

# 3.4 The Untold Story of Christopher Columbus

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

columbus, people, taino, christopher columbus, americas, called, wrote, enslaved, haiti, land, thought, indigenous people, europe, taught, gold, episode, book, spain, important, left

## SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Carter Bradshaw

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, season three, episode four, The Untold Story of Christopher Columbus.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 00:15

Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 00:50

Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 11:22

Okay, to start off this episode, I wanted to invite Carter, my husband, here to share a story with you. I know that learning this history of the United States can be really jarring for everyone. Either it's really hard to hear what happened to your ancestors, or it's really hard to come to grips with what your ancestors did. So Carter is going to share a little bit about his transformation on this journey of coming to truly understand the untold story of Christopher Columbus.

### **Carter Bradshaw** 11:55

The story of Christopher Columbus that I was taught in elementary school is probably similar to what most of you listening heard growing up. Christopher Columbus was an explorer, he was determined to go on a trip of discovery and couldn't find a sponsor, finally found a sympathetic ear in Queen Isabella of Spain, and was sent on this voyage. I do remember the detail that a lot of people thought the earth was flat and they were scared they were gonna sail off the edge, and so Columbus has been given credit for having courage to take on that dangerous journey and, quote, unquote, "discover" the Americas. I was taught to admire and honor him as the one who paved the way for other Europeans to come to the Americas, including the Pilgrims, and basically giving him credit for laying the foundation of what would become the United States. So years later, when on social media, I began to see so much

pushback and people saying, "Hey, don't celebrate Christopher Columbus Day. His legacy is not one that we should be honoring," I had a strong reaction to that. I thought, "No, we should honor him. He's the one who basically started America in a roundabout way." Years ago, I even took to Facebook to voice these feelings, and I said, "Hey, everybody who's bashing on Christopher Columbus, chill out." I wrote a couple paragraphs just saying, "We don't know that he was really that terrible." Well, here's what I was missing, two things: 1) any speck of humility; and 2) I hadn't done one second of my own research. Basically, I thought, "Okay, there are some historians who say he's a good guy, and some who say he's a bad guy, and we can't possibly know which is true, so I'm just gonna accept the version that fits with what I'm comfortable with" But that was a really lazy and dishonest approach to the subject. If you really take the time to research as Jasmine has done, hours and hours of research for us, the historical record is pretty clear. So if you find yourself feeling uncomfortable with this untold story, just take a deep breath. You're going to be okay. I promise you'll get through it. Dig deep to find that humility that will help you accept that maybe what you were taught in third grade isn't the complete story. And pay attention to this research. As disturbing as this story is, the truth is valuable. Even when it's uncomfortable, maybe especially when it's uncomfortable, it's important for us to confront it. Understanding the true history of Christopher Columbus will cause you to lose your rose-colored vision of who he was. But what you will gain is a stronger grasp of the truth and ability to honestly reckon with the history of this country and a deeper appreciation for the history of our Native American brothers and sisters, and their strength in struggling against and surviving the atrocities committed by the European colonizers.

#### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 14:49

Alright, I hope you are ready for this untold story. A little overview of the journey that we are going to take today: we're going to start with some of the myths that we have heard, what you've been taught about Christopher Columbus, and then move into why he set sail. Why did he go on this expedition in the first place? Then what did he do once he got to the Americas? And then we'll talk about some ideas for what we should do with this information.

#### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 15:19

So let's start with a little bit of myth busting. There are so many myths. Basically, the whole story of Columbus is a myth. But one of the biggest ones is that Columbus thought that he went to India. There are journal entries that show that Columbus reached a new continent, and he knew that he was not in India. To add on to that, he never actually came to the United States. Almost all of his time was spent in the Bahamas. Another thing that we've been taught is that he died penniless—he was so poor, but in reality, he went on this trip in 1499, to Haiti, and he made the Indigenous people in Haiti mine for gold for him. And he was able to take a bunch of that gold back with him to Spain, and he was able to keep a lot of the gold that was mined by Indigenous enslaved people, and so he died very rich and was able to leave his family with a very large inheritance. You may have also learned that he went on this very treacherous journey with horrible storms, but in reality, his journal shows that he had smooth sailing, very calm seas, and really nice weather for going on a trip. One of the biggest myths, one of the myths that hit me the hardest, is that Columbus was not actually from Italy. So, so many of us have been taught that Christopher Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy, but in reality, they're not sure where he was from. Some historians think that he might have been from Portugal. Other historians think that he might have been from Spain. A lot of people believe that he was Jewish and lived in Spain, and in

