



# COLUMBUS DAY

*The American Calendar*

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

# THE MEANING OF COLUMBUS DAY

The American Calendar

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Columbus Day:  
An American Holiday

# The Origins and Traditions of Columbus Day

Columbus Day—the day we celebrate Christopher Columbus’s historic discovery of the Americas in 1492—is a most unusual American holiday, as it commemorates an event that occurred well before the United States was a nation. And yet, in the five hundred years since Columbus’s sighting, the day has become distinctly American. In the late eighteenth century, Americans began to see Columbus as somewhat of a mythic founding figure; by the 1830s, he was seen as an archetype of the American ideal: bold, adventurous, innovative. Immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rallied around the immigrant Columbus. As Ronald Reagan remarked in a 1988 speech, Columbus Day has become a day “to celebrate not only an intrepid searcher but the dreams and opportunities that brought so many here after him.”<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Columbus (originally Cristoforo Colombo, 1451–1506) was born into a working-class family in Genoa, Italy. In his early twenties, he worked as a mariner on merchant ships in the Mediterranean. In the early 1480s, after returning from a trip to a Portuguese trading fortress on the West African coast, Columbus began to seek support for his idea that Asia could be reached faster and easier by sailing straight across the Atlantic Ocean, instead of sailing around the southern coast of Africa and across the Indian Ocean. After several years of searching for adequate financing for his proposed voyage, in April of 1492 Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain signed an agreement with Columbus that officially sponsored his enterprise.

On August 3, 1492, Columbus set sail from the port of Palos, Spain with three ships: the *Nina*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*. On the early morning of October 12, the lookout on the *Pinta* spotted white cliffs in the moonlight and called out “*Tierra! Tierra!*”—“Land! Land!” The ships landed on a small island in the Bahamas and Columbus, believing that he had finally reached Asia, called the natives he encountered “Indians.” The truth, as we now know, is that he had serendipitously discovered a continent entirely unknown to Europe.

Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the European colonies in the New World came to be known as “Columbia.” The association between Columbus and America continued to prosper as the revolutionary colonists sought to distance themselves from England. In Columbus, they found a hero who had challenged the unknown sea and left the Old World for a new beginning on a virgin continent—much as they were attempting to do. As scholars note, “Having effected a violent separation from England and its cultural and political icons, America was left without history—or heroes. . . . A new national story was needed, yet the Revolutionary leaders, obvious choices for mythical transformation, were loath to be raised to their pedestals.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Columbus Day Proclamation,” in this booklet.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Rose, “Columbus in History,” University of Virginia, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/columbus/co13.html> (accessed September 24, 2012).

## The Origins and Traditions of Columbus Day

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In the years following the American Revolution, Columbia, the feminine counterpart to Christopher Columbus, emerged as yet another icon for the young republic. As the first Lady Liberty, Columbia was dressed in classical robes and a liberty cap, often decorated with the stars and stripes of America. King's College in New York changed its name to Columbia College in 1784 for the purpose of showing "the glorification of America" and South Carolina made its capital city "Columbia" just a few years later. "Hail Columbia" served as our nation's unofficial anthem until "The Star-Spangled Banner" became official in 1931. Columbus was a popular subject for American poetry, appearing in Philip Freneau's 1774 *The Pictures of Columbus*, Joel Barlow's 1787 *The Vision of Columbus*, and Phillis Wheatley's 1775 "To His Excellency General Washington." In 1791, the Territory of Columbia—later known as the District of Columbia—was designated as the seat of federal government. By 1792, there was a movement to officially name the country Columbia. That same year, New York City's Columbian Order—better known as Tammany Hall—held the first celebration of Columbus Day in America, commemorating the tercentenary of Columbus's landing in America. The city of Baltimore, Maryland erected a forty-four-foot-tall brick obelisk in Columbus's honor.

Over the next century, many Catholic and Italian communities, noting that Columbus, too, was both Catholic and Italian, began to celebrate the explorer and hold him up as one of their own. The first distinctly Italian American celebration of Columbus Day occurred in New York City in 1866 at an annual sharpshooting contest at which a banquet and dance was held. By 1869, New York had taken to decorating ships in the harbor with Italian and American flags, in addition to hosting a carnival and parade. Italian Americans in San Francisco conducted their first "Discovery Day" parade in 1869—an annual event that soon included a reenactment of Columbus first setting foot in the New World. By 1876, Columbus Day celebrations were being held annually in St. Louis, Boston, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. Italian Americans even launched a campaign to have the explorer canonized. Though Rome was not convinced (Columbus had not, to anyone's knowledge, performed any miracles), in 1892, Pope Leo XIII issued a special encyclical calling upon all clergy in the Americas and in Europe to hold a special Mass each Columbus Day.

During the mid-nineteenth century, in the face of ardent anti-immigration and anti-Catholic activism, many who found themselves targets of this animus invoked Columbus as a symbol that legitimized their right to citizenship. During this time, organizations like the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic American fraternal organization, adopted his name and rose to prominence as they fought discrimination against struggling immigrants. As historian Thomas J. Schlereth writes, "Columbus was a world hero against American nativism. . . . As Catholic descendants of Columbus, member knights [of Columbus] were 'entitled to all the rights and privileges due such a discovery by one of our faith.'"<sup>3</sup> On the cusp of the 400th anniversary of Columbus's landfall, the Knights of Columbus and various other Italian American organizations began to lobby Congress for federal recognition of Columbus Day.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, "Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism," *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (December 1992): 958.

While Italians and Catholics rallied around Columbus in the name of civil rights and equality, his other admirers invoked him as a symbol of patriotism, progress, and westward expansion. In 1892, at the direction of Congress, President Benjamin Harrison delivered a proclamation that made October 12 “the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, [ . . . ] a general holiday for the people of the United States. On that day let the people, so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer.”<sup>4</sup>

In preparation for the quatercentenary celebration, New York City erected a statue of Columbus in what is now known as Columbus Circle. Forty thousand people gathered in New Haven, Connecticut to listen to odes to Columbus and watch six thousand members of the Knights of Columbus march in a parade. At Chicago’s World Fair, which was dubbed “The Columbian Exposition,” replicas of Columbus’s three ships were built and displayed. At this event, Senator Chauncey M. Depew of Kansas extolled Columbus’s virtue in superlative terms:

All hail, Columbus, discoverer, dreamer, hero, and apostle . . . The voice of gratitude and praise for all the blessings which have been showered upon mankind by his adventure is limited to no language, but is uttered in every tongue. Neither marble nor brass can fitly form his statue. Continents are his monument, and unnumbered millions, present and to come, who enjoy in their liberties and happiness the fruits of his faith, will reverently guard and preserve, from century to century, his name and fame.<sup>5</sup>

The first official, annual Columbus Day holiday was proclaimed by Governor Jesse F. McDonald of Colorado in 1907. Two years later, Tammany Hall man Timothy Sullivan introduced a successful bill in the New York state legislature to make Columbus Day a state holiday. By 1910, fifteen states had officially adopted the holiday. Over time, many more states followed suit, and in 1934 Congress made Columbus Day an official holiday of the United States to be celebrated annually on October 12. As a result of the Uniform Monday Holiday Act, which became effective in 1971, Columbus Day is now observed on the second Monday in October each year.

While the Columbus Day celebrations of the nineteenth century were often opposed because of their association with Catholicism and immigration, resistance to the celebration today has emerged on altogether different grounds. Renewed attention has been given to the darker aspects of the explorer’s journeys, including the enslavement

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Harrison, “Proclamation 335: 400th Anniversary of the Discovery of America by Columbus,” July 21, 1892, [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=71118](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=71118) (accessed September 24, 2012). The October 21 date was decided on because Congress thought that October 23—instead of October 12—would be appropriate, as that was the date on which Columbus arrived under the Julian calendar (as opposed to the Gregorian calendar, which was implemented in 1582). The 23rd was a Sunday, though, so, for schools to participate, the date was fixed for Friday, October 21.

<sup>5</sup> Chauncey Mitchell Depew, “The Columbian Oration, Delivered at the Dedicatory Ceremonies of the World’s Fair at Chicago, October 21, 1892,” in *Life and Later Speeches of Chauncey M. Depew*, ed. Joseph Benson Gilder. New York: The Cassell Publishing Co., 1894, 20.

and maltreatment of natives, the diseases that the Europeans brought to the New World, and the opening of the Atlantic slave trade.

As a result of the contention surrounding Columbus's legacy, some states have chosen either to celebrate alternatives to Columbus Day, or to not observe it at all. Hawaii does not recognize Columbus Day and instead celebrates Discoverers' Day, which commemorates the Polynesian discoverers of Hawaii. Likewise, South Dakota does not recognize Columbus Day, celebrating instead an official state holiday known as Native American Day. In addition to these states, some counties and cities throughout the country have opted to celebrate October 12 as "Indigenous People's Day" or "Native American Day," rather than Columbus Day.

Perhaps somewhere between the false dichotomies of Columbus as either hero or villain, the real Christopher Columbus—human, adventurous, imperfect—can be found. As the historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto notes, the answer to whether Columbus was saint or criminal "is that he *was* neither but has *become* both. The real Columbus was a mixture of virtues and vices like the rest of us, not conspicuously good or just, but generally well-intentioned, who grappled creditably with intractable problems."<sup>6</sup>

So, too, have the Americans who have followed Columbus's path to the New World.

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<sup>6</sup> Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "Columbus—Hero or Villain?," *History Today* 42, no. 5 (1992): 9.

# Proclamation on the 400th Anniversary of the Discovery of America by Columbus

BENJAMIN HARRISON

*Although Columbus Day did not become an official annual holiday of the United States until 1934, President Benjamin Harrison (1833–1901), acting according to a joint resolution of both houses of Congress, proclaimed a national holiday to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage. Delivered on July 21, 1892, ahead of the Chicago Columbian Exposition to be held October of that same year, Harrison's remarks made special mention of the school ceremonies that would "impress upon our youth the patriotic duties of American citizenship." It was during these ceremonies that a new salute to the American flag, authored by Francis Bellamy, was recited by school children across the country: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."*

*What purposes does President Harrison want this holiday to serve? Why and how, according to Harrison, are Columbus and his deeds relevant to contemporary Americans? Why does he connect the holiday with activities in schools and churches?*

Delivered on July 21, 1892.

Whereas by a joint resolution approved June 29, 1892, it was resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled—

That the President of the United States be authorized and directed to issue a proclamation recommending to the people the observance in all their localities of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, on the 21st of October, 1892, by public demonstrations and by suitable exercises in their schools and other places of assembly.

Now, therefore, I, Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States of America, in pursuance of the aforesaid joint resolution, do hereby appoint Friday, October 21, 1892, the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, as a general holiday for the people of the United States. On that day let the people, so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer and their appreciation of the great achievements of the four completed centuries of American life.

Columbus stood in his age as the pioneer of progress and enlightenment. The system of universal education is in our age the most prominent and salutary feature of the spirit of enlightenment, and it is peculiarly appropriate that the schools be made by the people the center of the day's demonstration. Let the national flag float over every schoolhouse in the country and the exercises be such as shall impress upon our youth the patriotic duties of American citizenship.

Benjamin Harrison, Proclamation on the 400th Anniversary

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In the churches and in the other places of assembly of the people let there be expressions of gratitude to Divine Providence for the devout faith of the discoverer and for the divine care and guidance which has directed our history and so abundantly blessed our people.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 21st day of July, A.D. 1892, and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and seventeenth

# Statement on Columbus Day

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

*Since Columbus Day became an annual national holiday in 1934, our presidents have usually marked the day with some proclamation or public statement. President Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945) issued many such statements during his four terms in office (1933–45). This one, from October 12, 1940, was given as World War II was raging in Europe, but before the United States would enter the war a year later. Though not yet part of the conflict, the US was already supplying Great Britain and other European allies with war supplies—first under the “Cash and Carry” program of 1939, which permitted the US to sell materiel to Britain, and later under the “Lend-Lease” program, signed into law five months after this speech, which provided for the giving of direct material aid to the country’s allies.*

*What about Columbus does President Roosevelt choose to celebrate? What lessons does he want Americans to draw from Columbus’ example, especially given the crisis already engulfing much of the world? Are those lessons of Columbus’s life and work still relevant or important to us today?*

The voyage of Christopher Columbus and his diminutive fleet toward the unknown west was not only a prelude to a new historical era. For the brave navigator it was the culmination of years of bold speculation, careful preparation, and struggle against opponents who had belittled his great plan and thwarted its execution.

