



# Christopher Columbus

For Grades 3-5

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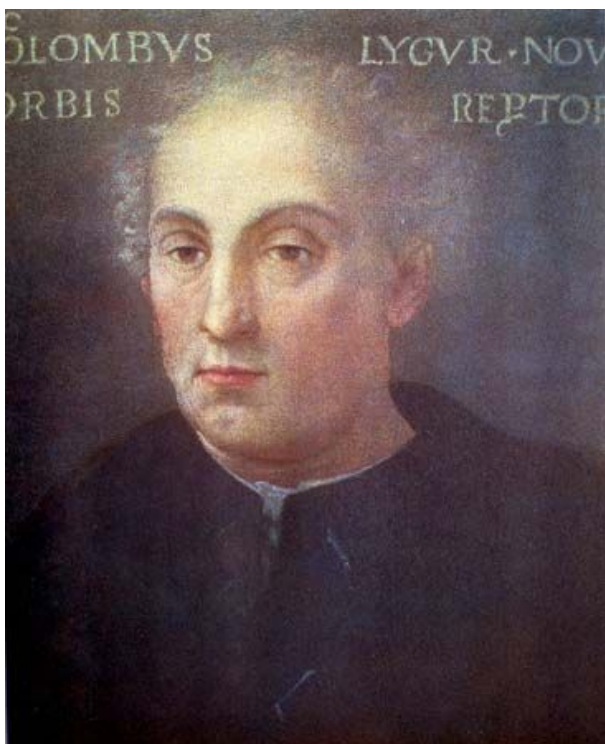
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## ARTICLE

# Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus was an explorer who is known for his voyages to the Americas more than 500 years ago. He opened the world of the Americas to his fellow Europeans. But in doing that, he brought great hardship to the Indigenous peoples who already lived there. They had lived there for thousands of years. Their lives were changed forever when many Europeans began to arrive and settle on their lands. The Indigenous peoples suffered from diseases brought by the Europeans. They were also enslaved and forced to work in mines and other places. Eventually Europeans took over their lands as well.



Christopher Columbus

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## Early Life

Cristoforo Colombo was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1451. He is known as Christopher Columbus to English-speaking people. He was the son of a weaver and had little schooling.

In about 1476, Columbus settled in Portugal. In the 1480s he started planning a voyage to discover a sea route to Asia. At the time, Europeans did not know about the Americas. They knew about Asia because earlier explorers had traveled there and brought back goods such as silk and spices. The Europeans were eager for Asian goods. However, these goods were costly because they had to be brought to Europe over a dangerous land route to the east. Many people thought that was the only way to reach Asia. Columbus and others knew that Earth was round. He thought that Asia could be reached by sailing to the west, across the Atlantic Ocean.



Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain supported Columbus's expeditions to the Americas.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (LC-DIG-pga-03133)



Christopher Columbus's fleet was made up of three ships: the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*.

Kean Collection/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Columbus asked the Portuguese king to pay for his voyage, but the king refused. Columbus then turned to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of the Spanish kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. In January 1492 they agreed to support the expedition. They provided three ships: the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa María*.

## First Voyage

On August 3, 1492, the ships set sail. On October 12, Columbus reached what are now the Bahamas, an island group east of Florida. He thought he had reached the East Indies in Asia. Columbus therefore called the islanders Indians.



Christopher Columbus and his crew landed in the Bahamas in October 1492.

*Architect of the Capitol*

Columbus reached Cuba on October 29. On December 6 he reached the island of Hispaniola. He built a fort on the island and left some men there. In January he returned to Spain. He took with him parrots, plants, gold, cloth, and several Indigenous people.

## Later Voyages

Ferdinand and Isabella were pleased with Columbus and his discoveries. They soon sent him back for a second trip. On his second voyage, from 1493 to 1496, Columbus had 17 ships and about 1,300 men. He found that the men he had left behind on Hispaniola had been killed. He then started a new colony and explored island coasts. He left his brothers in charge of the new colony when he returned to Spain.

On the third voyage, from 1498 to 1500, Columbus explored the Caribbean coast of South America. During this time, many people in the Hispaniola colony became angry with the rule of Columbus and his brothers. They complained to Spanish authorities. Columbus was eventually arrested and sent back to Spain in chains.

Upon his return, however, he was freed. He convinced Ferdinand and Isabella that he would find them treasures if he was allowed to return to the Americas. Columbus's last trip started in 1502. He explored the Central American coast but lost all four of his ships. He had to be rescued.

