

Why We Should NOT Celebrate Columbus Day

- First of all, this whole idea that Columbus *discovered* the "New World" is ridiculous. His expedition did bring a whole new understanding of the world to Europeans, but the idea that a land already inhabited by anywhere from 90-110 million people didn't really count until white folks landed smacks some major Western bias. Academia today considers the whole notion absurd, yet the whole "discovery" myth still defines how we teach this history to kids.
- Even if we wanted to use the first European contact with the Americas as the basis for "discovery," Columbus doesn't even hold that distinction. Leif Erikson was blown off-course with an adventurous band of Vikings from settlements in Greenland to land in Newfoundland around the year 1000. Viking sagas speak of it and there's archeological evidence proving the Vikings beat Columbus by nearly five centuries.
- There's no doubt Columbus' voyages were groundbreaking for European exploration, but it's simply not true he discovered North America. He first landed on the island of Hispaniola, where Haiti and the Dominican Republic are today, and mostly explored Caribbean islands. Columbus' fourth voyage did sail along the western coast of Central America, but that's as close as he got to North America. Still, he never even thought he was in a land previously unknown to Europeans – Columbus went to his grave thinking he had found a Western route to Asia.
- Columbus and his crew brought along all kinds of European diseases that indigenous people in the Americas had never encountered and had no immunity to. Millions upon millions of people died of these diseases. Around 95 percent of the native population in the Americas died within the first years of European contact.
- Schoolchildren invariably learn about Columbus' voyages, but they aren't told about the explorer's bloody time as viceroy of the West Indies. He was racist and brutally oppressed the indigenous people he encountered. When his soldiers weren't cutting the inhabitants to pieces through warfare, they kidnapped native people and sold them into slavery. Columbus used torture and mutilation in an attempt to control the population. It's a legacy worth remembering, though not worthy of honoring.