Expounding the strange doctrine that beyond the ocean stood solid, habitable earth, Columbus had first to make his views plausible to his doubting patrons and then to overcome the seemingly endless array of obstacles with which men of little minds barred the way to the fitting out of a fleet. Even when the three small ships were well away on their epoch-making course the crews mutinied and demanded that he turn back. Columbus, however, held to his course and on the morning of October 12, 1492, the welcome land was sighted.

The courage and the faith and the vision of the Genoese navigator glorify and enrich the drama of the early movement of European people to America. Columbus and his fellow voyagers were the harbingers of later mighty movements of people from Spain, from Columbus’s native Italy and from every country in Europe. And out of the fusion of all these national strains was created the America to which the Old World contributed so magnificently.

This year when we contemplate the estate to which the world has been brought by destructive forces, with lawlessness and wanton power ravaging an older civilization, and with our own republic girding itself for the defense of its institutions, we can revitalize our faith and renew our courage by a recollection of the triumph of Columbus after a period of grievous trial.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Statement on Columbus Day

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The promise which Columbus's discovery gave to the world, of a new beginning in the march of human progress, has been in process of fulfillment for four centuries. Our task is now to make strong our conviction that in spite of setbacks that process will go on toward fulfillment.

## **New York Discovers Columbus** **from *America Discovers Columbus***

CLAUDIA L. BUSHMAN

*In this excerpted selection, the American historian and author of *America Discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer Became an American Hero*, Claudia Bushman (b. 1934) reviews the ways in which Columbus's discovery of America was celebrated in New York City in 1792 and 1892. Written in 1992, in the year of the Columbus quincentenary, Bushman's review of past celebrations is explicitly intended to answer the contemporary question "How should this event be marked?" Considering her account especially of the events of one hundred years ago (1892), what do you think was being celebrated there and then? How might such events both express and foster civic pride and civic attachment? Do we still feel or need such civic attachment? Can we get it from our Columbus Day celebrations? If not, from where will it come?*

We stand on the eve of the major anniversary, the fifth century and half millennium of the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus, the Italian navigator sailing for Spain.

How should this event be marked? It is suitable to look to the past when New York was in the forefront of commemorative activity. I think you might be interested in how this event was celebrated in New York one hundred and two hundred years ago. We will be hard-pressed to outdo the things that were done before.

### *Two Hundred Years Ago*

The very first commemoration in the New World was in New York and sponsored by The Tammany Society, or Columbia Order, which had been organized in 1789 as a patriotic, benevolent, and charitable organization. A leading member, John Pintard, was a major power behind the group, and he hoped for a national organization. He exchanged views with the eminent scholar Dr. Jeremy Belknap of Boston who founded the Massachusetts Historical Society following Pintard's suggestion.

Pintard wrote a letter to the Massachusetts Historical Society in which he said, "Our society proposes celebrating the completion of the third century of discovery in America, on the 12th of October, 1792, with some peculiar remark of respect to the memory of Columbus, who is our patron. We think besides a procession and oration—for we have annual orations—of erecting a column to his memory. I wish to know, if possible, the dimensions and cast of your monument on Beacon Hill, to guide our calculations."

Boston picked up on this suggestion and organized the *second* commemoration of Columbus in the new world. . . . But New York's celebration on October 12, 1792, was the first. The proposed celebration was heralded in the *New York Journal and Patriotic Register* for October 10, 1792 by the following announcement:

Notice: The members of the Tammany Society or Columbian Order, are hereby notified that an extra meeting will be held in the Wigwam the 12th inst. at 7 o'clock to celebrate the third century since the discovery of America by Columbus. By Order of the Grand Sachem Benjamin Strong, Secretary. . . .

The event included an ode or poem dedicated to the Great Discoverer, eulogizing the Society, and was marked by a stately ceremony in which the Society eclipses all former efforts in the dignity and pomp displayed.

An attraction was an illuminated shaft or monument which was "exposed for the gratification of public curiosity sometime previous to the meeting." This shaft was more than fourteen feet high ornamented with a number of transparent devices depicting the principal events in the career of Columbus.

This monument got quite a bit of public interest and was assigned to a central position among the exhibits of the American Museum of The Tammany Society, which was begun by Pintard. This second museum in the country eventually became part of the P.T. Barnum's collection. The monument was annually illuminated on the 12th day of October and given prominence in the advertisements of the museum. But what has happened to this fourteen foot stone shaft is unknown. It is completely lost. The society honored Columbus for several years, but interest in this secondary patron began to wane as interest in politics waxed.

### *One Hundred Years Ago*

One hundred years ago, New York commemorated the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus in grand style. This was a time of belief in progress, and the celebration was full-blown, ceremonial, and optimistic. It will be very difficult to surpass.

The commemoration was characterized by length: six days of events; ethnic and religious diversity; and participation—five separate parades with an estimable 100,000 plus participants, and the many special exhibitions, programs, and entertainments such as the "Monster Festival Concert" under the auspices of the United German-American Singing Society where the prize cantata "Columbus," composed expressly for the occasion by B. Millamet, was rendered. Besides soloists and an orchestra of 150, there were 3,500 singers. The celebration was worthy of a world-shaking event in a progressive age; the Admiral of the Ocean Sea would have felt vindicated for his years of difficulty.

The committee of solid and important New Yorkers decided that the city should be festively decorated, particularly along the lines of march of the parades, and offered Columbus medals as prizes for the best daylight and nighttime decorations. . . .

I want to describe some of the events because it is fitting that we should be aware of them and that some of them should be recreated one hundred years later.

Religious observances took place on Saturday and Sunday, October 8 and 9, 1892. The committee “desired that all denominations without regard to color or creed, will join in making this a time of general rejoicing and thanksgiving.” A long list of temples and churches participated, including the “oldest congregations of Hebrews in the City founded 200 years ago by Hebrews driven from Spain the famous expulsion of 1492.” This group of Jews was forced to leave Spain the day before Columbus set sail on his first voyage. “A rare treat in music is promised,” which would include an ancient ritual of traditional chants, consisting of old melodies dating back prior to the expulsion. . . .

On Monday, October 10th, a huge school and college parade took place beginning with about 12,000 public school students, who marched in twenty regiments, each commanded by a principal. Some military groups marched with them and twenty-nine bands were interspersed, each with thirty to fifty pieces.

A Catholic school and college division containing 5,500 pupils from Roman Catholic schools and college followed, and then a college division which included 1,000 students from Columbia College, 1,200 from the University of the City of New York, 1,200 from law and engineering schools, 500 from the College of the City of New York, and more, in all several thousand.

These groups were followed by a division of uniformed schools and institutions, many of them, including such groups as the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, the Barnard School Military Corps, The West End School, Bordentown Military Institute, Columbia Grammar School, Young Dalton Volunteers, the Glittering Spears, the Italian and American Colonial School, the Knights of Temperance of the Episcopal Church Temperance Society, the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society Orphan Asylum, The General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, The Professor Deghuee’s Academy of Brooklyn, Baron de Hirsch Fund Trade School, The Weingart Institute, Rugby Academy, Bryant and Straton’s Business School, Metropolis Law School, and Brooklyn Latin School. . . .

The next day, October 11th, featured the Naval Parade, an impressive flotilla of American ships escorting foreign ships of war, three columns wide, from the Upper Bay to the Hudson River. As the vessels entered the Narrows, a salute of 21 guns was fired from the ships and forts on either side.

That evening a parade of United Catholic Societies began at 8 p.m., arrangements under direction of the Archbishop of New York, the most Rev. M. A. Corrigan with Hugh J. Grant, Mayor of the City of New York, taking part. Four divisions of these marchers were set off with bands, mounted aides, and marshalls. . . .

On October 12, the Military Parade began with mounted police and other mounted aides followed by 2,000 army troops, a naval brigade of 380 men, escorts and visiting troops including ceremonial units, a massive division of the Grand Army of the Republic of New York and visiting posts totaling about 6,000 men, many of whom were in uniform on horseback. More than fifty different G.A.R. [Grand Army of the Republic]

posts with their commanders took part. Next came 1,200 U.S. Letter Carriers, who were followed by the several companies of the New York Fire Department with a number of hooks and ladders plus the marching fire patrol and the Exempt Volunteer and Veteran Fireman's Division of ex-chiefs, men, escorts, and visitors from the general vicinity, 15 brigades of these, in groups from 50 to 800 or so. Then came the Italian Military Organizations including companies of infantry of 50 to 125 men each plus cavalry groups of 40 to 100 each plus mounted aides and marshalls followed by the German American Societies, aides and staff, the German American Shooting Society (1,400 men and a band), the Veteran Union 11th regiment (150 men and a band), the New York Turners (1,000 men and a band), and finally division 10 of independent organizations including the Ancient Order of Foresters in America (525), The Deutsche Landwehr Verein (8,000), Bohemian Organization (875), Polish Military Organization (525), The First Regiment Uniformed Rank KFP (300), The Chas. Summe Pioneer Corps., The First Austrian Schutzen Band (75, 20 mounted), and so on. This huge group started at the Battery and marched to 59th Street where it disbanded.

Later on October 12 an imposing ceremony preceded the unveiling of the 75-foot high Columbus monument at Columbus Circle, at 8th Avenue and 59th Street. The work of Gaetano Russo, the monument had been paid for by subscription among Italian citizens of the United States, Canada, and Central America. Many important people, including his Excellency Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States, and his Excellency Rosewell P. Flower, Governor of the State of New York, addressed those assembled. The monument was blessed by His Grace, Archbishop Corrigan and unveiled by Annie Barsotti, daughter of the monument committee president, while Italian bands played Italian American hymns and the artillery fired salutes.

That night, at 8 p.m., yet another parade, the Colombian Night Pageant, entitled the Triumph of America, with banners, lanterns, and floats, stepped off preceded by mounted heralds sounding fanfares, a platoon of mounted police and a body of bicyclists 5,000 strong. These banners and floats roughly told the history of the world, culminating in the great success of America. Succeeding floats depicted stone age men, Toltecs, Sun Worshipers, Columbus and other discoverers, the Spanish Court, the Santa Maria—drawn by sailors—the Puritan wedding of John Alden and Priscilla, Dutch Colonists, Penn and the Quakers, the 44 states represented by daughters of veterans, a group representing all nations, George Washington and his staff, then emerging from the past to the glorious present, floats for the Press, for Music, for Science, for Poetry and Romance, for the American Woman, for the Oceans, for Columbia's Ship of State, for the Battalion of Progress, and finally for Electra, representing technological progress. A whole building was dedicated to the electric light the next year at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

By now, I am sure that you are jaundiced and wary, impossible to impress with further marvels. Yet marvels remain. On two evenings, October 10th and 11th, major firework demonstrations were discharged from the Brooklyn Bridge. These went on for hours, from 8 p.m. to midnight.

## COLUMBUS DAY: AN AMERICAN HOLIDAY

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The fireworks on October 10th included many novelties never before shown:—a set piece of a statue of Columbus, a set piece of the ship in which the discoveries first set sail from Genoa, and two tons of colored fire displaying the famous Crystal Palace lights. The climax was the Grande Cascade of silver fire falling 200 feet from the top of the New York tower of the Bridge and extending all around it, a beautiful spectacle. Meanwhile a telegraphic message written in Morse Code letters of fire was sent from one tower of the Bridge to the other while the illumination was in progress. . . .