## Last Years

Columbus returned to Spain in November 1504. He died on May 20, 1506. Until his death he remained convinced that he had reached Asia.

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*Citation (MLA style):*

"Christopher Columbus." *Britannica LaunchPacks: Christopher Columbus*, Encyclopædia Britannica, 23 Mar. 2025. packs.eb.com. Accessed 3 May. 2025.

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# Exploring by Ship

## Vikings

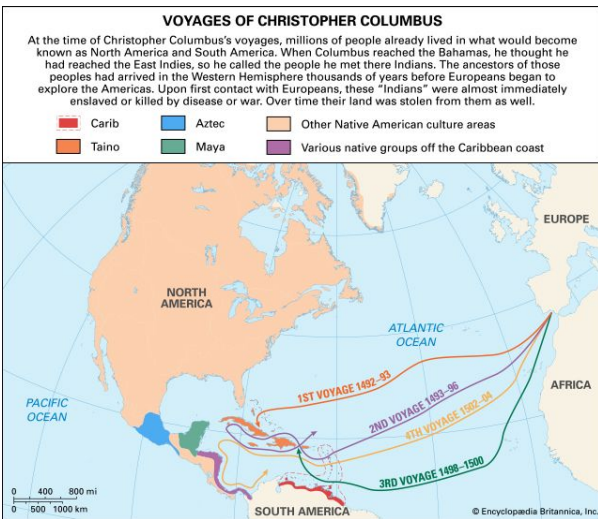


From the 800s to the 1000s, the Vikings traveled far from their homelands in Scandinavia. Some Vikings sailed as far west as North America.

*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

Columbus was probably not the first European to reach America. Vikings from northern Europe traveled to the coast of what is now Canada in about AD 1000. The Vikings did not stay long, however.

## Christopher Columbus



Christopher Columbus made four voyages from Europe to the Americas.

*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*



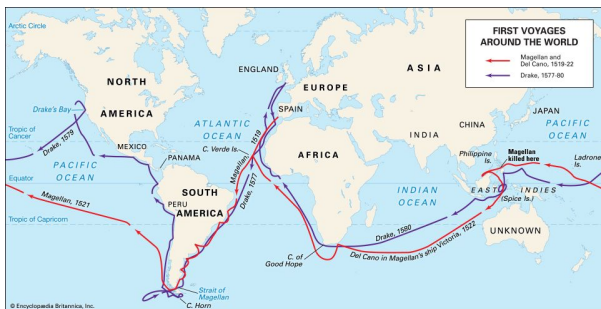
Italian explorer Christopher Columbus departed from Spain on August 3, 1492. He reached the Bahamas on October 12, 1492.

© Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

By the time of Columbus, Europeans had traveled to the East and explored many parts of Asia. Many other Europeans admired the cloths, spices, and medicines that the explorers brought back with them. They wanted more of these goods. But the voyage to Asia was long and expensive. Educated Europeans knew that the world was round. They thought that by sailing west, they could find a shorter route to Asia.

Between 1492 and 1504, Columbus made four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean. He reached Central and South America as well as the islands that are now called the West Indies. He never reached Asia, but his trips inspired many others to follow.

## Ferdinand Magellan



Ferdinand Magellan began the first voyage around the globe in 1519. Magellan was killed in the Philippines in 1521, so Juan Sebastián del Cano completed the trip. He led the expedition back to Spain in 1522.

*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

Ferdinand Magellan of Portugal did what Columbus had set out to do: he found a western sea route to Asia. He followed the South American coast southward from Brazil. In 1520 he passed around the tip of South America into the Pacific Ocean. Magellan died, but his crew kept sailing west. They went past the southern tip of Africa back to Spain. This was the first voyage around the world.

## Later Voyages



John Cabot landed in what is now Newfoundland in 1497. He was one of the first Europeans to land in North America.

*Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

In 1497, John Cabot, an Italian working for England, reached Newfoundland, in what is now Canada. In 1535, Jacques Cartier of France sailed from the Atlantic Ocean into Canada on the Saint Lawrence River.

