**Christopher Columbus: Hero or Villain?**

**Document 1**

This extraordinary man, who was now about twenty-seven years of age, appears to have united in his character every trait, and to have possessed every tallant, requisite to form and execute the greatest enterprizes. He was early educated in all the useful sciences that were taught in that day. He had made great proficiency in geography, astronomy and drawing, as they were necessary to his favourite pursuit of navigation. He had now been a number of years in the service of the Portuguese, and had acquired all the experience that their voyages and discoveries could afford.

His courage and perseverance had been put to the severest test, and the exercise of every amiable and heroic virtue rendered him universally known and respected.

Such was the situation of Columbus, when he formed and thoroughly digested a plan, which, in its operation and consequences, unfolded to the view of mankind one half of the globe, diffused wealth and dignity over the other, and extended commerce and civilization through the whole.

Source: Joel Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus, 1787*

|  |
| --- |
| **Document 2**Saturday, 13 October. "At daybreak great multitudes of men came to the shore, all young and of fine shapes, very handsome; their hair not curled but straight and coarse like horse-hair, and all with foreheads and heads much broader than any people I had hitherto seen; their eyes were large and very beautiful; they were not black, but the color of the inhabitants of the Canaries, which is a very natural circumstance, they being in the same latitude with the island of Ferro in the Canaries. They were straight-limbed without exception, and not with prominent bellies but handsomely shaped. They came to the ship in canoes, made of a single trunk of a tree, wrought in a wonderful manner considering the country; some of them large enough to contain forty or forty-five men, others of different sizes down to those fitted to hold but a single person. They rowed with an oar like a baker's peel, and wonderfully swift. If they happen to upset, they all jump into the sea, and swim till they have righted their canoe and emptied it with the calabashes they carry with them. They came loaded with balls of cotton, parrots, javelins, and other things too numerous to mention; these they exchanged for whatever we chose to give them. I was very attentive to them, and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of this metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed large vessels of gold, and in great quantities….”**Source:** Christopher Columbus: Extracts from his Journal, 1492  |

**Document 3**

 “These islands are inhabited by Cannabils a wild, unconquered race which feeds on human flesh.  I would be right to call them anthropophagi.  They wage unceasing wars against gentle and timid Indians to supply flesh; this is their booty and is what they hunt.  They ravage, despoil, and terrorize the Indians ruthlessly.”

**Source:** Guillermo Coma, Italian Sailor, 1493, just after sighting land

**Document 4**

From this record it should be clear that, despite occasional lashing out at the Indians, Columbus was never their systematic oppressor, but simply unable to control the Spaniards on land who were supposed to be under his command. If he had only been willing to confine himself to what he did so superlatively well — sailing and exploring — few if any could have traduced his memory. But because he insisted on remaining governor of the lands he had discovered, his reputation was blackened by the atrocities that occurred during the period when he still had final responsibility for their governance. But it is Columbus the discoverer and explorer whom we truly celebrate and honor, not Columbus the civil governor. His personal influence on the ultimate fate of the Indians of the Caribbean was slight; in no significant way did he change what their history would have been without him, once the discovery was made.

Source: Honoring Christopher Columbus, Warren H. Carroll, 1992, Catholic Education Resource Center.

**After reading the documents above, was Columbus a hero or villain?**

**Are these sources reliable:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Document** | **Reliable? Why or why not?** |
| **Doc. 1** |  |
| **Doc. 2** |  |
| **Doc. 3** |  |
| **Doc. 4** |  |

**What types of reliable sources might help you argue the opposing side? Why would these sources be reliable?**