Spain, they were really awful to the Jewish people and to the Muslims. And so people think that he may have been pressured into converting to Catholicism. But he was not Italian, and that will be really important when we talk a little bit later about where Columbus Day, the celebration of Columbus Day, comes from.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 17:33**

So these myths come from many different places. And one of the worst offenders is a book called "A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus," by Washington Irving. So this was a book that was published in 1828, a long, long time ago, and when it was published, it was extremely popular. Lots of people read it, and it is believed by historians today to be highly fictionalized, which means, basically, made up. For example, one of the myths that came directly from this book, that can be traced back to this book, specifically, is the idea that many people in the world thought that the earth was flat before Columbus went on his voyage. Well, that's not true. A lot of people, by the time Columbus set sail, a lot of people already knew that the earth was round. And Columbus really had nothing to do with that. But I bet if you asked a lot of adults today, a lot of people your age and my age, if they were taught this myth, they would say "Absolutely people thought that the Earth was flat, so they were really afraid to get on a ship with Columbus, but he was the one who knew it was round, and Woohoo, Columbus!" Nope. Most people already knew that the earth was round.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 18:52**

Now there is a myth, probably one of the most frustrating myths, that I want to do a deeper dive into. And that is the idea that Columbus discovered the Americas. Of course, you cannot discover a place that has millions of people already living in it. But the other thing is, there is evidence that shows that there were a lot of people who came to the Americas before Columbus did. For example, a lot of ancient Roman and Carthaginian—that just means from Carthage—a lot of Carthaginian coins have been found in many different parts of the Americas. And historians think that people from Africa and Asia also sailed to the Americas before Columbus. There was a group of people called the Phoenicians, and they were from Egypt, and they are believed to have set sail from Morocco or from West Africa. And they think that these Phoenicians landed in Mexico and 750 BCE. So BCE just means "Before the Common Era," or you might have heard BC, "Before Christ." BCE is just an updated way of saying BC. So 750 BCE, these Phoenicians arrived in Mexico. And they think this because there are these stone carvings of faces that were made by the Olmec. The Olmec people are one of the groups that is indigenous to Mexico. Now, Olmec was not their original name—I tried to look high and low and find what their original name is. But they wrote in hieroglyphics, and most of their writings have been lost. So they are called the Olmec, but we know that that's not what they called themselves. So the Olmec have these really giant—I mean, you can look up pictures of them, they are humongous—stone carvings. They would take these giant boulders and carve into the stone. And in this stone they carved different faces, and the faces that they have found match the features of people from West Africa. So the historians are like, "Well, they couldn't have just made up these people in their minds, they must have seen them." And that's why they think that West Africans had been to the Americas before Columbus. And another piece of evidence to support this claim is that when Columbus arrived in Haiti, he noticed that the people in Haiti, the Indigenous people of Haiti, were using these spears. And at the tip of their spear, the points were made of this combination of copper and gold and silver, and it's called guanine. When Columbus asked the Indigenous people where they got the spearheads, where they got

the guanine from, they said that they got it from Africans. And on the other side of that historians have found an alloy that is the exact same composition in West Africa. And in West Africa it's called guanine.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 21:59**

So why is this important? Because we need to get rid of the myth that Europeans were the only explorers, and that nobody else in the world had the idea to travel by ship to go find out what else was going on. There is an Afro-Caribbean scholar, and he visited a museum in Mexico that held some of these artifacts that shows that Africans had visited the Americas prior to Columbus. And after visiting the museum, he said, quote, "With this unique collection surrounding me, I had an eerie feeling that veils obscuring the past had been torn asunder. Somehow, upon leaving the museum, I suddenly felt that I could walk taller for the rest of my days." End quote. I feel like that quote is really important, because it is so critical for all of us to be able to see ourselves in history. And that's what he's saying. He's saying he felt something really deep, deep in his bones, when he found out that his people had been to the Americas. And we have this notion, we have been taught that a majority of the most important events in human history can be traced back to Europe, but the reality is that other people and other cultures just aren't included. The advances that were made by people of color around the world have not been included in what we were taught in school. And we're really missing out by leaving out these important stories. Not only did people from all over the world travel to the Americas, but there is proof to show that Native Americans also traveled across the sea. Millennia ago, they crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Canada to Scotland. An Indigenous ship was shipwrecked in Holland around 60 BCE. So long before Columbus, long before lots of different explorers, the Indigenous people were traveling too.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 23:56**

