

## RESOURCES ON COLUMBUS

### HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

*COLUMBUS: HIS ENTERPRISE* by Hans Koning. Monthly Review Press, 1976, ISBN 0-85345, HS — Adult.

"Christopher Columbus was what a friend of mine calls 'a grade-school hero.' Every American child in second or third grade learns about the brave sailor, son of a Genoese weaver, who convinced the King and Queen of Spain to let him sail west. Fighting the elements and a crew who thought the earth was flat, he persisted, and with his three little ships discovered America. . . . Now this may all seem perfectly harmless. Why worry about a good adventure yarn, especially if its actors lived almost five hundred years ago? . . . It is time to take a more serious look at his Enterprise. For that is what he himself called it: "La Empresa de las Indias," the Enterprise of the Indies. It was the perfect name, for its motivating force was a search for profits" (excerpts from pp. 9-10). [ICL]

*COLUMBUS AND OTHER CANNIBALS* by Jack D. Forbes. Autonomedia, 1992, ISBN 0-936756-70-5, H — Adult.

The subtitle of this book is *THE WETIKO DISEASE OF EXPLOITATION, IMPERIALISM AND TERRORISM*. See pages 31-42 for a focus on Columbus and his legacy.

*THE CONQUEST OF PARADISE: CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND THE COLUMBIAN LEGACY* by Kirkpatrick Sale. Penguin Books(USA),Inc., c1990, ISBN 0-452-26669-6, A.

"Based on seven years of exhaustive research . . . [t]his highly original book offers a fascinating treatment of how history is perceived, how myths are manufactured, and how a reassessment of our history helps us understand our civilization today" (back cover). [FC]

*DANGEROUS MEMORIES: INVASION AND RESISTANCE SINCE 1492* by Renny Golden et al. Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, c1991, ISBN 0-9631026-0-5, HS —Adult.

"As a native woman active on many fronts of the modern native war, I have searched for the thing that's been so effective in keeping my people down. The one thing I've attributed the largest part of 'down' to is the 'white historical perspective.' I was exposed to that perspective during my entire educational experience, and today I constantly face both the nonnative and native reliance on that perspective. . . . You readers will no doubt find many of the following accounts of white history brutal. White men were brutal. If you bother, you can look around on this day and see these images. Embrace these stories nevertheless . . . The time of the comfort zone has passed. Changes must be brought home to bear fruit, or I fear for the future — a barren intellectual, cultural, and environmental wasteland" (Marilyn James [Arrow Lakes Band of Sinixt, Washington State] in the Foreword, p. 7). [ICL]

***LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME ABOUT CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS : WHAT YOUR HISTORY BOOKS GOT WRONG*** by James W. Loewen. The New Press, c1992, ISBN 13-978-1-56584-008-9, A (especially teachers).

This is a "must" book for reading in preparation for Columbus Day. Loewen generously shares the fruits of his in-depth research with the reader. As only one example, in Chapter 2, entitled "1493: The True Importance of Christopher Columbus," Loewen decries the standard explanation (in traditional high school history books) of European "domination of the world for the next 500 years" often in one vague, nearly circular pronouncement, such as the one in *THE AMERICAN TRADIITON*: "Interest in practical matters and the world outside Europe led to advances in shipbuilding and navigation" (pp. 32-33). He then documents in fine detail the real reasons for European expansion: advances in military technology, social technology (bureaucracy, mechanical printing and so on), ideological and theological justifications for amassing wealth, general belief in a proselytizing religion and, finally, later successes in "explorations" and exploitations of the lands, labor and lives of indigenous peoples, including the effects of European diseases on them.

As Howard Zinn is quoted on the cover: "A perfect antidote for the nonsense about Columbus conveyed to our children for generations." I agree! [ICL]

***MORNING GIRL*** by Michael Dorris (Modoc). Hyperion Books for Children, c1992, ISBN 1-56282-285-3, I, M (intermediate grades and middle school).

