbus made mistakes, those should not overshadow his genuine efforts to do right by the natives. When one takes the entirety of his life into account, what he was up against, and what he ultimately accomplished, Columbus emerges as one of the greatest and most important heroes of history. He will always be worthy of our respect and celebration.”<sup>33</sup>



## FOR FURTHER STUDY

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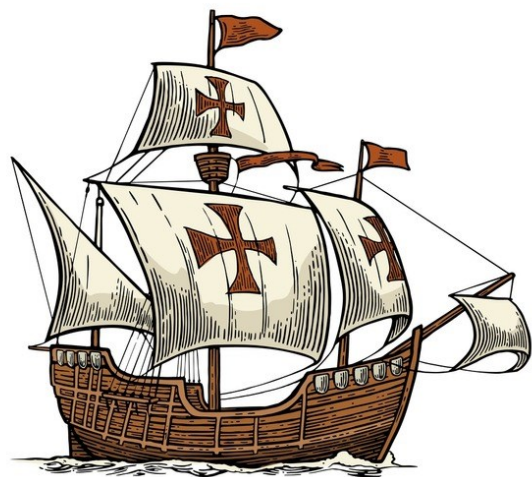
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/christopher-columbus-statue-removed-cities/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/14/us/columbus-statues-vandalized-trnd/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2020/10/06/christopher-columbus-north-end-replacement/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/columbus-statue-minnesota-saint-paul-state-capitol-prince-a9582011.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-lifestyle-holidays-columbus-day-a1ad30d52ad7ff80aa8e7621e2f9a425>

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<sup>10</sup> Graber, Mary. 2019. *Debunking Howard Zinn : Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America*. Washington, Dc: Regnery History.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Zinn, Howard. (1980) 2003. *A People's History of the United States*. New York, NY: Harper, an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers.

<sup>17</sup> Graber, Mary. 2019. *Debunking Howard Zinn : Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America*. Washington, Dc: Regnery History.

<sup>18</sup> Fuson, Robert H. 1991. *The Log of Christopher Columbus*.

<sup>19</sup> Graber, Mary. 2019. *Debunking Howard Zinn : Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America*. Washington, Dc: Regnery History.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Columbus - When Did the Hero Become a Villain." 2017. Italianhistorical.org. 2017. <https://italianhistorical.org/columbus.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Graber, Mary. 2019. *Debunking Howard Zinn : Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America*. Washington, Dc: Regnery History.

<sup>25</sup> "Killing Columbus: Seeking the 'Undiscovery' of America. - Free Online Library." 2015. Thefreelibrary.com. 2015. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Killing+Columbus:+Seeking+the+%22Undiscovery%22+of+America-a0520322465>.

<sup>26</sup> *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem, Carol Delaney*

<sup>27</sup> "Killing Columbus: Seeking the 'Undiscovery' of America. - Free Online Library." 2015. Thefreelibrary.com. 2015. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Killing+Columbus:+Seeking+the+%22Undiscovery%22+of+America-a0520322465>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Allen, Jeanne. 2017. "Why I Proudly Celebrate Columbus Day - Washington Examiner." *Washington Examiner - Political News and Conservative Analysis about Congress, the President, and the Federal Government*. October 9, 2017. [https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/265009/why-i-proudly-celebrate-columbus-day/#google\\_vignette](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/265009/why-i-proudly-celebrate-columbus-day/#google_vignette).

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.