Hero or Villain

Although Christopher Columbus is infamous for his greed and cruelty, without him the exploration of the Americas would have been postponed much longer. Certainly, it is impossible to disagree with the fact that his conquests came at an enormous cost and were undertaken for glory and gold. However, such actions were perceived as common during that time and were necessary, in order to, successfully reach and profit from the Americas. Thus, the courage, aggression, and passion all associated with Columbus led to the discovery of the new world and set forth the values we continue to live by today.

In the past few decades, controversy has arisen over whether or not we should still celebrate Columbus Day because of the cost the voyage had on the New World. Native Americans, especially, have reason to object because of Columbus’s treatment towards their ancestors. After arriving in the Caribbean he described the inhabitants as hardy and good listeners, a feature he associated with high-quality slaves. They were forced to find gold and work on plantations, as well as, supply labor needs in Europe. If they objected or failed to complete their task Columbus would cut off their hands or sentence them to death. The Spanish also raped the women and brought diseases that wiped out thousands of Native Americans. In addition, Columbus used the spread of Christianity as a passport to glory and riches. Under this pretense he destroyed many natural resources- including
forests, native people—such as the Taino Indians, and even suppressed other’s ideas so that he could achieve his dreams.

Even though Columbus was a ruthless leader, his behavior was not unusual during the age of exploration. It must also be taken into consideration that other prominent historical figures have also committed acts we would regard as improper, but that were accepted during that period in our history. For example, President Thomas Jefferson forced his slaves to sleep with him (today that would be rape), but so did most slave owners of the 18th century. However, we still recognize him for his great leadership and the positive things he did for our country. One of Columbus’s most recognized traits was his determination. Following a let down from Italy and Portugal, he sought financial funding from Spain for seven years until Fernando and Isabel finally agree to help him. He also continued on his voyage till he arrived in what he believed to be Asia, despite opposition from his crew and bleak likelihood of survival. Finally, Columbus worked hard to keep the public approval of his conquests and create colonies in the New World. Columbus was a very courageous man and took many risks traveling through uncharted waters for an unknown distance. He was an excellent navigator and kept detailed notes that established a safe route across the ocean and opened the way to global trade and development. These advancements improved Europe’s economy and brought new resources and medicines to both the new and old worlds. By his efforts, Christianity was brought to thousands, in addition to, knowledge and products from Europe. The explorer challenged the opinion and position of others, to insure that things were done efficiently and to the best interest of everyone. Overall, Columbus’s achievements outweighed his faults and served as the initial connection between to separate cultures.
Columbus’s journey was one that indisputably changed the course of history. It devastated the native people of the Americas and put in motion many practices we despise today. On the other hand, it enlightened society and brought hope and profit to both continents. To conclude, when Columbus spotted land in the Caribbean it was like Neil Armstrong taking the first step on the moon, “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.”
Citations

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