Alright, so now that you have an understanding of some of the myths that we have been taught, I think you'll be able to make space in your mind for the real story, the untold story. So let's get into it. Why did Columbus decide to get on a ship and sail across the sea? There are three main reasons, and this comes directly from that book that I was telling you about, "Lies My Teacher Told Me." So there are three really concrete reasons about why Columbus's conquest was significant, even though there were a lot of people who had been to the Americas before him. The first is because Europeans were developing military weapons at an exponential rate. So it said in the book, quote, "Except for the invention of agriculture, this was probably the most consequential development in human history." End quote. So this is talking about the military technology. Europe was involved in a lot of wars, so they were caught up in an arms race. They were always trying to get more and more and more weapons, because they were always fighting. More and more and more people trying to take what they had. The second reason is because there were new forms of social technology that were being really widespread. There was bureaucracy, double-entry bookkeeping, and mechanical printing. So when it comes to bureaucracy and bookkeeping, these were two things that help people manage enterprises from far away. So you're thinking about the Europeans, the weaponry they're building because they want to go and conquer and take people's land. Well, the Europeans decided they want to do this, but they have to also control the people and control the land, control the resources from all the way in Europe. So they developed bureaucracy, and they developed this system of bookkeeping so that they could keep track of everything that was going on across the world among their many conquests.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 25:50**

The second reason is the printing press. So the printing press was invented in 1440. And it was commercialized by 1450. So by 1450, the printing press is going all over the place and printing everything you need to know, right? So this meant that the news about what Columbus was doing in America traveled across Europe much faster. So even though lots of people had travelled to the Americas before, they would tell the people that they knew and maybe it was spread around their town. But it wasn't going all over Europe. Now that there was a printing press, they were writing down what he was seeing and what he was doing. Everybody was reading it and thinking, "Oh, I got to get a piece of that, too."

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 26:31**

The third reason is because gaining wealth and dominating other people was extremely valued in Europe. So they thought that if you were rich, and you were able to subjugate others, you would have respect and praise on Earth, but you would also be able to earn your salvation in the afterlife by doing these things. In a letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, Columbus wrote, quote, "Gold is a wonderful thing. Whoever owns it is Lord of all he wants. With gold it is even possible for souls to open the way to paradise." End quote. So Columbus and many others literally believed that if you got rich, you could get into heaven. Which, I mean...if you've read the Bible that is completely backwards. It literally says that rich men will have a harder time getting into heaven, but I guess they weren't really reading it to find out what Jesus thought. I don't know.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 27:33**

Anyway, so we're taught that Columbus, his main motivation was exploration, right? We're taught that he was so curious, and he wanted to go and see the world. But obviously, that was not the case. His expedition was called "la empresa," that means "the enterprise." It was literally called "my business venture." He knew that he was going out to make himself rich and to dominate over others. He was in the business of exploiting people. He was in the business of taking what wasn't his. Once he arrived in the Americas. He wrote back immediately to Spain about how the people are perfect for enslaving. And this shows that their goal was not exploration or trade, but actually ruling over others and taking what they had.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 28:24**

So who were these people? Who were the people that Columbus, enslaved, raped, tortured and killed? They were called the Taino people. They were indigenous to Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, and they are a member of the Arawak family of tribes. Arawak is like an umbrella term. So Arawak is the umbrella, and then there are lots of tribes underneath them. And Taino is one of those tribes. And during my research, I found that a lot of historians use Arawak and Taino very interchangeably. I think it's important to say Taino specifically, because we know which tribe it was. So whenever you can be as specific as possible, just do it. It's like if you know someone is Black, don't say they're a person of color, just say that they're Black. So I'm going to use Taino instead of Arawak, but know that you might also run into it as being Arawak.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 29:20**

