

Tenacity of Columbus

After five centuries, Christopher Columbus – the man for whom today is designated a national holiday – remains a mysterious and controversial figure. He has been variously described as one of the greatest mariners in history, a visionary genius, a mystic, a national hero, a failed administrator, a naïve entrepreneur and a ruthless and greedy imperialist. Whatever assessments may apply, Columbus is widely believed to be the first European to sail across the Atlantic Ocean and successfully land on the American continent.



Columbus' enterprise to find a westward route to Asia grew out of the practical experience of a long and varied maritime career, as well as out of his considerable reading in geographical and theological literature. Born in 1451 in Genoa, Italy, he settled for a time in Portugal, where he tried unsuccessfully to enlist support for his project, before moving to Spain. After many difficulties, through a combination of good luck and persuasiveness, he gained the support of the Catholic monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand.

The widely published report of his voyage in 1492 made Columbus famous throughout Europe and secured for him the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and further royal patronage. Columbus, who never abandoned the belief that he had reached Asia, led three more expeditions to the Caribbean. But intrigue and his own administrative failings brought disappointment and political obscurity to his final years. He died on May 20, 1506.

While his life is a mixture of man and myth, some important principles are instructive to us:

1. He developed a dream for his life – that of discovery, the desire to find a westward route to Asia – and remained focused in its pursuit throughout his life.
2. His accomplishments, because of his dedication to that dream, far exceeded his own expectations and personal benefits, contributing to the good of generations that would follow him.
3. He was willing to take risks as he sought new worlds and new relationships.

Those are no small considerations as we mark this day that is named for a great explorer.

– Beecher Hunter