

I thought we might spend Monday, Wednesday and Friday of this week talking about some EXPLORERS, beginning today with CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS and AMERIGO VESPUCCI (pronounced 'Ves - pooch - ee').

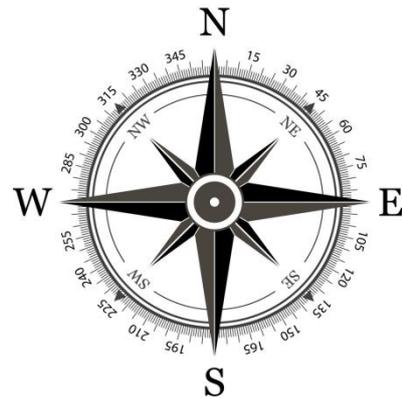
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS is sometimes said to have 'discovered' America - by which people mean the land mass now occupied by the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. But there are three points we should make about that.



The first is that Christopher Columbus only discovered America in the sense that people living in EUROPE weren't aware that there was such a thing as 'America' until Christopher Columbus set off from Portugal, heading west across the Atlantic Ocean, to see what he could find. There were plenty of people on the American landmass before Columbus turned up - in the North, NATIVE AMERICANS. In the centre and the south, various peoples like the AZTECS and the INCAS.

The second is that Columbus never landed on the land mass now occupied by the United States of America - on his first journey, he landed on CUBA, which is just east of what is now Florida. And on his other three journeys across the Atlantic Ocean, he ended up exploring areas in Central and South America.

The third is that Columbus never realised that his voyages had taken him to a whole new continent. You see, he was looking for an easy way to get to Asia, and the rich markets in India and China. The only way Europeans could get to Asia was to sail south, down, down, down the western edge of the continent of Africa, around the bottom of the African continent (which was called the 'Cape of Good Hope' by sailors as a joke because it was actually really dangerous to sail in those waters), and then in a north-easterly direction into the Indian Ocean. Columbus thought - 'Well, the world is round, so if instead of trying to go east to get to Asia, I instead sail west across the Atlantic, if I just keep on going, I should eventually sail all the way around the world and get to Asia with no problems.' So when he got to Cuba on his first journey, he thought he had arrived somewhere in India - and that's why some islands near Cuba are known to this day as the WEST INDIES. And it's also why the Native Americans who had lived for centuries in North America came to be known as INDIAN Americans (or RED INDIANS, though people don't use that term anymore) by the Europeans who followed in Columbus' footsteps and landed in North America and met the Native Americans who were living there.



But with those three points made, there is no doubt that 3 AUGUST 1492, the date when Columbus launched his three ships - the SANTA MARIA, the SANTA CLARA, and the PINTA - on his first journey across the Atlantic, is one of the most important dates in human

history. Opening up America for exploration and exploitation by people living in Europe had huge effects, both good and bad. These effects were mostly good for Europeans who had a whole new place to live in and explore, a place that contained huge riches that could be taken back across the Atlantic to Europe. But Columbus' voyage of discovery was all bad for those who were



already in America when the Europeans arrived - for the most part, they were killed or driven from their lands by the Europeans. Spoiler alert, but this final scene from the thrilling film APOCALYPTO (pronounced 'A - pok - a - lip - toe') shows the absolute shock those native peoples must have felt to suddenly see these strange people in their ships arriving on their shores: <https://youtu.be/vFHRPXRBywo?t=226>

It must have been the same kind of shock that we would have if alien spacecraft suddenly appeared in the skies above the earth, or if those skies were suddenly occupied by thousands and thousands of angels singing 'Glory to God in the highest! And peace to people of goodwill!' Our world would be changed forever.

Of course, the land mass that Columbus played a key role in helping Europeans discover was not known as 'America' at the time. That it is known as 'America' now is because of AMERIGO VESPUCCI, who sailed across the Atlantic in 1499 and 1498 to explore the area of south America that is now known as BRAZIL. Vespucci wrote some books about his voyages, claiming that the landmass he had explored didn't belong to Asia at all, but was a NEW WORLD. When people in Europe read Vespucci's books, they decided to name that new world 'America' after Vespucci. America = Amerigo, see? Not bad, eh? - having an entire continent named after you just because you did a couple of trips across the Atlantic, and wrote a couple of books about your trips, and were the first to claim that you had discovered a new continent. Columbus had to be content with having a country in South America named after him - Colombia - and the American capital, Washington, being located in the 'District of Columbia'.