Okay, so what happened once Columbus arrived? We all know the little elementary school thing, "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." I think there needs to be a lot more to that saying, about how we raped and pillaged, but that's what we're about to get into. So Columbus lands in Haiti on October 14 of 1492, and he meets the Taino people, and he immediately starts to write a description of them in his journal. And after he writes down this description, he talks in his journal about how he tried to figure out if they had any gold. So he's like, "Hi, how are you? Where is your gold?" On his third day in the Americas, he travels around the island looking for different villages. And then after meeting the people for a little while he writes in his journal quote, "I could subjugate the whole of them with 50 men and govern them as I pleased." End quote. So after that he travels for three months around the different islands and gets to know the Taino people. And this is what he has to say about them in his journal. He starts off by talking about their homes, he says, "Inside they were well swept and clean and their furnishing very well arranged. All were made of very beautiful palm branches." Then he talks about how there were wild birds tamed in their houses. "There were wonderful outfits of nets and hooks and fishing tackle," Columbus writes, "and it was a delight to see the Taino canoes." He says that they were, quote, "very beautiful and carved. It was a pleasure to see its workmanship, and beauty." End quote. He ends by describing the people as, quote, "the best people in the world, and beyond all the mildest of people, so full of love and without greed. They love their neighbors as themselves, and they have the softest and gentlest of voices in the world. And they're always smiling." End quote.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 31:26**

You would think that after meeting these amazing people who love their neighbors as themselves and have the most beautiful smiles and gentlest voices that he would have tried to befriend them, but instead, he kidnaps 10 to 25 Taino people, and he takes them back to Spain. Now, as they're going back to Spain, a bunch of them die of sickness, and only seven or eight of them survive the trip. When he gets back to Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, the king and queen of Spain, see he's brought with him these Indigenous and enslaved Taino people, and they hear of the beautiful lands and the amazing opportunities for gold, and they decide, okay, "He needs to go back and conquer this."

**Jasmine Bradshaw 32:13**

This is where we come to something that's called the Doctrine of Discovery. Now, that might sound familiar, but I was like, wait, what is that? The Doctrine of Discovery is a doctrine that was issued by Pope Alexander VI. And in this Doctrine of Discovery it says that anyone who is not Christian is not considered to be a full human. So if you encounter land that has people on it, but those people aren't Christian, you can take the land because it's considered empty. If you're not Christian, you're not human, and therefore you don't exist at all. I don't know how that would square with God in any way, but that is what they taught people, this horrible Doctrine of Discovery. Now, the thing about it is, the Doctrine of Discovery came in...wait for it...1493. Very convenient, if I do say so myself. Obviously, the Europeans were trying to absolve any guilt that they might have been feeling for what they knew they were about to do. And they were really good at pretending like they were doing this in the name of the Lord.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 33:23**

So when Spanish colonizers arrived in a place that they were wanting to conquer, they would read something that's called their "requirement." And I was able to find an example of what the requirement

sounded like. It says, quote, "I implore you to recognize the church as a lady, and in the name of the Pope, take the king as Lord of this land and obey his mandates. If you do not do it, I tell you that with the help of God, I will enter powerfully against you. I will make war everywhere and every way that I can. I will subject you to the yoke and obedience to the church, and to His Majesty. I will take your women and children and make them slaves. The deaths and injuries that you receive from here on will be your own fault, and not that of His Majesty, nor of the gentlemen that accompany me." End quote. So what they're saying here is "Fair warning! We are going to kill you, we're going to rape you. We're going to take your stuff, and we're going to do it all in the name of God." And here's the thing: you guys, he said this in Spanish. Do you think the Taino people spoke Spanish? No, of course not. They spoke their own Indigenous language. So when the Spanish people would come and say this requirement, they would say it in a language that the people who they were about to conquer didn't even understand. Ay ay ay, ay ay ay. You know what, I was going to edit that out, but no. This is how I actually feel about it. It is how I really feel, because it is so beyond ridiculous, and we haven't even gotten to the most heinous part of it yet, so buckle up.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 35:07

