



The arrival of white Europeans in the Western Hemisphere, ignited by Christopher Columbus's accidental discovery of "new" land in 1492, brought on a clash of cultures commonly referred to as the "Columbian Exchange." It was the circa 1500 version of the natural occurrence in history any time two foreign cultures come into contact for the very first time. The process involves swap of tangible things (such as animals, crops, pottery, weapons, and so on), ideas and technology (such as farming know-how, military strategy, and so forth), and germs (bacteria and disease, in other words). The results are always mixed with an assortment of positive and negative, short-term and far-reaching, insignificant and catastrophic outcomes. [Within 50 years of Spanish arrival, the native population in Hispaniola \(present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti\) declined from one million to perhaps as few as 200.](#) Although unfortunate, the decimation was not intended genocide. While a good portion of the natives were victims of armed aggression and many others were enslaved, the tragic loss of life owing to infectious disease was unavoidable (unless, of course, there was never to be a meeting of peoples in Europe with peoples of the Americas). To think that Columbus somehow knowingly embraced a diabolical mission of extermination as the underlying objective of his trans-Atlantic voyage is simply skewed reasoning.