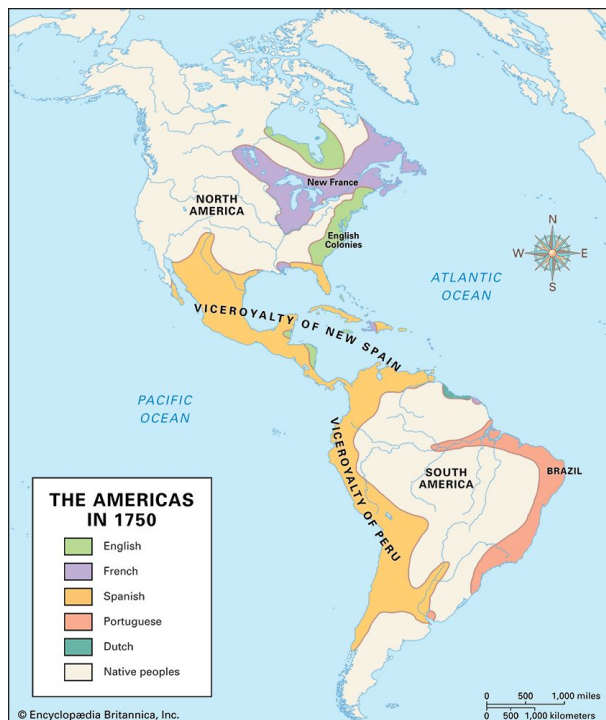


Hudson Bay in Canada and the Hudson River in the United States were named for the explorer Henry Hudson.

*Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

In 1610 the Englishman Henry Hudson sailed into the large bay in Canada that is now called Hudson Bay. Hudson was trying to find a water route through North America to the Pacific Ocean. People called this unknown route the Northwest Passage. The first explorer to find this passage was the Norwegian Roald Amundsen in 1906.

## Settling the Land



By 1750, five European powers had taken control of large areas of the Americas.

*Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

The riches of the Americas attracted many early settlers, or colonists. Some worked on their own, while others worked for European trading companies. Both groups wanted to make money selling valuable things back to Europe. Gold and silver were the most valuable products of South America and Mexico. Further to the north, the furs of animals were the most valuable products.

As Europeans began settling the land, they met many Native Americans. Their relations were often friendly. But Native Americans grew angry as Europeans took over more land. Wars between settlers and Native Americans killed thousands. Many more Native Americans died from smallpox and other European diseases.

Meanwhile, European settlers began to grow the crops that Native Americans grew, including corn, potatoes, pumpkins, squash, peanuts, and tobacco. Europeans also brought plants like sugarcane and coffee to the Americas and found that they grew well there. Some Europeans set up large farms and sold their crops back to Europe.

Some of the first European farmers captured Native Americans and forced them to work as enslaved people. Enslaved Africans eventually replaced them. The Portuguese brought in enslaved Africans starting in 1502. The English used enslaved Africans in their North American colonies beginning in 1619. When the English colonies became the United States, many of the new states continued to use enslaved people until the late 1800s.

### Spanish Colonies

The earliest Spanish settlements were in the West Indies. The Spanish set up Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola in 1496. It was the first capital of Spain's colonial empire, called New Spain.



Francisco Pizarro conquered what is now Peru and founded the city of Lima there.

*The New York Public Library Digital Collection (image no. b13072223)*

In 1513, Vasco de Balboa traveled across Central America. He became the first European to view the Pacific Ocean from the Americas. Six years later Hernán Cortés made his first attack on the Aztec empire in Mexico. In 1533, Francisco Pizarro took Peru away from the Inca people. The Spanish stole gold and silver from the native empires and shipped it back to Spain.

Spain's colonial empire became the biggest in the Americas. At its peak it included the largest Caribbean islands, all of Mexico and most of Central America, large sections of South America, Florida, and the southwestern quarter of what is now the United States.

## English Colonies

The important English colonies were on the Atlantic coast of North America. In 1607 merchants from the Virginia Company founded Jamestown. This was the first permanent English settlement in North America.



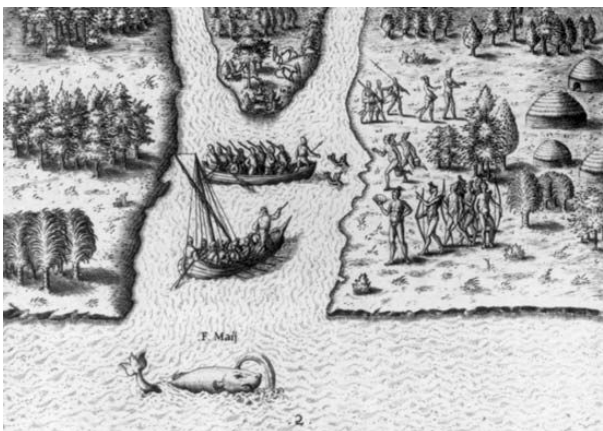
Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag Native Americans, visits with the English settlers called Pilgrims.

*Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

Other English settlers soon founded Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay Colony in New England. These colonies were unusual. The people who started them, called Puritans, had reasons besides making money. They wanted freedom to practice their own forms of Christianity. They could not find this freedom in Europe.

The English settled other parts of the Americas, too. Starting in 1670, the English traders of the Hudson's Bay Company set up trading posts in Canada. In the Caribbean Sea, England had settlements on several islands. The largest was Jamaica, which England seized from Spain in 1655. The English settled Belize in Central America in 1638. Scattered settlements in South America united to form British Guiana in 1831.

## French Colonies



In 1562, French explorer Jean Ribaut brought colonists from France to North America. They landed near Saint John's River in what is now Florida.

*Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

France's settlements in North America were known as New France. Most of these settlements were in what is now Canada. The French explored widely, made friends with Native Americans, and built forts and trading posts. The fur trade became the basis of New France's economy. In the late 1600s and early 1700s, the French captured many trading posts from the Hudson's Bay Company.



An illustration from 1698 depicts the last expedition of the French explorer Sieur de La Salle.

*Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Jan Van Vianen (neg. no. LC-USZ62-3283)*

In 1608, Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec as the first permanent French settlement. One French explorer, the Sieur de La Salle, floated down the Mississippi River in 1682 and claimed all the land it drained.

France also claimed islands in the Caribbean Sea, including what is now Haiti. In the mid-1600s, France founded French Guiana on the northeastern coast of South America.

France and England (which united with Scotland to form Great Britain in 1707) often fought over land in North America. One such fight became known as the French and Indian War. At the end of that war, in 1763, Great Britain won control of French Canada. It also won all other French territory east of the Mississippi River. France sold its territories farther west to the United States in 1803.

## Other Colonies

The Portuguese were among the earliest explorers in the Americas. However, the only colony they set up was Brazil, in South America.

In about 1626 the Dutch built a settlement in North America called New Amsterdam. The English took over New Amsterdam in 1664 and renamed it New York. The Dutch also set up colonies in the Caribbean.

Russia came to North America from the west. The Russians set up their first permanent settlement in Alaska in 1784. The Russians traded for furs as far south as California. In 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States.

## End of European Control

Most colonies in North, Central, and South America became independent between 1776 and 1826. Many islands, however, remained as colonies.

In 1823, President James Monroe of the United States issued a statement called the Monroe Doctrine. It declared that European countries were no longer welcome to set up colonies in the Americas.

*Citation (MLA style):*

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## ARTICLE

# Ferdinand and Isabella

Ferdinand and Isabella were the first king and queen of Spain. They were called the Catholic Monarchs because they strongly supported the Roman Catholic Church. They are also known for sending Christopher Columbus to explore the New World.



Ferdinand II and Isabella I were the first king and queen of a unified Spain.

PRISMA ARCHIVO/Alamy

## Background

Isabella was born on April 22, 1451. Ferdinand was born on March 10, 1452. At that time the land that is now Spain was divided into several kingdoms. Isabella's father was the king of Castile, a kingdom in central Spain. Ferdinand's father was the king of Aragon, in northeastern Spain. Princess Isabella married Prince Ferdinand in 1469.

Isabella I married Ferdinand II without royal consent, which led to a civil war.

Isabella became queen of Castile in 1474, but the king of Portugal also wanted to rule there. Isabella defeated him in war in 1479. In the same year Ferdinand became king of Aragon. Castile and Aragon were then joined under the rule of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. The combined kingdom was the beginning of Spain.

## Reign

Ferdinand and Isabella banned all religions other than Roman Catholicism. In 1478 they established a court that treated non-Catholics very harshly. The court was called the Spanish Inquisition. In 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella forced all Jews who would not become Catholics to leave Spain.

Ferdinand and Isabella also fought to drive Muslims from Spain. Muslims from North Africa had controlled much of the area since the 700s CE. Over hundreds of years Christians gradually took land back from the Muslims. In 1482 Ferdinand and Isabella went to war with Granada, the last Muslim kingdom in Spain. They defeated Granada in 1492. Spain was then a united Christian country.

Later in 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella supported Columbus' first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. The places where Columbus landed became colonies of Spain. Isabella died on November 26, 1504. Ferdinand died on January 23, 1516.

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### PRIMARY SOURCE

*Britannica Note:*

Columbus wrote this letter to the King and Queen of Spain in around 1494. In it he gives recommendations for how Spain should proceed with regard to colonization and the removal of gold.