Okay. Now I want to talk to you about the resistance of the Indigenous people. So when Columbus got there, he and his men did everything they could to conquer the native people. They demanded that the people give them whatever they had, including their women and their girls. They raped women, they raped girls, all the time. And the Indigenous people were like, "No, we're not going to stand for this." So if the natives would try to resist, they would cut off parts of their body. They would cut off their ears, they would cut off their nose, and then they would send them back to their villages as an example to the rest of the people. In an article called "Whose History Matters: Students Can Name Columbus but Most Have Never Heard of the Taino People," Bill Bigelow writes, quote, "It was a general rule among Spaniards to be cruel. Not just cruel, but extraordinarily cruel, so that harsh and bitter treatment would prevent Indians as daring to think of themselves as human beings, or having a minute to think at all. So they would cut an Indian's hands and leave them dangling by a shred of skin. And they would send him saying, 'Go now spread the news to your chiefs.' They would test their swords, and their manly strength on captured Indians and placed bets on the slicing off of heads, or the cutting of bodies in half by one blow, they burned or hanged captured chiefs." End quote.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 36:43

So it's important to note, and I have said this a few different times, the first time I said it was when I talked in episode three, about how to talk to your children about slavery. It is important to note that people have to be cruel if the people are resisting. If the people are listening to you and doing everything that you're saying, you don't have to slice them in half with the sword, because they're doing what you're telling them to do. But if they are strong people who are sure of themselves and their value, they are going to resist, and that is what the native people did. That is what the Taino people did. They resisted strategically, and they did it before Columbus even came back from Spain for the second time.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw** 37:24

So after he kidnapped those 10 to 25 people and took them to Spain, he left 39 Spaniards and a force called "La Navidad," and he thought that the Spaniards could keep the Taino people in line because, like he wrote in his journal, he thought that they were super timid. And he also wrote down in his

journal, quote, "As soon as they see that they are safe, and have laid aside all fear, they are very simple and honest, and exceedingly liberal with all they have, none of them refusing anything he may possess when he is asked for it. But on the contrary, inviting us to ask them, they exhibit great love toward all others in preference to themselves. They also give objects of great value for trifles, and content themselves with very little or nothing in return. I did not find, as some of us had expected, any cannibals among them, but on the contrary, men of great deference and kindness." End quote. So after Columbus left to go back to Spain, the Taino killed all of the Spaniards and burned down La Navidad. I'm sure they had a feeling of what was to come and that feeling was probably terrible.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 38:39**

So Columbus leaves Spain for the second time to go to Haiti. And on his ship he is outfitted with everything he would need to conquer these people. King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella sent him back with 17 ships, 1200 to 1500 men, cannons, crossbows, guns, cavalry, and attack dogs. Once Columbus returns, the Taino people really get into this strategic resistance. And this resistance is referred to as the first anti-colonial guerrilla war in the Americas. So they would do things like refuse to plant the food that they were told they had to plant, and they would even rip up crops that had already been planted so that the Spanish would starve. They would also use their weapons, but they couldn't withstand the guns, cannons, and hunting dogs that Columbus brought with him. Kirkpatrick Sale wrote this book, it's called "The Conquest of Paradise," and he details a particularly awful scene from history. He talks about how in March of 1495, the Tainos were resisting Columbus and he attacked them. He says, quote, "The soldiers mowed down dozens with point blank volleys, loosed the dogs to rip open limbs and bellies, chased fleeing Indians into the brush to skewer them on sword and pike." End quote. When Columbus's son, Fernando, was writing about this attack, he says that they, quote, "With God's aid soon gained a complete victory, killing many Indians and capturing others who were also killed." End quote.