On Thursday night, October 13th, the Lennox Lyceum was the site of the Columbian banquet where important people partook of a menu which was “a work of art” and participated in toasts and dancing.

Such were the New York commemorations of the discovery of America in 1792 and 1892. I hope the events of 1992 will be equally significant.

# Discovering Columbus

JOHN NOBLE WILFORD

*Compared with their predecessors, recent historians and cultural critics have been much less friendly to the idea of heroes and individual greatness, and Columbus has not escaped this revisionist treatment. In this 1991 essay, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author John Noble Wilford (b. 1933) chronicles the changing reputation of Columbus, arguing that Columbus's standing is mainly a mirror of the changing prejudices and cultural attitudes of society. Yet he also appears to want to separate the man from his changing mythical reputation, to know Columbus as "he really was." Is it possible to do so? Is Wilford's effort free of the prevailing opinions and prejudices of his own time? Do you think "the real Columbus" was a great man, worthy of remembrance? Is Wilford correct in linking the reputation of Columbus with the reputation of America, and in making the greatness of America to this point in our history dependent on our future reputation? Is the goodness or greatness of any human individual or any nation to be settled by an appeal to reputation or popular opinion?*

Read John Noble Wilford's "Discovering Columbus" at the *New York Times*:  
[www.nytimes.com/1991/08/11/magazine/discovering-columbus.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm](http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/11/magazine/discovering-columbus.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm).

# What Columbus Day Really Means

WILLIAM J. CONNELL

*In the face of growing public criticisms of Columbus and objections to celebrating Columbus Day, American historian and educator William J. Connell (b. 1958), writing in 2010, undertakes a defense of the holiday. What exactly is that defense, and how does it develop from the beginning to the end of his essay? Is he right in saying, “the holiday marks the event, not the person”? Can one celebrate an event without honoring the person responsible for it? Is the holiday no more than “a pretty good excuse for taking a day off from work”? Is there any connection between the event—finding America—and a holiday that recognizes “the greatness of all of America’s people”?*

During the run-up to Columbus Day I usually get a call from at least one and sometimes several newspaper reporters who are looking for the latest on what has become one of the most controversial of our national holidays. Rather than begin with whatever issues the media are covering—topics like the number of deaths in the New World caused by the European discovery; or the attitude of Columbus toward the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean . . . or whether syphilis really came from the Americas to Europe; or whether certain people . . . deserve to be excluded from or honored in the parade in New York—I always try to remind the reporters that Columbus Day is just a holiday.

Leave the parades aside. The most evident way in which holidays are celebrated is by taking a day off from work or school. Our system of holidays, which developed gradually over time and continues to evolve, is founded upon the recognition that weekends are not sufficient, that some jobs don’t offer much time off, and that children and teachers need a break now and then in the course of the school year. One characteristic of holidays is that unless they are observed widely, which is to say by almost everyone, many of us wouldn’t take them. There are so many incremental reasons for not taking time off . . . that a lot of us would willingly do without a day’s vacation that would have been good both for us and for society at large if we had taken it. That is why there are legal holidays.

But which days should be holidays? Another way of posing the question would be to say, “Given that holidays are necessary, but that left to their own devices people would simply work, how do you justify a legal holiday so that it does not appear completely arbitrary, and so that people will be encouraged to observe it?” Most of the media noise around the Columbus Day holiday is about the holiday’s excuse, not the holiday itself. Realizing that helps to put matters in perspective.

In a country of diverse religious faiths and national origins like the United States, it made sense to develop a holiday system that was not entirely tied to a religious calendar. (Christmas survives here, of course, but in law it’s a secular holiday much like New Year’s Day.) . . . The American system of holidays was constructed mostly around a series of great events and persons in our nation’s history. The aim was to instill a feeling of civic pride. Holidays were chosen as occasions to bring everyone together, not for

excluding certain people. They were supposed to be about the recognition of our society's common struggles and achievements. *Civic religion* is often used to describe the principle behind America's calendar of public holidays. . . .

When thinking about the Columbus Day holiday it helps to remember the good intentions of the people who put together the first parade in New York. Columbus Day was first proclaimed a national holiday by President Benjamin Harrison in 1892, 400 years after Columbus's first voyage. The idea, lost on present-day critics of the holiday, was that this would be a national holiday that would be special for recognizing both Native Americans, who were here before Columbus, and the many immigrants—including Italians—who were just then coming to this country in astounding numbers. It was to be a national holiday that was *not* about the Founding Fathers or the Civil War, but about the *rest* of American history. Like the Columbian Exposition dedicated in Chicago that year and opened in 1893, it was to be about our land and all its people. Harrison especially designated the schools as centers of the Columbus celebration because universal public schooling, which had only recently taken hold, was seen as essential to a democracy that was seriously aiming to include everyone and not just preserve a governing elite.

You won't find it in the public literature surrounding the first Columbus Day in 1892, but in the background lay two recent tragedies, one involving Native Americans, the other involving Italian Americans. The first tragedy was the massacre by U.S. troops of between 146 and 200 Lakota Sioux, including men, women and children, at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, on December 29, 1890. Shooting began after a misunderstanding involving an elderly, deaf Sioux warrior who hadn't heard and therefore did not understand that he was supposed to hand over his rifle to the U.S. Cavalry. The massacre at Wounded Knee marked the definitive end of Indian resistance in the Great Plains. The episode was immediately seen by the government as potentially troubling, although there was much popular sentiment against the Sioux. An inquiry was held, the soldiers were absolved, and some were awarded medals that Native Americans to this day are seeking to have rescinded.

A second tragedy in the immediate background of the 1892 Columbus celebration took place in New Orleans. There, on March 14, 1891—only 10 weeks after the Wounded Knee Massacre—11 Italians were lynched in prison by a mob led by prominent Louisiana politicians. A trial for the murder of the New Orleans police chief had ended in mistrials for three of the Italians and the acquittal of the others who were brought to trial. Unhappy with the verdict and spurred on by fear of the "Mafia" (a word that had only recently entered American usage), civic leaders organized an assault on the prison to put the Italians to death. This episode was also troubling to the U.S. Government. These were legally innocent men who had been killed. But Italians were not very popular, and even Theodore Roosevelt was quoted as saying that he thought the New Orleans Italians "got what they deserved." A grand jury was summoned, but no one was charged with a crime. President Harrison, who would proclaim the Columbus holiday the following year, was genuinely saddened by the case, and over the objections of some members of Congress he paid reparations to the Italian government for the deaths of its citizens.

Whenever I hear of protests about the Columbus Day holiday—protests that tend to pit Native Americans against Italian Americans, I remember these tragedies that occurred so soon before the first Columbus Day holiday, and I shake my head. President Harrison did not allude to either of these sad episodes in his proclamation of the holiday, but the idea for the holiday involved a vision of an America that would get beyond the prejudice that had led to these deaths. Columbus Day was supposed to recognize the greatness of all of America's people, but especially Italians and Native Americans.

Consider how the first Columbus Day parade in New York was described in the newspapers. It consisted mostly of about 12,000 public school students grouped into 20 regiments, each commanded by a principal. The boys marched in school uniforms or their Sunday best, while the girls, dressed in red, white and blue, sat in bleachers. Alongside the public schoolers there were military drill squads and 29 marching bands, each of 30 to 50 instruments. After the public schools, there followed 5,500 students from the Catholic schools. Then there were students from the private schools wearing school uniforms. These included the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, the Barnard School Military Corps, and the Italian and American Colonial School. The Dante Alighieri Italian College of Astoria was dressed entirely in sailor outfits. These were followed by the Native American marching band from the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, which, according to one description, included "300 marching Indian boys and 50 tall Indian girls." That the Native Americans came right after the students from the Dante Alighieri School speaks volumes about the spirit of the original Columbus Day.

I teach college kids, and since they tend to be more skeptical about Columbus Day than younger students, it's nice to point out that the first Columbus Day parade had a "college division." Thus 800 New York University students played kazoos and wore mortarboards. In between songs they chanted "Who are we? Who are we? New York Universitee!" The College of Physicians and Surgeons wore Skeletons on their hats. And the Columbia College students marched in white hats and white sweaters, with a message on top of their hats that spelled out "We are the People."

So Columbus Day is for all Americans. It marks the first encounter that brought together the original Americans and the future ones. A lot of suffering followed, and a lot of achievement too. That a special role has been reserved for Italians in keeping the parades and the commemoration alive for well over a century seems right, since Columbus was Italian—although even in the 1890s his nationality was being contested. Some people, who include respectable scholars, still argue, based on elements of his biography and family history, that Columbus must really have been Spanish, Portuguese, Jewish, or Greek, instead of, or in addition to, Italian. One lonely scholar in the 1930s even wrote that Columbus, because of a square jaw and dirty blond hair in an old portrait, must have been Danish. The consensus, however, is that he was an Italian from outside of Genoa.

So much for his ethnicity. What about his moral standing? In the late 19th century an international movement, led by a French priest, sought to have Columbus canonized for bringing Christianity to the New World. To the Catholic Church's credit, this never got

very far. It sometimes gets overlooked in current discussions that we neither commemorate Columbus's birthday (as was the practice for Presidents Washington and Lincoln, and as we now do with Martin Luther King, Jr.) nor his death date (which is when Christian saints are memorialized), but rather the date of his arrival in the New World. The historical truth about Columbus—the short version suitable for reporters who are pressed for time—is that Columbus *was* Italian, but he was no saint.

The holiday marks the event, not the person. What Columbus gets criticized for nowadays are attitudes that were typical of the European sailing captains and merchants who plied the Mediterranean and the Atlantic in the 15th century. Within that group he was unquestionably a man of daring and unusual ambition. But what really mattered was his landing on San Salvador, which was a momentous, world-changing occasion such as has rarely happened in human history. Sounds to me like a pretty good excuse for taking a day off from work.

# 2



## Columbus: Man and Symbol



*Columbus as Symbolic Founder  
of “Columbia”*



# Hail, Columbia

PHILIP PHILE AND JOSEPH HOPKINSON

*This song was composed by German American composer and musician Philip Phile (c. 1734–93) for the first inauguration of George Washington, in 1789. Nine years later, Joseph Hopkinson (1770–1842), a Philadelphia lawyer and future congressman and judge—as well as son of the patriot Francis Hopkinson, who signed the Declaration of Independence—penned words for the already famous musical composition. Approached by Gilbert Fox, a local actor and singer who wanted to sing the song at an upcoming concert, Hopkinson wrote the poem overnight and gave it to Fox the next day. The rendition was an immediate success, and President John Adams caught the show a few nights after its opening.*

*For most of the nineteenth century, the song was used as the unofficial national anthem of the United States, and it is currently used as the entrance march for the Vice President of the United States. What is this song primarily about? What does it celebrate? What is the meaning of the title? Beginning in the early eighteenth century, the European colonies in America became known as “Columbia,” after the man who opened the New World for settlement by the Old. Does the poet—do you—see any connection between Columbus and Columbia, and between both and George Washington and the nation he was being inaugurated to lead? For a musical rendition of this song, see: <http://youtu.be/JPIQS1pzHdA>.*

Hail Columbia, happy land!  
Hail, ye heroes, heav'n-born band,  
Who fought and bled in freedom's cause,  
Who fought and bled in freedom's cause,  
And when the storm of war was gone  
Enjoy'd the peace your valor won.  
Let independence be our boast,  
Ever mindful what it cost;  
Ever grateful for the prize,  
Let its altar reach the skies.

*(Chorus)*

Firm, united let us be,  
Rallying round our liberty,  
As a band of brothers joined,  
Peace and safety we shall find.

Immortal patriots, rise once more,  
Defend your rights, defend your shore!  
Let no rude foe, with impious hand,  
Let no rude foe, with impious hand,

Invade the shrine where sacred lies  
Of toil and blood, the well-earned prize,  
While offering peace, sincere and just,  
In Heaven's we place a manly trust,  
That truth and justice will prevail,  
And every scheme of bondage fail.

