

Columbus

The Indictment:

You are charged with the mistreatment and murder of thousands, perhaps millions, of Taino Indians

Your first act in the lands you “discovered” was to take possession of another people’s territory in the name of an empire thousands of miles away.

From the very beginning of your time in the Indies you kidnapped Taino Indians. Even when they attempted to escape, making it clear that they wanted to leave, you refused to release them.

Your journal shows that your only wish in the Indies was to find gold. The only reason you showed any kindness to the Tainos on your first trip was so they would agree to show you the source of their gold.

On your second voyage to the Indies, you ordered your men to round up the Tainos and had over 500 shipped to Spain as slaves. You told your men to help themselves to the remaining Taino captives, which they did. This act alone killed several hundred Tainos.

In 1495 you started the policy of forcing Tainos, age 14 and older, to collect gold for you. Those who didn’t return every three months with the amount of gold you demanded were punished by having their hands chopped off.

You ordered your men to spread “terror” among Tainos when there was rumor of resistance.

The list goes on. When you arrived on Hispanolo there may have been as many as a million or even three million Tainos on the island. According to one Spanish priest, by 1542 there were 200 Tainos left. There is no one to blame but you.

You were Admiral, you were Viceroy, you were Governor of the island.



Expert Text 1

Excerpts from Christopher Columbus's journal

Friday, October 12, 1492

In order that they might feel a great friendship toward us, because I knew that they were a people to be delivered and converted to our holy faith by love rather than by force, I gave some of them some red caps and some glass beads, which they hung round their necks, and many other things of little value. At this they were greatly pleased and became so entirely our friends that it was a wonder to see them.

Afterwards they came swimming to the ships, where we were and brought us parrots and cotton thread in balls, and spears and many other things, and we exchanged them for other things, such as small glass beads and hawk's bells, which we gave to them. In fact, they took all and gave all, such as they had, with good will, but it seemed to me that they were a people very deficient in everything.

They all go naked as their mothers bore them and the women also, although I saw only one very young girl. And all those whom I did see were youths so that I did not see one who was over thirty years of age; they were very good faces. Their hair is coarse almost like the hair of a horse's tail and short; they wear their hair down over their eyebrows and except for a few strands back, they wear it long and almost never cut. Some of them are painted black and they are neither the color of the people of the Canaries, neither black nor white, some of them are painted white and some red, and some in any color that they find. Some of them paint their faces, some their whole bodies, some only the eyes and some only the nose.

They do not bear arms or know them, for I showed them swords and they took them by the blade and cut themselves through ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are certain reed, without iron, and some of these have a fish tooth at the end, while others are pointed in various ways.

They are all generally fairly tall, good looking and well proportioned. I saw some, who bore marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to them to ask how this came about, and they indicated to me that people came from other islands, which are near and wished to capture them and they defended themselves. And I believed and still believe that they come here from the mainland to take them as slaves.

They should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since I see that they very soon say all that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no creed. Our Lord willing, at the time of my departure, I will bring back six of them to Your Highnesses that they may learn to talk.

Saturday, October 13th.1492

They bought balls of spun cotton and parrots and spears and other trifles... and they gave all for anything that was given to them. And I was attentive and labored to know if they had gold, and I saw that some of them wore a small piece hanging from a hole they have in the nose, and from signs I was able to understand that, going to the south or going around the island to the south, there was a king who had large vessels of it and possessed much gold. I hurried to make them go there, and afterwards saw that they were not inclined for the journey.

I decided to wait until the afternoon of the following day, and after that to leave for the south-west, or, as many of them indicated to me, they said that there was a land to the south and to the southwest and to the northwest, and that those of the northwest often came to attack them. So I decided to go to the southwest, to seek gold and precious stones...

The people are very gentle, and since they long to possess something of ours and fear that nothing will be given to them unless they give something, when they have nothing, they take what they can and immediately throw themselves in the water and swim. But all they do possess, they give or anything which is given to them, so they exchange things for even pieces of broken dishes and bits of broken glass cups...

1) Is this a primary or secondary source? How do you know?

2) How does Christopher Columbus describe the Taino Native Americans? What does he say they look like?

3) What does Christopher Columbus want from the Tainos? What does he plan to do with six of them?