## Letter to the King and Queen of Spain

Christopher Columbus

&nbsp;

Most High and Mighty Sovereigns,

In obedience to your Highnesses' commands, and with submission to superior judgment, I will say whatever occurs to me in reference to the colonization and commerce of the Island of Espanola, and of the other islands, both those already discovered and those that may be discovered hereafter.

In the first place, as regards the Island of Espanola: Inasmuch as the number of colonists who desire to go thither amounts to two thousand, owing to the land being safer and better for farming and trading, and because it will serve as a place to which they can return and from which they can carry on trade with the neighboring islands:

That in the said island there shall be founded three or four towns, situated in the most convenient places, and that the settlers who are there be assigned to the aforesaid places and towns.

That for the better and more speedy colonization of the said island, no one shall have liberty to collect gold in it except those who have taken out colonists' papers, and have built houses for their abode, in the town in which they are, that they may live united and in greater safety.

That each town shall have its alcalde [Mayor] ... and its notary public, as is the use and custom in Castile.

That there shall be a church, and parish priests or friars to administer the sacraments, to perform divine worship, and for the conversion of the Indians.

That none of the colonists shall go to seek gold without a license from the governor or alcalde of the town where he lives; and that he must first take oath to return to the place whence he sets out, for the purpose of registering faithfully all the gold he may have found, and to return once a month, or once a week, as the time may have been set for him, to render account and show the quantity of said gold; and that this shall be written down by the notary before the alcalde, or, if it seems better, that a friar or priest, deputed for the purpose, shall be also present

That all the gold thus brought in shall be smelted immediately, and stamped with some mark that shall distinguish each town; and that the portion which belongs to your Highnesses shall be weighed, and given and consigned to each alcalde in his own town, and registered by the above-mentioned priest or friar, so that it shall not pass through the hands of only one person, and there shall be no opportunity to conceal the truth.

That all gold that may be found without the mark of one of the said towns in the possession of any one who has once registered in accordance with the above order shall be taken as forfeited, and that the accuser shall have one portion of it and your Highnesses the other.

That one per centum of all the gold that may be found shall be set aside for building churches and adorning the same, and for the support of the priests or friars belonging to them; and, if it should be thought proper to pay any thing to the alcaldes or notaries for their services, or for ensuring the faithful performance of their duties, that this amount shall be sent to the governor or treasurer who may be appointed there by your Highnesses.

As regards the division of the gold, and the share that ought to be reserved for your Highnesses, this, in my opinion, must be left to the aforesaid governor and treasurer, because it will have to be greater or less according to the quantity of gold that may be found. Or, should it seem preferable, your Highnesses might, for the space of one year, take one half, and the collector the other, and a better arrangement for the division be made afterward.

That if the said alcaldes or notaries shall commit or be privy to any fraud, punishment shall be provided, and the same for the colonists who shall not have declared all the gold they have.

That in the said island there shall be a treasurer, with a clerk to assist him, who shall receive all the gold belonging to your Highnesses, and the alcaldes and notaries of the towns shall each keep a record of what they deliver to the said treasurer.

As, in the eagerness to get gold, every one will wish, naturally, to engage in its search in preference to any other employment, it seems to me that the privilege of going to look for gold ought to be withheld during some portion of each year, that there may be opportunity to have the other business necessary for the island performed.

In regard to the discovery of new countries, I think permission should be granted to all that wish to go, and more liberality used in the matter of the fifth, making the tax easier, in some fair way, in order that many may be disposed to go on voyages.

I will now give my opinion about ships going to the said Island of Espanola, and the order that should be maintained; and that is, that the said ships should only be allowed to discharge in one or two ports designated for the purpose, and should register there whatever cargo they bring or unload; and when the time for their departure comes, that they should sail from these same ports, and register all the cargo they take in, that nothing may be concealed.

In reference to the transportation of gold from the island to Castile, that all of it should be taken on board the ship, both that belonging to your Highnesses and the property of every one else; that it should all be placed in one chest with two locks, with their keys, and that the master of the vessel keep one key and some person selected by the governor and treasurer the other; that there should come with the gold, for a testimony, a list of all that has been put into the said chest, properly marked, so that each owner may receive his own; and that, for the faithful performance of this duty, if any gold whatsoever is found outside of the said chest in any way, be it little or much, it shall be forfeited to your Highnesses.

That all the ships that come from the said island shall be obliged to make their proper discharge in the port of Cadiz, and that no person shall disembark or other person be permitted to go on board until the ship has been visited by the person or persons deputed for that purpose, in the said city, by your Highnesses, to whom the master shall show all that he carries, and exhibit the manifest of all the cargo, it may be seen and examined if the said ship brings any thing hidden and not known at the time of lading.