*(Chorus)*

Firm, united let us be,  
Rallying round our liberty,  
As a band of brothers joined,  
Peace and safety we shall find.

Behold the chief who now commands,  
Once more to serve his country stands.  
The rock on which the storm will break,  
The rock on which the storm will break,  
But armed in virtue, firm, and true,  
His hopes are fixed on Heav'n and you.  
When hope was sinking in dismay,  
When glooms obscured Columbia's day,  
His steady mind, from changes free,  
Resolved on death or liberty.

*(Chorus)*

Firm, united let us be,  
Rallying round our liberty,  
As a band of brothers joined,  
Peace and safety we shall find.

Sound, sound the trump of fame,  
Let Washington's great name  
Ring through the world with loud applause,  
Ring through the world with loud applause,  
Let ev'ry clime to freedom dear,  
Listen with a joyful ear,  
With equal skill, with God-like pow'r  
He governs in the fearful hour  
Of horrid war, or guides with ease  
The happier time of honest peace.

*(Chorus)*

Firm, united let us be,  
Rallying round our liberty,  
As a band of brothers joined,  
Peace and safety we shall find.

# Ode to Columbia

TIMOTHY DWIGHT IV

*This song was composed in 1777 by Reverend Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), a Congregationalist minister, theologian, and eighth president of Yale University. Born into a prominent Massachusetts family, Dwight was a sixth-generation American and grandson of Jonathan Edwards. He came of age during the heady days of the American Revolution, and this song, popular with the soldiers of the Revolution, was written while he was a chaplain with the Revolutionary Army. Although it does not mention the name of Columbus, it attributes to the land named after him—and, thus, to his legacy—all the possible virtues and successes expected from the New World he discovered. What exactly does Dwight see as the differences between the Old World and the New? Does it make sense to link these differences to Columbus and his deeds?*

Columbia, Columbia to glory arise,  
The queen of the world, and the child of the skies!  
Thy genius commands thee; with rapture behold,  
While ages on ages thy splendors unfold.  
Thy reign is the last and the noblest of time;  
Most fruitful thy soil, most inviting thy clime;  
Let the crimes of the east ne'er encrimson thy name;  
Be freedom and science and virtue thy fame.

To conquest and slaughter let Europe aspire;  
Whelm nations in blood, and wrap cities in fire;  
Thy heroes the rights of mankind shall defend,  
And triumph pursue them, and glory attend.  
A world is thy realm; for a world be thy laws,  
Enlarged as thine empire, and just as thy cause;  
On Freedom's broad basis that empire shall rise,  
Extend with the main and dissolve with the skies.

Fair science her gates to thy sons shall unbar.  
And the east see thy morn hide the beams of her star;  
New bards and new sages, unrivall'd, shall soar  
To fame, unextinguish'd, when time is no more;  
To thee, the last refuge of virtue design'd,  
Shall fly from all nations the best of mankind;  
Here, grateful, to Heaven with transport shall bring  
Their incense, more fragrant than odors of spring.

Nor less shall thy fair ones to glory ascend,  
And genius and beauty in harmony blend;  
The graces of form shall awake pure desire,

And the charms of the soul ever cherish the fire;  
Their sweetness unmingled, their manners refined,  
And virtue's bright image enstamp'd on the mind,  
With peace and soft rapture shall teach life to glow,  
And light up a smile in the aspect of woe.

Thy fleets to all regions thy power shall display,  
The nations admire, and the ocean obey;  
Each shore to thy glory its tribute unfold,  
And the east and the south yield their spices and gold.  
As the day-spring unbounded, thy splendor shall flow,  
And earth's little kingdoms before thee shall bow,  
While the ensigns of union, in triumph unfurl'd.  
Hush the tumult of war, and give peace to the world.

Thus, as down a lone valley, with cedars o'erspread,  
From war's dread confusion I pensively stray'd,—  
The gloom from the face of fair heaven retired,  
The winds ceased to murmur, the thunders expired,  
Perfumes, as of Eden, flow'd sweetly along,  
And a voice, as of angels, enchantingly sung:  
"Columbia, Columbia, to glory arise,  
The queen of the world, and the child of the skies."

## Excerpt from *The Columbiad*

JOEL BARLOW

*In 1807 the American poet, diplomat, businessman, and politician Joel Barlow (1754–1812) published an epic poem about Columbus, a more elaborate version of his earlier work *The Vision of Columbus* (1787). After reading this first poem, George Washington wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette about Barlow, declaring that the poet was “considered by those who are good Judges to be a genius of the first magnitude; and to be one of those Bards who hold the keys of the gate by which Patriots, Sages and Heroes are admitted to immortality.”*

*Unlike Dwight’s poem (above), Barlow’s clearly invokes and glorifies Columbus the man and suggests that his life’s experience would have made him sympathetic to the American Revolution and its novel political principles. What was it about Columbus’ life and experience that, according to Barlow, made Columbus a forerunner and prophet of the future United States? What does Barlow see in the American prospect that justifies his linking it with Columbus?*

I sing the Mariner who first unfurl’d  
An eastern banner o’er the western world,  
And taught mankind where future empires lay  
In these fair confines of descending day;  
Who sway’d a moment, with vicarious power,  
Iberia’s sceptre on the new found shore,  
Then saw the paths his virtuous steps had trod  
Pursued by avarice and defiled with blood,  
The tribes he foster’d with paternal toil  
Snatch’d from his hand, and slaughter’d for their spoil.

Slaves, kings, adventurers, envious of his name,  
Enjoy’d his labours and purloin’d his fame,  
And gave the Viceroy, from his high seat hurl’d.  
Chains for a crown, a prison for a world  
Long overwhelm’d in woes, and sickening there,  
He met the slow still march of black despair,  
Sought the last refuge from his hopeless doom,  
And wish’d from thankless men a peaceful tomb:  
Till vision’d ages, opening on his eyes,  
Cheer’d his sad soul, and bade new nations rise;  
He saw the Atlantic heaven with light o’ercast,  
And Freedom crown his glorious work at last.

Almighty Freedom! give my venturous song  
The force, the charm that to thy voice belong;

Tis thine to shape my course, to light my way,  
To nerve my country with the patriot lay,  
To teach all men where all their interest lies,  
How rulers may be just and nations wise:  
Strong in thy strength I bend no suppliant knee,  
Invoke no miracle, no Muse but thee.

. . . Based on its rock of Right your empire lies,  
On walls of wisdom let the fabric rise;  
Preserve your principles, their force unfold,  
Let nations prove them and let kings behold.  
EQUALITY, your first firm-grounded stand;  
Then FREE ELECTION; then your FEDERAL BAND;  
This holy Triad should forever shine  
The great compendium of all rights divine,  
Creed of all schools, whence youths by millions draw  
Their themes of right, their decalogues of law;  
Till men shall wonder (in these codes inured)  
How wars were made, how tyrants were endured.

Then shall your works of art superior rise,  
Your fruits perfume a larger length of skies,  
Canals careering climb your sunbright hills,  
Vein the green slopes and strow their nurturing rills,<sup>1</sup>  
Thro tunnel'd heights and sundering ridges glide,  
Rob the rich west of half Kenhawa's tide<sup>2</sup>,  
Mix your wide climates, all their stores confound,  
And plant new ports in every midland mound.  
Your lawless Mississippi, now who slimes  
And drowns and desolates his waste of climes,  
Ribb'd with your dikes, his torrent shall restrain,  
And ask your leave to travel to the main;  
Won from his wave while rising cantons smile,  
Rear their glad nations and reward their toil.

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<sup>1</sup> *A very small brook.*

<sup>2</sup> *A tributary of the Ohio River in West Virginia.*

# Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean

DAVID T. SHAW AND THOMAS Á BECKET

*First published in 1843, “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” was a popular patriotic song in the twentieth century; its British counterpart, played to the same tune, is known as “Britannia, the Pride of the Ocean.” The exact origins and authorship of the song are disputed, but sometime around 1843, David T. Shaw, a singer in Philadelphia, penned some patriotic lines which he gave to another musician, Thomas á Becket (1808–90), to put to music. Becket composed the tune, but may have also provided new lyrics to the song that Shaw then published, crediting Becket only as arranger. Becket soon published his own version, which may have been inspired by a British poem published by Stephen Joseph Meany in 1842. In any case, the song quickly became popular on both sides of the Atlantic and soon became a patriotic standard.*

*How does this song differ from the previous celebrations of Columbia? What about it is celebrated here? What does it mean to call Columbia “the ark of freedom’s foundation”? What is the connection between that “ark” and the flag? Between that “ark” and the army and navy?*

*For a musical rendition of this song, see: <http://youtu.be/evYfXBoN9cU>.*

O, Columbia! the gem of the ocean,  
The home of the brave and the free,  
The shrine of each patriot’s devotion,  
A world offers homage to thee.  
Thy mandates make heroes assemble  
When Liberty’s form stands in view.  
Thy banners make tyranny tremble  
When borne by the red, white and blue!  
When borne by the red, white and blue!  
When borne by the red, white and blue!  
Thy banners make tyranny tremble  
When borne by the red, white and blue!

When war wing’d its wide desolation,  
And threatened the land to deform,  
The ark then of freedom’s foundation,  
Columbia rode safe thro’ the storm;  
With her garlands of vict’ry around her,  
When so proudly she bore her brave crew,  
With her flag proudly floating before her,  
The boast of the red, white and blue!  
The boast of the red, white and blue!  
The boast of the red, white and blue!

With her flag proudly floating before her,  
The boast of the red, white and blue!

The Star-Spangled Banner bring hither,  
O'er Columbia's true sons let it wave;  
May the wreaths they have won never wither,  
Nor its stars cease to shine on the brave.  
May thy service, united, ne'er sever,  
But hold to their colors so true.

The Army and Navy forever,  
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!  
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!  
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!  
The Army and Navy forever.  
Three cheers for the red, white and blue!



*Columbus as Explorer  
and the Spirit of Exploration*



# **First Landing of Columbus in the New World** **from *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus***

WASHINGTON IRVING

*Washington Irving (1783–1859) was an American author and US ambassador to Spain, perhaps best known for his short stories “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and for his five-volume biography of his namesake, George Washington. One of the first American writers to garner acclaim in Europe, Irving wrote his history of Christopher Columbus while accompanying the American diplomat Alexander Hill Everett to Madrid, making good use of the consul’s library on Spanish history. Published as a four-volume set in 1828, the semifictional account quickly became immensely popular.*

*Try to imagine yourself both as Columbus and as one of Columbus’ crew, first sighting land and coming ashore after the long and tumultuous voyage. How well do you think Irving captures your feelings and thoughts? Now imagine yourself as one of the natives on the island. How would you regard the sea-faring Europeans? What, exactly, is being celebrated in Irving’s account of the landing? Is the account believable?*

It was on the morning of Friday, 12th October, 1492, that Columbus first beheld the new world. When the day dawned, he saw before him a level and beautiful island several leagues in extent, of great freshness and verdure, and covered with trees like a continual orchard. Though every thing appeared in the wild luxuriance of untamed nature, yet the island was evidently populous, for the inhabitants were seen issuing from the woods, and running from all parts to the shore, where they stood gazing at the ships. They were all perfectly naked, and from their attitudes and gestures appeared to be lost in astonishment. Columbus made signal for the ships to cast anchor, and the boats to be manned and armed. He entered his own boat richly attired in scarlet, and bearing the royal standard; whilst Martin Alonzo Pinzon, and Vincent Yañez his brother, put off in company in their boats, each bearing the banner of the enterprise emblazoned with a green cross, having on each side the letters F. and Y. surmounted by crowns, the initials of the Castilian monarchs Fernando and Ysabel.<sup>1</sup>

As they approached the shores, they were refreshed by the sight of the ample forests, which in those climates have extraordinary beauty of vegetation. They beheld fruits of tempting hue, but unknown kind, growing among the trees which overhung the shores. The purity and suavity of the atmosphere, the crystal transparency of the seas which bathe these islands, give them a wonderful beauty, and must have had their effect upon the susceptible feelings of Columbus. No sooner did he land, than he threw himself upon his knees, kissed the earth, and returned thanks to God with tears of joy. His example was followed by the rest, whose hearts indeed overflowed with the same feelings of gratitude. Columbus then rising drew his sword, displayed the royal standard, and assembling round

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<sup>1</sup> *Ferdinand and Isabella.*

him the two captains, with Rodrigo de Escobido, notary of the armament, Rodrigo Sanchez, and the rest who had landed, he took solemn possession in the name of the Castilian sovereigns, giving the island the name of San Salvador. Having complied with the requisite forms and ceremonies, he now called upon all present to take the oath of obedience to him, as admiral and viceroy, representing the persons of the sovereigns.