A beautiful, even poetic, story of a Taino girl who finds Columbus coming to the shores of her island home. Though it emphasizes nuclear family over just a few references to extended family and community, it is one of the rare books (if not the only book) on Columbus for children actually written by a Native author. [K-8]

***A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES*** by Howard Zinn. Harper & Row, c1980, ISBN 0-06-090792-4, HS — Adult.

"[T]his book will be skeptical of governments and their attempts, through politics and culture, to ensnare ordinary people in a giant web of nationhood pretending to a common interest. I will try not to overlook the cruelties that victims inflict on one another as they are jammed together in the boxcars of the system. I don't want to romanticize them. But I do remember (in rough paraphrase) a statement I once read: 'The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don't listen to it, you will never know what justice is.' . . . If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win. I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past's fugitive moments of compassion rather than in its solid centuries of warfare. . . . That, being as blunt as I can, is my approach to the history of the United States. The reader may as well know that before going on" (Howard Zinn in Chapter 1, "Columbus, the Indians and Human Progress," pp 10-11). [ICL]

**REDISCOVERING AMERICA: READINGS AND TEACHING GUIDE**, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, bilingual in Spanish and English, Arnaldo Ramos et al., eds., cOct. 1992, ISBN 1-878554-09-3, MS — Adult.

"Some people worry that by uncovering history we may 'stir things up.' Aren't we going to upset children, they ask, if they learn the truth about Columbus and all that followed? We believe things need stirring up. . . . In this process children may begin to lose Columbus and other 'explorers' and 'leaders' as heroes. But in exchange they may gain a much richer sense of their own history. Without this chance to see themselves in history, how can students possibly imagine a role for themselves in creating the future?" (from p. 6 of "Rediscovering America invites you to dis-cover or un-cover our history," an introduction and overview of contents). [ICL]

**RETHINKING COLUMBUS, THE NEXT 500 YEARS: RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE ARRIVAL OF COLUMBUS IN THE AMERICAS**, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson, eds. Rethinking Schools, c1998, ISBN 0-942961-20-X, MS — Adult.

"Columbus is dead but his legacy is not. In 1492, Columbus predicted, 'Considering the beauty of the land, it could not be but that there was gain to be got.' From the poisonous chemical dumps and mining projects that threaten groundwater, to oil spills on the coastal shorelines to the massive clearcutting of old-growth forests, Columbus' exploitative spirit lives on. Likewise the slave system Columbus introduced to this hemisphere was ultimately overthrown, but not the calculus that weighs human lives in terms of private profit — of the 'gain to be got'" (the editors in the Introduction "Why Rethink Columbus?," p. 11). [ICL]

**A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES** by Bartolome' de Las Casas. Penguin Group (USA), Inc., 1992, ISBN 0-140-44562-5, HS — ADULT.

"Bartolome' de Las Casa was the first and fiercest critic of Spanish colonialism in the New World. An early traveler to the Americas who sailed on one of Columbus's voyages, Las Casas was so horrified by the wholesale massacre he witnessed that he dedicated his life to protecting the native community. He wrote **A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES** in 1542, a shocking catalogue of mass slaughter, torture and slavery, which showed that the evangelizing mission of Columbus had descended under later conquistadors into genocide" (back cover). [ICL]

**VOICES OF A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES** by Howard Zinn and Arnold Arnove. Seven Stories Press, c2004, ISBN 1-58322-628-1, HS — Adult.

"I wanted, in writing people's history, to awaken a great consciousness of class conflict, racial injustice, sexual inequality, and national arrogance. But I also wanted to bring into the light the hidden resistance of the people against the power of the establishment: the

refusal of Native Americans to simply die and disappear; the rebellion of black people in the anti-slavery movement and in the more recent movement against racial segregation; the strikes carried out by working people to improve their lives. . . . To omit or to minimize these voices of resistance is to create the idea that power only rests with those who have the guns, who possess the wealth, who own the newspapers and television stations. I want to point out that people who seem to have no power, whether working people, people of color, or women — once they organize and protest and create movements — have a voice no government can suppress” (Howard Zinn in the Introduction, p. 28). [ICL]

A YOUNG PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, VOL. I: COLUMBUS TO THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR by Howard Zinn, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff. Seven Stories Press, c2007, ISBN-13: 978-1-58322-759-6, MS up.