That the chest in which the said gold has been carried shall be opened in the presence of the magistrates of the said city of Cadiz, and of the person deputed for that purpose by your Highnesses, and his own property be given to each owner. - I beg your Highnesses to hold me in your protection; and I remain, praying our Lord God for your Highnesses' lives and the increase of much greater States

&nbsp;

The End.

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IMAGE

## Columbus Day



Columbus Day commemorates the day that Christopher Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492.

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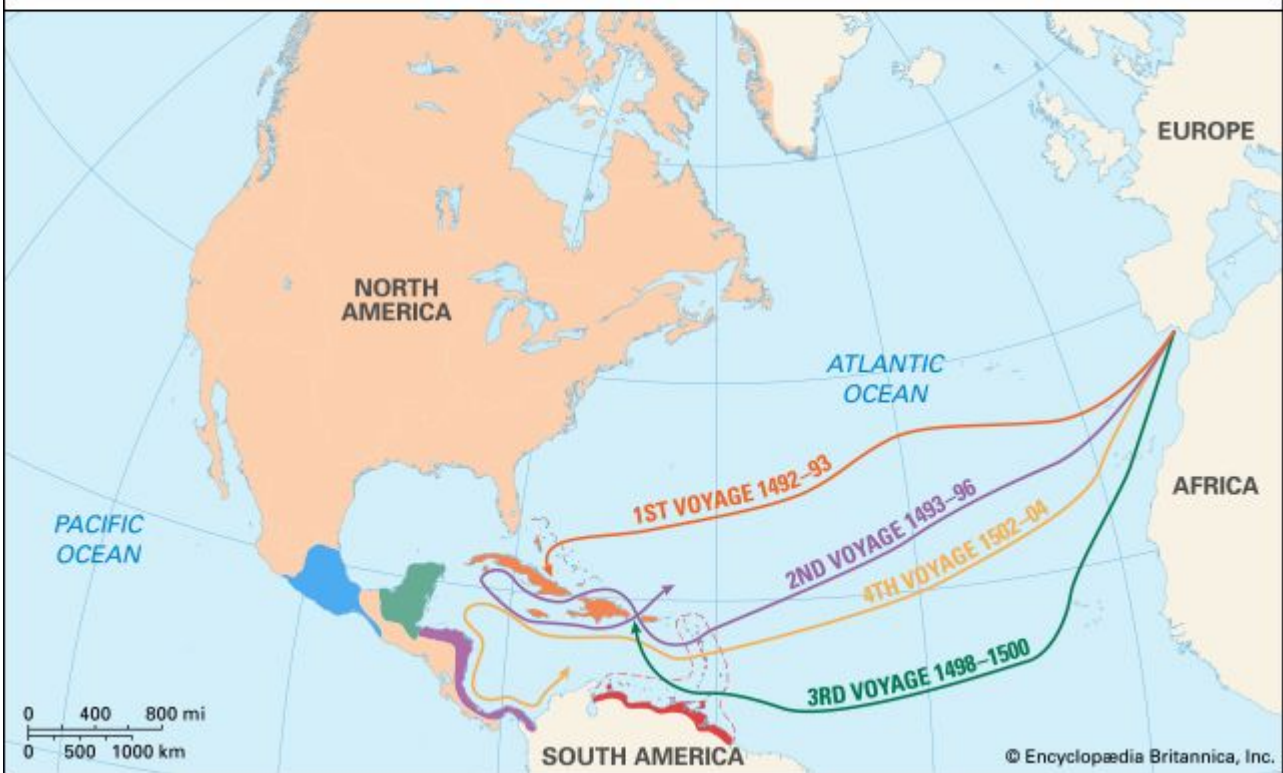


# Columbus, Christopher

## VOYAGES OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

At the time of Christopher Columbus's voyages, millions of people already lived in what would become known as North America and South America. When Columbus reached the Bahamas, he thought he had reached the East Indies, so he called the people he met there Indians. The ancestors of those peoples had arrived in the Western Hemisphere thousands of years before Europeans began to explore the Americas. Upon first contact with Europeans, these "Indians" were almost immediately enslaved or killed by disease or war. Over time their land was stolen from them as well.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|  Carib |  Aztec |  Other Native American culture areas           |
|  Taino |  Maya  |  Various native groups off the Caribbean coast |



The four voyages of Christopher Columbus

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