The feelings of the crew now burst forth in the most extravagant transports. They had recently considered themselves devoted men, hurrying forward to destruction; they now looked upon themselves as favourites of fortune, and gave themselves up to the most unbounded joy. They thronged around the admiral in their overflowing zeal. Some embraced him, others kissed his hands. Those who had been most mutinous and turbulent during the voyage, were now most devoted and enthusiastic. Some begged favours of him, as of a man who had already wealth and honours in his gift. Many abject spirits, who had outraged him by their insolence, now crouched as it were at his feet, begging pardon for all the trouble they had caused him, and offering for the future the blindest obedience to his commands.

The natives of the island, when, at the dawn of day they had beheld the ships, with their sails set, hovering on their coast, had supposed them some monsters which had issued from the deep during the night. They had crowded to the beach, and watched their movements with awful anxiety. Their veering about, apparently without effort; the shifting and furling of their sails, resembling huge wings, filled them with astonishment. When they beheld the boats approach the shore, and a number of strange beings clad in glittering steel, or raiment of various colours, landing upon the beach, they fled in affright to their woods. Finding, however, that there was no attempt to pursue, nor molest them, they gradually recovered from their terror, and approached the Spaniards with great awe, frequently prostrating themselves on the earth, and making signs of adoration. During the ceremonies of taking possession, they remained gazing in timid admiration at the complexion, the beards, the shining armour, and splendid dresses of the Spaniards. The admiral particularly attracted their attention, from his commanding height, his air of authority, his dress of scarlet, and the deference which was paid him by his companions; all which pointed him out to be the commander. When they had still further recovered from their fears, they approached the Spaniards, touched their beards, and examined their hands and faces, admiring their whiteness. Columbus, pleased with their simplicity, their gentleness, and the confidence they reposed in beings who must have appeared to them so strange and formidable, suffered their scrutiny with perfect acquiescence. The wondering savages were won by this benignity; they now supposed that the ships had sailed out of the crystal firmament which bounded their horizon, or that they had descended from above on their ample wings, and that these marvelous beings were inhabitants of the skies.

# Columbus a Heretic and a Visionary to His Contemporaries

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

*James Freeman Clarke (1810–88) was an American author, editor, abolitionist, and Unitarian minister. Associated with the Transcendentalists (though eventually rejecting the label), Clarke published early poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson while serving as editor of the Western Messenger, a Unitarian magazine he cofounded to promote liberal Christian thought. In 1880, Clarke published Self-Culture: Physical, Intellectual, Moral, and Spiritual, a collection of his public lectures about education, human nature, and Christian culture from which this selection is drawn. This excerpt, specifically, comes from a speech titled the “Education of Hope.”*

*Clarke’s brief synopsis of the “actual life” of Columbus raises the question about how to judge this man—or, perhaps, any man: whose judgment counts most, that of one’s contemporaries or that of future generations (and which future generations)? Can you appreciate the judgments of Columbus’s contemporaries? Why did they “reward” him with “a sumptuous funeral”? Why do we judge him differently? Are “great hope” and “profound convictions” enough to make a successful life?*

We think of Columbus as the great discoverer of America; we do not remember that his actual life was one of disappointment and failure. Even his discovery of America was a disappointment; he was looking for India, and utterly failed of this. He made maps and sold them to support his old father. Poverty, contumely<sup>1</sup>, indignities of all sorts, met him wherever he turned. His expectations were considered extravagant, his schemes futile; the theologians exposed him with texts out of the Bible; he wasted seven years waiting in vain for encouragement at the court of Spain. He applied unsuccessfully to the governments of Venice, Portugal, Genoa, France, England. Practical men said, “It can’t be done. He is a visionary.” Doctors of divinity said, “He is a heretic; he contradicts the Bible.” Isabella, being a woman, and a woman of sentiment, wished to help him; but her confessor said no. We all know how he was compelled to put down mutiny in his crew, and how, after his discovery was made, he was rewarded with chains and imprisonment, how he died in neglect, poverty, and pain, and only was rewarded by a sumptuous funeral. His great hope, his profound convictions, were his only support and strength.

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<sup>1</sup> *Insulting language or treatment.*

# Excitement at the News of the Discovery

JOHN FISKE

*Published in 1892, John Fiske's two-volume account The Discovery of America was, according to the author, a continuation of his interest in the evolution of man and societies—and, specifically, his study of the contact between civilizations. Born Edmund Fiske Green (1842–1901), Fiske pursued these themes as a historian and lecturer in philosophy at Harvard College and elsewhere, writing many books about the subject: Myths and Myth Makers (1872), Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy (1874), Darwinism and Other Essays (1876), and Through Nature to God (1899), among many others.*

*As Fiske points out, everyone, beginning with Columbus himself, was mistaken about the place at which he had landed, believing that he had indeed reached China as he had hoped. Does this ignorance influence your judgment of Columbus's deed? Were you Columbus, would you have been sorry to discover that you had been mistaken? How would you compare the riches sought from the East with the undeveloped land at which Columbus arrived? Why does Fiske say that there can never again be a deed as great as Columbus's? Has it proved to be true that "No worlds are left for a future Columbus to conquer"?*

It was generally assumed without question that the Admiral's theory of his discovery must be correct, that the coast of Cuba must be the eastern extremity of China, that the coast of Hispaniola must be the northern extremity of Cipango, and that a direct route—much shorter than that which Portugal had so long been seeking—had now been found to those lands of illimitable wealth described by Marco Polo. To be sure, Columbus had not as yet seen the evidences of this oriental splendor, and had been puzzled at not finding them, but he felt confident that he had come very near them and would come full upon them in a second voyage. There was nobody who knew enough to refute these opinions, and really why should not this great geographer, who had accomplished so much already which people had scouted as impossible,—why should he not know what he was about? It was easy enough now to get men and money for the second voyage. When the Admiral sailed from Cadiz on September 25, 1493, it was with seventeen ships, carrying 1,500 men. Their dreams were of the marble palaces of Quinsay, of isles of spices, and the treasures of Prester John. The sovereigns wept for joy as they thought that such untold riches were vouchsafed them by the special decree of Heaven, as a reward for having overcome the Moors at Granada and banished the Jews from Spain. Columbus shared these views, and regarded himself as a special instrument for executing the divine decrees. He renewed his vow to rescue the Holy Sepulcher,<sup>1</sup> promising within the next

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<sup>1</sup> *The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, also called the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, or the Church of the Resurrection by Eastern Christians, is a church within the Christian Quarter of the walled Old City of Jerusalem. The site is venerated as Golgotha (the Hill of Calvary), where Jesus was crucified, and is said also to contain the place where Jesus was buried (the Sepulcher). In Columbus's day, the Muslims controlled Jerusalem.*

seven years to equip at his own expense a crusading army of 50,000 foot and 4,000 horse; within five years thereafter he would follow this with a second army of like dimensions.

Thus nobody had the faintest suspicion of what had been done. In the famous letter to Santangel<sup>2</sup> there is of course not a word about a new world. The grandeur of the achievement was quite beyond the ken of the generation that witnessed it. For we have since come to learn that in 1492 the contact between the eastern and the western halves of our planet was first really begun, and the two streams of human life which had flowed on for countless ages apart were thenceforth to mingle together. The first voyage of Columbus is thus a unique event in the history of mankind. Nothing like it was ever done before, and nothing like it can ever be done again. No worlds are left for a future Columbus to conquer. The era of which this great Italian mariner was the most illustrious representative has closed forever.

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<sup>2</sup> *A finance minister to Ferdinand II who made the case to Isabella I in favor of Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492.*

# Columbus and His Discovery of America

HERBERT B. ADAMS

*In this address, given on October 10, 1892, at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University to celebrate the opening of the academic year, Herbert Baxter Adams (1850–1901), a professor of history, uses Columbus’s discovery of the New World as an example of a “great deed,” that brings with it “a certain immortality.” What precisely, according to the poem, are the excellences of Columbus? What is the meaning of “Those faithful, finding eyes”? Why does Adams think—and why might anyone think—that the discovery of America is the greatest event in secular history? What other events, before or since, would you think comparable? According to what standards of greatness?*

“Was this his face, and these the finding eyes  
That plucked a new world from the rolling seas?  
Who, serving Christ, whom most he sought to please,  
Willed his one thought until he saw arise  
Man’s other home and earthly paradise—  
His early vision, when with stalwart knees  
He pushed the boat from his young olive-trees,  
And sailed to wrest the secret of the skies?

“He on the waters dared to set his feet,  
And through believing planted earth’s last race.  
What faith in man must in our new world beat,  
Thinking how once he saw before his face  
The West and all the host of stars retreat  
Into the silent infinite of space!”<sup>1</sup>

Those faithful, finding eyes of Columbus! For now four hundred years they have looked outward upon the westward course of empire in the new hemisphere which he first opened to discovery and conquest. Our modern eyes seek in vain to arrest that steadfast, far-away gaze, which seems to be looking into a future beyond our own. In the radiant light of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America, millions of men and women will look upon this man’s face with curious or admiring eyes; but when this generation, and many hundred years shall have passed away, those “finding eyes” will still be shining on through art, and poetry and history, like stars in the firmament.

There is a certain immortality in a great deed, like that of Columbus, which makes the doer, even though in many respects an ordinary man of his time, forever memorable. The discovery of America has been called the greatest event in secular history. This dictum may shock the ancients and startle the moderns; but let the mind of reflecting students range at will, through the centuries, back and forth in the galleries of human achievement,

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<sup>1</sup> George Edward Woodberry, “On a Portrait of Columbus,” 1892.

and determine if you can what single secular deed even approximates in grandeur and far-reaching historic significance to the finding of a new world on this earth, with which planet alone history is concerned. What are all the conquests of antiquity, or the decisive battles and great inventions of mankind, compared with America, time's noblest offspring? The passage of Christopher Columbus across the western sea, bearing the weight of Christendom and European civilization, opened the way for the greatest migrations in human history, for the steady march of enlightened nations towards civil and religious liberty. The discovery of America was the first crossing of Oceanus, that great and murmuring stream, which flowed around the old Mediterranean world. Amid the groaning and travailing of human creation, men burst the confines of that outward sea and began to people new continents. I tell you, sirs, the modern history of Europe, with its long exodus of hungry, landless peoples, with its epoch-making wars, its revolutions in church and state, were conditioned by that one secular event called the discovery of America.