“I am not worried about disillusioning young people by pointing to the flaws in the traditional heroes. We should be able to tell the truth about people whom we have been taught to look upon as heroes, but who really do not deserve that admiration. Why should we think it heroic to do as Columbus did, arrive in this hemisphere and carry on a rampage of violence, in order to find gold? . . . I prefer to see Bartolome’ de Las Casas as a hero, for exposing Columbus’s violent behavior against the Indians he encountered in the Bahamas” (Howard Zinn in the Introduction, p. x.). [ICL]

## OTHER RESOURCES RECOMMENDED

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS

*COLUMBUS DAY* by Vicki Liestman. Carolrhoda Books, c1991, ISBN 0-87614-559-4, EP (early primary).

This little book tries to "play on both teams," as it were — detailing Columbus and his trips in the traditional way of the great seaman and hero but also including the facts about his treatment of the Natives. Useful ONLY IF supplemented by the teacher with facts chronicled by Columbus himself about the destruction of the peoples and lands of the Caribbean. [ICL]

### MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL AND ADULT RESOURCES

*COLUMBUS AND THE WORLD AROUND HIM* by Milton Meltzer. Franklin Watts, c1990, ISBN 0-531-10899-6, M, H, A.

"The voyages of Columbus inaugurated a profound change in human history. They began the era of [destruction of indigenous people and cultures], slavery and colonialism, whose ravages still burden the earth. This book, coming on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first voyage, is not only the realistic story of what Columbus did long ago, but a contribution to our understanding of how America came to be what it is today" (paper cover flap). [ICL]

*THE COLUMBUS CONTROVERSY: CHALLENGING HOW HISTORY IS WRITTEN.*

Macmillan/McGraw School Publishing Company, c1992, H, A. This "Live Action" videotape (23 minutes) presents both sides of the controversy over Columbus' legacy in the so-called "New World," perspectives from both a Native and non-Native historian, and a look at a teacher in Portland, OR who guides his class in rethinking the myths and realities of the Columbus story. [SMM]

*COLUMBUS DAY* by Jimmie Durham (Cherokee), West End Press, c1983, ISBN 0-931122-30-9, M, H, A.

"This book features [Durham's] poems, prose, drawings, and speeches, giving an overview of his place in his society, world society, time, and history. The mystical drawings complement these hard-edged, lyric, bitter, humorous and always honest poems, which at their best are, as the writer intended, 'as eloquent as the sound of a rattlesnake'" (back cover). His poem "Columbus Day," pages 10-11, presents startling images of those who resisted Columbus in their living and dying. M, H, A. [NAL]

*DISCOVERING CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: HOW HISTORY IS INVENTED* by Kathy Pelta. Lerner Publications, c1991, ISBN 0-8225-4899-2, M, H, A.

I have misgivings about this book but decided to include it in this listing. It does help

students understand "the ideas and biases historians have brought to the subject and how historians have sorted the facts from the myths" (cover flap) but it brushes with very general strokes the facts about the treatment of the Natives, inhabitants of the islands for millennia, by himself and his men. This book, if used, needs A LOT of supplementation from the teacher, provided he or she has studied Native perspectives and their strong feelings about "the Columbus story." [SMM]

*THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS: HIS OWN ACCOUNT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY VOYAGE TO DISCOVER THE NEW WORLD [SIC].* Bonanza Books, c1960, ISBN 0-517-69699-1, M, H, A.

This is basically a translation of Columbus's journal by the first priest to be ordained in the "New World," Bishop Bartolome de las Casas. The book includes a letter written by Columbus as he was homeward bound. Unfortunately, only the first voyage (1492-93) is included in this volume. [FC]

*THE TRUTH ABOUT COLUMBUS: A SUBVERSIVELY TRUE POSTER BOOK FOR A DUBIOUS CELEBRATORY OCCASION* by James W. Loewen. The New Press, c1992, ISBN 1-56584-008-9, M, H, A.