# Columbus

NANCY BYRD TURNER

*In this 1919 poem, from Youth's Companion, which she edited, the American poet Nancy Byrd Turner (1880–1971) celebrates the character of Columbus. For which virtues especially does she honor him? She emphasizes his dream and his prayer. What sort of a man lives and “pledges his soul” according to his dreams and prayers? Is having dreams and offering prayers sufficient for realizing their fulfillment? What other Columbian virtues would be needed? How does Turner's portrait compare with that of Adams (above) or Whitman (below)?*

Back and forth in his narrow room  
The weaver's son at his weaving went;  
And ever the strands upon the loom  
In a curious pattern met and blent:  
Shores of a strange new continent  
Limned by the threads his hand had drawn,—  
Till his life was shaken with discontent:  
*He had dreamed a dream, and he must be gone!*

The people jeered in the market place  
At the moody fellow they chanced to meet;  
The dark queen listened with laughing face  
To the stumbling story he must repeat;  
The wise men scoffed in the staring street,  
“A fool will perish in folly's way”;  
But they could not hinder his eager feet:  
*He had seen a star, and he would not stay!*

The seas ran cold on his urging prows,  
The sky line drowned in the dripping west;  
His sailors muttered with sullen brows,  
And cursed the dream in the dreamer's breast.  
The wind came smiting at death's behest,  
But he would not shorten one dipping sail;  
His heart was sworn in a single quest:  
*He had prayed a prayer, and it must prevail!*

Then, on the dark his flaming star,  
Proof of his prayer in the thundering gale,  
Land of the dream that he dreamed afar!  
*He had pledged his soul, and he did not fail!*

# Prayer of Columbus

WALT WHITMAN

*In this 1874 poem, American poet Walt Whitman (1819–92) imagines Columbus ashore in the New World (perhaps after his fourth voyage). He is sick, miserable, and close to death, hence eager for communion with God. How does Whitman’s Columbus, in his final prayer to God, allot responsibility for his own deeds and accomplishments? For what, if anything, does Columbus claim credit for himself? If he rightly sees himself as a vessel for God’s providence, would we have to reject Herbert Adams’s view (above) that Columbus’s voyage to America was the greatest event in secular history? What are Columbus’s hopes—and fears—for the New World he discovered? How would you answer Columbus’s question, “Is it the prophet’s thought I speak, or am I raving?” What is the vision that, thanks to Whitman, Columbus receives in the final stanza? Might it be an answer to his prayer? Can you square Columbus’s last words “And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me” with his prior claim that all that he did was really God’s doing? Has Whitman’s America—and ours—forgotten the possibility of miracles and the role of providence?*

A batter’d, wreck’d old man,  
Thrown on this savage shore, far, far from home,  
Pent by the sea and dark rebellious brows, twelve dreary months,  
Sore, stiff with many toils, sicken’d, and nigh to death,  
I take my way along the island’s edge,  
Venting a heavy heart.

I am too full of woe!  
Haply, I may not live another day;  
I cannot rest, O God—I cannot eat or drink or sleep,  
Till I put forth myself, my prayer, once more to Thee,  
Breathe, bathe myself once more in Thee—commune with Thee,  
Report myself once more to Thee.

Thou knowest my years entire, my life,  
(My long and crowded life of active work—not adoration merely;)  
Thou knowest the prayers and vigils of my youth;  
Thou knowest my manhood’s solemn and visionary meditations;  
Thou knowest how, before I commenced, I devoted all to come to Thee;  
Thou knowest I have in age ratified all those vows, and strictly kept them;  
Thou knowest I have not once lost nor faith nor ecstasy in Thee;  
(In shackles, prison’d, in disgrace, repining not,  
Accepting all from Thee—as duly come from Thee.)

All my emprises have been fill’d with Thee,  
My speculations, plans, begun and carried on in thoughts of Thee,

Sailing the deep or journeying the land for Thee;  
Intentions, purports, aspirations mine—leaving results to Thee.

O I am sure they really came from Thee!  
The urge, the ardor, the unconquerable will,  
The potent, felt, interior command, stronger than words,  
A message from the Heavens whispering to me even in sleep,  
These sped me on.

By me, and these, the work so far accomplish'd, (for what has been, has been;)  
By me Earth's elder, cloy'd and stifled lands, uncloy'd, unloos'd;  
By me the hemispheres rounded and tied—the unknown to the known.

The end I know not—it is all in Thee;  
Or small, or great, I know not—haply, what broad fields, what lands;  
Haply, the brutish, measureless human undergrowth I know,  
Transplanted there, may rise to stature, knowledge worthy Thee;  
Haply the swords I know may there indeed be turn'd to reaping-tools;  
Haply the lifeless cross I know—Europe's dead cross—may bud and blossom there.

One effort more—my altar this bleak sand:  
That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,  
With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,  
(Light rare, untellable—lighting the very light!  
Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages!)  
For that, O God—be it my latest word—here on my knees,  
Old, poor, and paralyzed—I thank Thee.

My terminus near,  
The clouds already closing in upon me,  
The voyage balk'd—the course disputed, lost,  
I yield my ships to Thee.

Steersman unseen! henceforth the helms are Thine;  
Take Thou command—(what to my petty skill Thy navigation?)  
My hands, my limbs grow nerveless;  
My brain feels rack'd, bewilder'd; Let the old timbers part—I will not part!  
I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me,  
Thee, Thee, at least, I know.

Is it the prophet's thought I speak, or am I raving?  
What do I know of life? what of myself?  
I know not even my own work, past or present;  
Dim, ever-shifting guesses of it spread before me,  
Of newer, better worlds, their mighty parturition,  
Mocking, perplexing me.

And these things I see suddenly—what mean they?  
As if some miracle, some hand divine unseal'd my eyes,  
Shadowy, vast shapes, smile through the air and sky,  
And on the distant waves sail countless ships,  
And anthems in new tongues I hear saluting me.

# Columbus

EDWARD EVERETT HALE

*Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909), Unitarian minister and antislavery activist, was a prolific author of stories, essays, and poems, many on patriotic themes. A lifelong patriot, Hale was born into a family of active Americans: He was the nephew both of Edward Everett, renowned orator and statesman, and of Alexander Hill Everett, the American diplomat who invited Washington Irving to Spain, where he wrote about Columbus. Hale’s father, Nathan Hale, was the namesake and nephew of Nathan Hale, executed by the British for espionage during the Revolutionary War and famous for his last words, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”*

*In 1882, Hale visited Spain to conduct research on Columbus and his travels, writing his biography on the explorer—The Life of Christopher Columbus: From His Own Letters and Journals—in time to be released for the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery. The following selection, a poem in which he presents a novel view of the reason for, and the meaning of, Columbus’ voyages, comes from his 1903 collection of songs and poetry, New England History in Ballads. Who is it that says, “Give me white paper!” Why is it needed? What, in this poem, is the distinctive virtue of Columbus, and why does he sail? What, according to Hale, is the purpose of America?*

Give me white paper!  
This which you use is black and rough with smears  
Of sweat and grime and fraud and blood and tears,  
Crossed with the story of men’s sins and fears,  
Of battle and of famine all these years,  
When all God’s children had forgot their birth,  
And drudged and fought and died like beasts of earth.

“Give me white paper!”  
One storm-trained seaman listened to the word;  
What no man saw he saw; he heard what no man heard.  
In answer he compelled the sea  
To eager man to tell  
The secret she had kept so well!  
Left blood and guilt and tyranny behind,—  
Sailing still West the hidden shore to find;  
For all mankind that unstained scroll unfurled,  
Where God might write anew the story of the World.

# Columbus

JOAQUIN MILLER

*Joaquin Miller (pen name of Cincinnatus Hiner Miller; 1837–1913) was an American poet whose work was popular in England, in part because it was so distinctly American. Nicknamed the “Poet of the Sierras,” Miller wrote about the adventurous life he led, having worked at various times as a mining-camp cook, rider on the Pony Express, horse thief, newspaper correspondent, judge, and politician. In 1892, he composed “Columbus” for the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, praising the explorer for his unrelenting adventurous spirit.*

*For decades this poem, memorized by millions of schoolchildren, rivaled the Gettysburg Address in popularity. What, according to the poem, is Columbus’s unique virtue? In the last stanza, examine and interpret the images of darkness and light; the speck of light and the starlit flag into which it grew; and its further growth to become “Time’s burst of dawn.” Can you make sense of the claims of the last two lines of the poem, about Columbus and about his “grandest lesson” to “that world”?*

Behind him lay the gray Azores,  
Behind the Gates of Hercules;  
Before him not the ghost of shores;  
Before him only shoreless seas.  
The good mate said: “Now must we pray,  
For lo! the very stars are gone.  
Brave Adm’r’l, speak; what shall I say?”  
“Why, say, ‘Sail on! sail on! and on!’”

“My men grow mutinous day by day;  
My men grow ghastly, wan and weak.”  
The stout mate thought of home; a spray  
Of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.  
“What shall I say, brave Adm’r’l, say,  
If we sight naught but seas at dawn?”  
“Why, you shall say at break of day:  
‘Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!’”

They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,  
Until at last the blanched mate said:  
“Why, now not even God would know  
Should I and all my men fall dead.  
These very winds forget their way,  
For God from these dread seas is gone.  
Now speak, brave Adm’r’l, speak and say”—  
He said: “Sail on! sail on! and on!”

They sailed. They sailed. Then spake the mate:  
“This mad sea shows his teeth to-night.  
He curls his lip, he lies in wait,  
He lifts his teeth, as if to bite!  
Brave Adm’r’l, say but one good word:  
What shall we do when hope is gone?”  
The words leapt like a leaping sword:  
“Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!”

Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,  
And peered through darkness. Ah, that night  
Of all dark nights! And then a speck—  
A light! A light! At last a light!  
It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!  
It grew to be Time’s burst of dawn.  
He gained a world; he gave that world  
Its grandest lesson: “On! sail on!”

# Columbus and the Egg

JAMES BALDWIN

*James Baldwin (1841–1925) was an American educator and editor whose books of stories for children had a great influence on the education of young people in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth. In this parable, attributed to Italian historian Girolamo Benzoni's History of the New World (1565) and taken from Baldwin's collection, Thirty More Famous Stories Retold, Baldwin invites us to consider how anyone can know whether something cannot be done. What do you think of Columbus's response to the doubters? If anybody can do something "after he has been shown how," what is it that enables the first person to do that which is thought to be impossible?*

Christopher Columbus discovered America on the 12th of October, 1492. He had spent eighteen years in planning for that wonderful first voyage which he made across the Atlantic Ocean. The thoughts and hopes of the best part of his life had been given to it. He had talked and argued with sailors and scholars and princes and kings, saying, "I know that, by sailing west across the great ocean, one may at last reach lands that have never been visited by Europeans." But he had been laughed at as a foolish dreamer, and few people had any faith in his projects.

At last, however, the king and queen of Spain gave him ships with which to make the trial voyage. He crossed the ocean and discovered strange lands, inhabited by a people unlike any that had been known before. He believed that these lands were a part of India.

When he returned home with the news of his discovery there was great rejoicing, and he was hailed as the hero who had given a new world to Spain. Crowds of people lined the streets through which he passed, and all were anxious to do him honor. The king and queen welcomed him to their palace and listened with pleasure to the story of his voyage. Never had so great respect been shown to any common man.

But there were some who were jealous of the discoverer, and as ready to find fault as others were to praise. "Who is this Columbus?" they asked, "and what has he done? Is he not a pauper pilot from Italy? And could not any other seaman sail across the ocean just as he has done?"

One day Columbus was at a dinner which a Spanish gentleman had given in his honor, and several of these persons were present. They were proud, conceited fellows, and they very soon began to try to make Columbus uncomfortable.

"You have discovered strange lands beyond the sea," they said. "But what of that? We do not see why there should be so much said about it. Anybody can sail across the ocean; and anybody can coast along the islands on the other side, just as you have done. It is the simplest thing in the world."

Columbus made no answer; but after a while he took an egg from a dish and said to the company, "Who among you, gentlemen, can make this egg stand on end?"

One by one those at the table tried the experiment. When the egg had gone entirely around and none had succeeded, all said that it could not be done.

Then Columbus took the egg and struck its small end gently upon the table so as to break the shell a little. After that there was no trouble in making it stand upright.

"Gentlemen," said he, "what is easier than to do this which you said was impossible? It is the simplest thing in the world. Anybody can do it—*after he has been shown how.*"



*Columbus as Immigrant  
and the Immigrant Experience*



# The Significance of Columbus Day to New Americans

## THE EDITORIAL

*As was noted in "The Origins and Traditions of Columbus Day" (above), the early celebrations of Columbus Day, occurring in the nineteenth century, focused not on Columbus as explorer or symbolic founder but on Columbus as immigrant. American Catholics and Italian Americans in particular, invoked the figure of Columbus—as immigrant, Italian, and Catholic—to counteract the ardent anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic activism from which they were suffering. This editorial, published in the Independent, a New York City magazine, in 1910 before Columbus Day became a legal holiday, explains why the holiday should matter to American immigrants. What, according to this editorial, is the importance of Columbus Day? How can it be both a religious and a patriotic holiday? Although the editorial begins by saying that "Columbus Day belongs to our Catholic people," it proceeds to suggest the importance of religion for all American citizens. What do you think of that suggestion, both for the time in which the editorial was written and for the present time?*

Columbus Day is not yet generally recognized as a legal holiday, but a real holiday it is wherever a large part of the people desire it as their religious festival. For it has been created for Catholics, particularly immigrant Catholics and their children, the special Catholic holiday of the year, something like the Sunday school children's festival day in Brooklyn and some other cities, when they march in procession and hear speeches. Christmas and Thanksgiving are religious or family holidays for all the people; Columbus Day belongs to our Catholic people.

The choice of the day is a happy one. Columbus was the first immigrant to America. He was an Italian; he was a Catholic. There have been efforts made, and some progress in them, to have him canonized as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. The search for miracles thru his intercession, we believe, has not yet been successful, but with the new honor given to him, and the attention called to his religious spirit, it will be strange if a sufficient number of cures of the sick thru his mediation shall not be found to warrant his addition to the number of saints. He labored enough; he suffered enough; he had wonderful prophetic vision. Let him be the favorite saint of our Italian immigrants, of our Spanish citizens, and let our Irish Catholics honor him next to St. Patrick. We wonder that we have never yet had a legal St. Patrick's holiday here in New York. Why have our Irish rulers preferred the worship of their Indian Saint Tammany!<sup>1</sup>

Last week was Columbus Day in the large cities which are now possessed by our Catholic immigrants and their descendants. President Taft stood with head uncovered for hours while the procession passed by. Archbishop O'Connell reviewed the procession

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<sup>1</sup>Tamanend or Tammany (c. 1628–c.1698), a Delaware chief friendly to William Penn and the Pennsylvania colonists. Saint Tammany Day was celebrated on May 1, replacing the British May Day tradition, and championed by the Tammany Society, a fraternal order whose early members included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Benjamin Rush.

and he preached the commemorative sermon. Fifty thousand people took part in the Boston procession, and the rivalry for the first prize in the "floats" went to an Italian society. They marched by nationalities. Italians, Irish, French, Spanish, Hungarians and all the rest. They marched in soldierly fashion; and very marked was the order of the men who had served their three years in a European army. It was a most inspiring sight, whether in Boston, or in dozens of other cities, where the Catholic population dominates, as it does in New York, and even, slightly, in Philadelphia.

While the constituents of the magnificent processions are of differing nationalities, the one thing that unifies them is their religion. They are all Catholic. The North of Ireland Orangemen take no part in it, nor the Scotch, nor the Lutherans of Germany. There is a Catholic organization known as the Knights of Columbus, and they have given a nucleus for the celebration of the day. So far as the Italians are concerned we do not suppose that the religious spirit controls their celebration, but they still call themselves Catholics, and they are naturally better Catholics in this country, where the Church is free from the State, than they were at home.

It is properly a matter of gratification and pride that this new Columbus Day is so enthusiastically celebrated. It goes for patriotism; it goes for religion. The great danger for our immigrants is that their children will lose with their religion that control of moral restraint which has kept their fathers decent. Nor is this a danger of Catholic immigrants alone; we see it in our Jewish population, and to a considerable extent in our own native Protestant population. So far as superstition has kept them in control, that is fast being lost. As fast as they can get out of parental rule young Jews in multitudes are forgetting to fast on Yom Kippur, while Sabbath is a forgotten day. There is growing up a race of hoodlums, "Apaches," utterly lawless, irreligious and immoral. Over them priest or preacher or rabbi has no influence. If they ever had the parochial school they hated it and despise it. They have utterly broken off from their old religion and have but a dim, but unpleasant, memory of it. Possibly the reaction will come with their children, who will have no bitter religious hostilities, only utter indifference; and who may be more accessible to the influences that will be brought by the Church. There is some hope there. We remember the irreligiousness of this country at the end of the eighteenth century and the wonderful reaction that followed.<sup>2</sup>

So far as the Catholic Church is concerned, we believe it will yet recover its young people that have gone astray, or that they will join other religious bodies. The free spirit and the intelligence of the day into which our immigrants have entered quite overturn all that faith which rests on superstition. The protest of our youth against the religion of their parents is largely intellectual. They cannot believe what was taught them as truth, and when told that they must believe they rebel. In our own land the superstitions attached to the Catholic Church have been largely cleansed away. Intelligent priests do not teach them, and intelligent Catholics do not believe them. They are retained only as useful for the control of the more ignorant. Even abroad the process is going on, and we hear of several saints lately dropped from the martyrology. But these reforms go too slowly, and

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<sup>2</sup> *The Great Awakening, an American religious revival occurring between the early eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century.*

Lourdes and St. Ann still multiply their miracles, and the people kneel in earnest petition that the blood may be liquefied which will insure the mediation of the saint and avert the cholera.

This happens to be an unfortunate time for the Roman Church. It is a period of intellectual repression and of ecclesiastical tyranny. In Europe those who hate the Church are rejoicing in the blindness of the Vatican, which has blundered with extraordinary persistence. It has blundered politically, and no less in its restraint of intellectual freedom. It has set France and Spain and Portugal against it, while it has forbidden its students for the priesthood to see any light but its own, and it has set spies over its very teachers of theology in fear that they may question in their hearts. Of course, this is resented in high ecclesiastical circles. The tyranny of the Archbishop of Boston angers his priests. These things will not last. The days of Pius X will come to an end; and when the reaction comes it is impossible that under a new Leo there shall not be more liberty and less antagonism to the spirit which searches everywhere for truth, even the new truth as well as that a thousand years old and musty. We believe in Columbus Day.

# Americanism

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

*In this Columbus Day speech from 1915 (excerpted), former President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) addressed the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal organization that advanced the cause of equality and civil rights, on the subject of immigration and Americanization. What, according to the opening paragraph, is Roosevelt’s attitude toward Columbus and his commemoration by the society of the Knights of Columbus? What is Roosevelt’s attitude toward immigrants, and how does he see the relation between our democratic principles and immigration? What does he regard as the rights and duties of new immigrants to America? Why does he object to “hyphenated Americans”? What is Americanism, and why does it matter? Are his arguments still relevant today?*

Four centuries and a quarter have gone by since Columbus by discovering America opened the greatest era in world history. Four centuries have passed since the Spaniards began that colonization on the main land which has resulted in the growth of the nations of Latin-America. Three centuries have passed since, with the settlements on the coasts of Virginia and Massachusetts, the real history of what is now the United States began. All this we ultimately owe to the action of an Italian seaman in the service of a Spanish King and a Spanish Queen. It is eminently fitting that one of the largest and most influential social organizations of this great Republic,—a Republic in which the tongue is English, and the blood derived from many sources,—should, in its name, commemorate the great Italian. It is eminently fitting to make an address on Americanism before this society.

## DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

We of the United States need above all things to remember that, while we are by blood and culture kin to each of the nations of Europe, we are also separate from each of them. We are a new and distinct nationality. We are developing our own distinctive culture and civilization, and the worth of this civilization will largely depend upon our determination to keep it distinctively our own. Our sons and daughters should be educated here and not abroad. We should freely take from every other nation whatever we can make of use, but we should adopt and develop to our own peculiar needs what we thus take, and never be content merely to copy.

Our nation was founded to perpetuate democratic principles. These principles are that each man is to be treated on his worth as a man without regard to the land from which his forefathers came and without regard to the creed which he professes. If the United States proves false to these principles of civil and religious liberty, it will have inflicted the greatest blow on the system of free popular government that has ever been inflicted. Here we have had a virgin continent on which to try the experiment of making out of divers race stocks a new nation and of treating all the citizens of that nation in such a fashion as

to preserve them equality of opportunity in industrial, civil, and political life. Our duty is to secure each man against any injustice by his fellows.

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

One of the most important things to secure for him is the right to hold and to express the religious views that best meet his own soul needs. Any political movement directed against any body of our fellow-citizens because of their religious creed is a grave offense against American principles and American institutions. It is a wicked thing either to support or to oppose a man because of the creed he professes. This applies to Jew and Gentile, to Catholic and Protestant, and to the man who would be regarded as unorthodox by all of them alike. Political movements directed against men because of their religious belief, and intended to prevent men of that creed from holding office, have never accomplished anything but harm. This was true in the days of the "Know-Nothing" and Native-American [nativist] parties in the middle of the last century; and it is just as true to-day. Such a movement directly contravenes the spirit of the Constitution itself. Washington and his associates believed that it was essential to the existence of this Republic that there should never be any union of Church and State; and such union is partially accomplished wherever a given creed is aided by the State or when any public servant is elected or defeated because of his creed. The Constitution explicitly forbids the requiring of any religious test as a qualification for holding office. To impose such a test by popular vote is as bad as to impose it by law. To vote either for or against a man because of his creed is to impose upon him a religious test and is a clear violation of the spirit of the Constitution. . . .

### HYPHENATED AMERICANS

What is true of creed is no less true of nationality. There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all. This is just as true of the man who puts "native" before the hyphen as of the man who puts German or Irish or English or French before the hyphen. Americanism is a matter of the spirit and of the soul. Our allegiance must be purely to the United States. We must unsparingly condemn any man who holds any other allegiance. But if he is heartily and singly loyal to this Republic, then no matter where he was born, he is just as good an American as any one else.

The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic. The men who do not become Americans and nothing else are hyphenated Americans; and there ought to be no room for them in this country. The man who calls himself an

American citizen and who yet shows by his actions that he is primarily the citizen of a foreign land, plays a thoroughly mischievous part in the life of our body politic. He has no place here; and the sooner he returns to the land to which he feels his real heart-allegiance, the better it will be for every good American. There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else. . . .

For an American citizen to vote as a German-American, an Irish-American, or an English-American, is to be a traitor to American institutions; and those hyphenated Americans who terrorize American politicians by threats of the foreign vote are engaged in treason to the American Republic. . . .

#### RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF CITIZENS

Any discrimination against aliens is a wrong, for it tends to put the immigrant at a disadvantage and to cause him to feel bitterness and resentment during the very years when he should be preparing himself for American citizenship. If an immigrant is not fit to become a citizen, he should not be allowed to come here. If he is fit, he should be given all the rights to earn his own livelihood, and to better himself, that any man can have. . . . Special legislation should deal with the aliens who do not come here to be made citizens. But the alien who comes here intending to become a citizen should be helped in every way to advance himself, should be removed from every possible disadvantage, and in return should be required under penalty of being sent back to the country from which he came, to prove that he is in good faith fitting himself to be an American citizen. . . .

#### AMERICANIZATION

The foreign-born population of this country must be an Americanized population—no other kind can fight the battles of America either in war or peace. It must talk the language of its native-born fellow-citizens, it must possess American citizenship and American ideals. It must stand firm by its oath of allegiance in word and deed and must show that in very fact it has renounced allegiance to every prince, potentate, or foreign government. It must be maintained on an American standard of living so as to prevent labor disturbances in important plants and at critical times. None of these objects can be secured as long as we have immigrant colonies, ghettos, and immigrant sections, and above all they cannot be assured so long as we consider the immigrant only as an industrial asset. The immigrant must not be allowed to drift or to be put at the mercy of the exploiter. Our object is not to imitate one of the older racial types, but to maintain a new American type and then to secure loyalty to this type. We cannot secure such loyalty unless we make this a country where men shall feel that they have justice and also where they shall feel that they are required to perform the duties imposed upon them. . . . [W]e have failed to impress upon the immigrant and upon the native-born as well that they are expected to do justice as well as to receive justice, that they are expected to be heartily and actively and single-mindedly loyal to the flag no less than to benefit by living under it.