This 8 ½ x 11 book has a poster in its middle which summarizes the books contents in a poster-way. Its contents are much like Loewen's major work, *LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME*, except that it is written in a slightly more colloquial style appropriate for, say, many middle school students. The last few pages (33-35) raise the usual abjections about why the truth about Columbus shouldn't be taught to children, with carefully crafted responses by the author. Middle school students should have no problem with these answers to these often-raised objections. Doubtless some, if not many, will agree with them. Finally, he adds a small bibliography and substantial index, inviting anyone who believes he has made a mistake or is wrong about something to write to him at the publisher. [SMM]

### HISTORICAL FICTION

*A COYOTE COLUMBUS STORY* by Thomas King (Cherokee). Greenwood Book, Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., c1992, ISBN 0-88899-155-X, M, H, A.

"It was Coyote who fixed up this world, you know. She is the one who did it. She made rainbows and flowers and clouds and rivers. And she made prune juice and afternoon naps and toe-nail polish and television commercials. Some of these things were pretty good, and some of these things were foolish. But what she loved to do best was to play ball' (first page of text). 'And some of these things were pretty awful. Like those Columbus people. Because Coyote was thinking about playing ball, you see, instead of concentrating on what she was creating. The illustrations, by Cree artist Kent Monkman, are, well, indescribable'" (OYATE catalog, p. 19). This is a classic example of Native humor. For lower grades the

story might need a little help for children to understand the point. Coyote, for a number of Native people, is, among other things, part divine, part human, a shape-shifter, a problem solver, a mistake-maker, a fixer-upper, a creator of good and bad things as in this story. Sometimes Native people treat with humor, sarcasm and ridicule those things which, in their histories, are most painful to remember. [K-8]

*THE CROWN OF COLUMBUS: A NOVEL* by Michael Dorris (Modoc) and Louise Erdrich. Harper Collins, c1991, ISBN 0-06-016079-9, A.

According to the book's cover flap, this is a "novel of discoveries . . . that chronicles the adventures of a pair of mismatched lovers and their quest for the truth about Christopher Columbus — and themselves. . . . [It] is a contemporary love story, a rollicking tale of adventure, a tender, funny examination of parenthood, and new beginnings." The late Michael Dorris (Modoc) and Louise Erdrich were a married couple and, each in his and her own right, authors of several bestsellers. [FC]

*THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS* by Gerald Vizenor (Ojibwe). Fire Keepers (Quality Paperback Book Club), c1996, A.

"First published in 1991 to coincide with the Columbian quincentenary, *THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS* turns history on its head with an astonishing reworking of the popular legend of Columbus' discovery of America. . . . Drawing on postmodern conventions and Native American folklore, Vizenor has crafted a provocative and funny alternative to the Columbus myth " (back cover). [NAL]

*THE INDIAN CHRONICLES* by Jose Barreiro (Taino). Arte Publica Press, c1993, ISBN 1-55885-067-8, A.

This is another "must read" book. It is a "novel of discovery, the American Indians' discovery of the ways of the Europeans. . . . As an acknowledged expert on American Indian history and culture, Jose Barreiro has maintained total accuracy in his exploration of the Taino cultures, of which he is a direct descendant. This forgotten chapter of history makes for fascinating and enlightening reading by providing an alternative view of the frequently mythologized encounter and the men who brought it about (back cover). Oren Lyons (Onondaga) states: "The flesh, passion and courage portrayed by Jose Barreiro's Native characters is a welcome relief from the usual stereotypical one-dimensional characterizations of Indians by Western writers" (back cover). Kirkpatrick Sale says: "This story is an extraordinary act of imagination, but firmly grounded on an extraordinary amount of scholarship. The two together make — literally *make* — history" I have to admit that many times in my reading of this novel I had to remind myself that it was fiction! [ICL]

Compiled by Ruth Gudinas of FULL CIRCLE: EDUCATION FOR A DIVERSE SOCIETY,  
N9136 Big Lake Rd. Gresham WI 54128-8955, 715-787-4427  
[rgudinas@ezwebtech.com](mailto:rgudinas@ezwebtech.com)

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