We cannot afford to continue to use hundreds of thousands of immigrants merely as industrial assets while they remain social outcasts and menaces any more than fifty years ago we could afford to keep the black man merely as an industrial asset and not as a human being. We cannot afford to build a big industrial plant and herd men and women about it without care for their welfare. We cannot afford to permit squalid overcrowding or the kind of living system which makes impossible the decencies and necessities of life. We cannot afford the low wage rates and the merely seasonal industries which mean the sacrifice of both individual and family life and morals to the industrial machinery. . . .

Justice Dowling<sup>1</sup> in his speech has described the excellent fourth degree of your order, of how in it you dwell upon duties rather than rights, upon the great duties of patriotism and of national spirit. It is a fine thing to have a society that holds up such a standard of duty. I ask you to make a special effort to deal with Americanization, the fusing into one nation, a nation necessarily different from all other nations, of all who come to our shores. Pay heed to the three principal essentials: (1) the need of a common language, with a minimum amount of illiteracy; (2) the need of a common civil standard, similar ideals, beliefs, and customs symbolized by the oath of allegiance to America; and (3) the need of a high standard of living, of reasonable equality of opportunity and of social and industrial justice. In every great crisis in our history, in the Revolution and in the Civil War, and in the lesser crises, like the Spanish war, all factions and races have been forgotten in the common spirit of Americanism. Protestant and Catholic, men of English or of French, of Irish or of German, descent have joined with a single-minded purpose to secure for the country what only can be achieved by the resultant union of all patriotic citizens. You of this organization have done a great service by your insistence that citizens should pay heed first of all to their duties. Hitherto undue prominence has been given to the question of rights. Your organization is a splendid engine for giving to the stranger within our gates a high conception of American citizenship. . . .

### ONE AMERICA

All of us, no matter from what land our parents came, no matter in what way we may severally worship our Creator, must stand shoulder to shoulder in a united America for the elimination of race and religious prejudice. We must stand for a reign of equal justice to both big and small. We must insist on the maintenance of the American standard of living. We must stand for an adequate national control which shall secure a better training of our young men in time of peace, both for the work of peace and for the work of war. We must direct every national resource, material and spiritual, to the task not of shirking difficulties, but of training our people to overcome difficulties. Our aim must be, not to make life easy and soft, not to soften soul and body, but to fit us in virile fashion to do a great work for all mankind. This great work can only be done by a mighty democracy, with these qualities of soul, guided by those qualities of mind, which will both make it refuse to do injustice to any other nation, and also enable it to hold its own against aggression by any other nation. In our relations with the outside world, we must abhor

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<sup>1</sup>*Victor J. Dowling of the New York Supreme Court, a Democratic politician who was active in the Catholic Church and a member of the Knights of Columbus. He had spoken to the gathering before Roosevelt's address.*

wrongdoing, and disdain to commit it, and we must no less disdain the baseness of spirit which lamely submits to wrongdoing. Finally and most important of all, we must strive for the establishment within our own borders of that stern and lofty standard of personal and public neutrality which shall guarantee to each man his rights, and which shall insist in return upon the full performance by each man of his duties both to his neighbor and to the great nation whose flag must symbolize in the future as it has symbolized in the past the highest hopes of all mankind.

# Columbus Day in New York

JOSEPH TUSIANI

*Americanization and integration of immigrants to the United States, however desirable, is often difficult to accomplish. New immigrants may continue to feel uprooted; their new life in America may fall far short of the dreams they had of it; they may face discrimination and hostility from their new fellow Americans. In addition, political and other opportunists may cynically exploit their ethnic differences, encouraging them to remain identified as “hyphenated Americans.” In this moving but troubling poem, the Italian-born and -educated American poet and professor Joseph Tusiani (b. 1924) touches on these difficulties as he contemplates a Columbus Day parade in his adopted home city of New York. Reading slowly and carefully, pausing over every line and stanza, try to tease out the poet’s conflicting thoughts and feelings in relation to the immigrant experience, including his family’s and his own. How does he view the current celebration of Columbus Day (first two stanzas)? Why, despite this view, does he still take an interest in the parade? (“Gente mia” is Italian for “my people.”) Why does he see in the parade’s Columbus figure “the immigrant of every land,” and why does he see him as “unhappy in his happy paradise”? How does he characterize his own grandfather and his relation to New York—both on Columbus Day and on all the other days? Why does the poet say, at the end, that the immigrant who worked and died here “still lacks identity with his American dust”? Does the poet himself share this lack of identity with his new country? Or does he still find reasons to celebrate Columbus Day and the promise of immigration to America?*

Poor Joel Barlow, your Columbiad  
unwrote itself for lack of salty spray.  
Here is the epic of Columbus Day  
reduced to an innocuous parade

where mayoral dreamers grin in competition,  
endorsed (or almost) by the Governor,  
and politicians who are neither-nor  
turn on Italian smiles as cars’ ignition.

It does not matter. This gente mia,  
for I can see (is there a lump in my throat?)  
dear Christopher Columbus on a float  
called for all time to come Santa Maria.

How beautiful he beams! He has the eyes  
of my Grandfather, and his callous hand;  
he is the immigrant of every land  
unhappy in his happy paradise,

misunderstood in all this understanding  
gold of the Indian summer round his brow,  
unable to forget the Ocean now  
when he should but recall the joy of landing.

Look closer! There's Grandfather, come this year  
to represent Columbus on his float.  
A hero and the worthiest of note,  
he is the very one no crowd will cheer

tomorrow when the town goes back to work;  
but look at him today, today at last,  
in all the greatness of his humble past —  
the new Columbus conquering New York.

He brings the best credentials to be he—  
faith in his glance to win the fighting waves,  
dream of free people and despair of slaves  
to conquer a new land ultimately.

So here he is today, today at last,  
riding atop his bright Santa Maria,  
the navigator of the gente mia,  
light of my future, darkness of his past,

the one who comes to dig (for dig we must)  
for the high glory of the subway tracks,  
the immigrant who died and yet still lacks  
identity with his American dust.

# Remarks on Signing the Columbus Day Proclamation

RONALD REAGAN

*In proclaiming Columbus Day 1988, during his last year in office, President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) comments on the significance of Columbus and Columbus Day and looks forward to the 500th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to America. What does he mean by suggesting that "Columbus was the inventor of the American dream"? For what does Reagan celebrate immigrants to America? What, for Reagan, makes Columbus Day "an American holiday"? Assuming that the old story he tells at the end is not just a piece of throwaway entertainment but has some connection with the themes of the American dream and the American experiment, what might be its point? Is there something that we Americans must keep doing until we get it right?*

I hope that welcome was for Christopher Columbus. Secretary Carlucci, Secretary Verity, and distinguished international guests: We are here today for the signing of the Columbus Day proclamation. It's on this day we revisit the enduring lessons of his courage and leadership. Columbus, of course, has always held a proud place in our history not only for his voyage of exploration but for the spirit that he exemplified. He was a dreamer, a man of vision and courage, a man filled with hope for the future and with the determination to cast off for the unknown and sail into uncharted seas for the joy of finding whatever was there. Put it all together and you might say that Columbus was the inventor of the American dream.

Of course, we recognize others besides Columbus today. For just as Columbus, a son of Italy, inaugurated the age of European exploration in this hemisphere, so too, have millions of Americans of Italian descent contributed to the building of this nation of aspirations on this continent of hope. Over the years, millions have left that country for these shores, often carrying scarcely more than the prayers in their hearts and the determination in their souls. And as they've come, they have brought with them the richness of the heritage of their homeland, and given its richness and strength to our land.

Spain also claims Columbus and his achievements. And millions of Americans of Spanish heritage have also followed in his wake. Like immigrants from all over the world, they have lived the American dream and made it a reality for themselves and their children and the generations that followed.

Yes, Columbus Day is an American holiday, a day to celebrate not only an intrepid searcher but the dreams and opportunities that brought so many here after him and all that they and all immigrants have given to this land.

In the next few years Columbus' voyage will take on a heightened significance. The year 1992 will mark the 500th anniversary of his sailing. It is called the Quincentenary, and it may take another 500 years before I can say that easily. But it will be a time when Americans from all backgrounds look back on all that that voyage has meant to mankind

over the past half millennium. We're already getting ready for the big celebration. Three years ago, I appointed a commission, the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, to recommend ways for the Nation to mark this milestone. The Commission has submitted its report, which I have sent to Congress. Recommendations include educational programs to enhance the knowledge of history, geography, foreign languages, and international affairs among our young people. The Commission will be raising money from the private sector in order to plan and coordinate projects for the anniversary. The members of the Commission are with us today, so let me recognize them and say thank you to all of them for their efforts to make sure that the Quincentenary is a success.

Now, before I sign the proclamation, with all the celebrations we've been having over the last decade or so—the Revolution, the Constitution, now Columbus' voyage—I can't help being reminded of an old story. That's what happens when you reach my age. You can't ever help being reminded of old stories. And if you've heard me tell this one before, well, you're just going to have to hear me tell it again.

It's about a man who wanted to become an opera singer in the worst sort of way. And he became an actor in Hollywood. And he was an actor only until he could put together enough money to travel to Milan to study. And he studied in Italy for two years and then finally was rewarded with being invited to sing at La Scala, the very spiritual fountainhead of opera. They were doing *Pagliacci*. And he sang the beautiful aria "*Vesti la giubba*."<sup>1</sup>

And when he had finished singing, the applause from the orchestra seats and the galleries was so sustained and so strong that he had to repeat the aria as an encore. And again, the same sustained, loud applause; and again, he sang "*Vesti la giubba*." And this went on until finally he motioned for quiet. And he tried to tell them what this welcome meant to him on this, his first appearance in opera. But he said, "I've sung '*Vesti la giubba*' now nine times. My voice is gone. I cannot do it again." And a voice from the balcony said, "You'll do it till you get it right."

And now it's time for signing.

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<sup>1</sup> The tenor aria, "*Vesti la giubba*" ("Put on the costume"), from the 1892 opera by Ruggero Leoncavallo is sung (at the end of Act One) by the clown Pagliacci, who, despite having just learned of his wife's infidelity, must don his costume and play the clown, because the show must go on. You might wish to consider whether Reagan's choice of this aria has any significance for the theme of the American dream and American hopefulness in the face of tragedy.

## About the Cover



**Ivan Aivazovsky**  
*Ships of Columbus, 1880*

Ivan Aivazovsky (1817–1900) was a Russian painter who achieved great fame during his lifetime, being elected into the Academies of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Rome, Florence, Stuttgart, and Amsterdam. Born into a poor Armenian family in Crimea, as a child Aivazovsky earned an art scholarship to a gymnasium (secondary school) in Simferopol, and then entered into the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. Influenced by his childhood home near the Feodosia Bay, his artwork from

early on focused on seascapes and maritime scenes, and in the mid-1830s, after winning a gold medal for his works “Still Bay of Finland” and “The Roads Near Kronstadt,” he moved back to Crimea and his beloved Black Sea. In 1839, he joined a Navy expedition, where he witnessed sea battles—which he would later paint to much critical acclaim. For the next few years, he accompanied Russian research and science expeditions throughout Europe, the Americas, and Asia, drawing hundreds of sketches that he would later use to create full works of art. When he returned, he built a workshop near the Feodosia coast and there lived, painting seascapes and experimenting with other subjects, until his death at age eighty-two. He left behind over 6,000 full-sized pieces of art—some of the most famous of which include *The Roads Near Kronstadt* (1840), *Battle of Chesma* (1848), *The Ninth Wave* (1850), *A Strong Wind* (1856), and, of course, *Ships of Columbus* (1880).

The *Ships of Columbus* captures Columbus’s arrival to the New World, but, unlike many of the other painters of the moment, Aivazovsky chose to depict the expedition while it was still at sea. The stillness of the water and the hazy sunlight gives the painting a certain calmness, while the obscured view of the other ships and the row-boat heading for land provides a level of excitement and uncertainty as the explorers approach the unknown.

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