### **Jasmine Bradshaw 40:27**

So I don't know about you. But I do not remember learning in school about all of the weaponry that Columbus brought with him on this excursion. And I think that there's a really important reason that we unpack this. So in "Lies My Teacher Told Me," James Loewen makes a really important point. He talks about why our textbooks don't mention the arms as one of the factors for domination. Why is it that we are told that Columbus was able to dominate these people, but we aren't told how or why? And he says it's because it's reflecting badly on us, obviously. Who are the books written for? And who are they written by? Well, they're written for European descendants. So if it makes your European descendants look bad, they're going to leave it out. He talks about the fact that these things are left out so that we will come to believe that Europe's domination of the world is something that was natural, like it was a natural progression of what was supposed to happen, that Europe was supposed to be in charge of the whole world, and supposed to have the most power and the most wealth and the most land. By not explaining this, students and adults alike are left to come to this conclusion that well, "Why do the Europeans control everything? Oh, it must be because they're better than us. It must be because they're smarter than everybody else." Loewen says that when you don't teach the real reasons behind colonization, when you don't teach that Europe was more focused on building weaponry because Europe was more focused on killing people to take their land, then you are left to the conclusion that dominating other people is natural, that it's totally natural, and okay, for one group to dominate another.



It's not that Indigenous people were not as smart as Europeans. It's that their culture was not focused on producing weaponry. They weren't thinking all the time about taking other people's stuff and killing people to take their land and to take their gold. They didn't need to have weapons that killed people as fast as possible, because they didn't value conquering others in the same way that the Europeans did.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 42:45**

Obviously, it will not come as a shock to you by now that Columbus was an enslaver. There is a British journalist who wrote over 30 books on African history. His name is Basil Davidson, and he says not only did Columbus begin the transatlantic slave trade, he was also responsible for bringing enslaved Africans to the Americas. So a lot of times when we think of the slave trade, we think just of Africans coming to America, but it actually started much before then with the Indigenous people. So Native Americans were taken all over, especially to Europe, as enslaved people. And that was the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. That was the beginning of bringing enslaved people across the Atlantic Ocean—it started with Indigenous people and then moved on to Africans. And Columbus is responsible for both of those things.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 43:38**

So in 1501, the king and the queen issue the first license to send enslaved Africans to the Caribbean. So this was a license for Christopher Columbus to take Africans, kidnap them, torture them, and put them on ships and sail them to the Caribbean to be enslaved. And as many of you know, my ancestors are from the Caribbean. And I say that because my ancestors are actually from Africa, but I don't know where they're from, because they were taken on the slave ships. They were enslaved. So Columbus started that by bringing enslaved Africans to the Caribbean. And this British journalist, Basil Davidson, he refers to Columbus as the father of the slave trade. Here is an example of what enslavement looked like in Haiti. So in 1495, the Spanish who were in Haiti did a slave raid. This is where they rounded up 1500 of the Taino people, and they chose 500 of the quote, unquote "best specimens," and they sent those to Spain. So of those 500 people who were sent to Spain, 200 of them died on the trip over. Then another 500 of them were chosen for the Spaniards who lived in Haiti. One of the Spanish eyewitnesses of the event, said, quote, "Whoever wanted them could take as many as he pleased." And another Spanish eyewitness said, quote, "Among them were many women who had infants at the breast, since they were afraid we would turn to catch them again, left their infants anywhere on the ground and started to flee like desperate people, some fled so far that they were removed from our settlements of Isabella, that they were removed for seven or eight days beyond mountains, across huge rivers. Wherefore, from now on, scarcely any will be had." End, quote, I need you to sit with that for a minute, that a mother would leave her baby on the ground, because of the fear that she felt. I cannot imagine what this must have been like. The terror and the vitriol that was leveled against them is despicable. And they did not do this because they were bad mothers. They did this because of what was being done to them. You guys, we cannot continue to celebrate this man in any way.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 46:31**

Okay, so in 1496, Columbus writes back to Spain to Ferdinand and Isabella, and he says, quote, "In the name of the Holy Trinity, we can send from here all the slaves and Brazil wood which could be sold. Although they die now, they will not always die. The Negroes and Canary Islanders died at first." End quote, so Columbus is basically saying, people are dying because of the horrible conditions that they're

living in, because of the horrible work that we're putting them through, because of the torture, but it's okay They will get used to it. And I need you to be able to make the connection between this thought and this thing that Columbus said, and the stereotypes that we see today about people of color. We have been taught, whether explicitly or implicitly, that people of color, Black people especially, do not feel pain in the same way that white people do. There are so many studies out there that show that even doctors have this internal implicit bias that tells them that their Black patients don't feel as much pain as other people. That's why when Black mothers are in labor, and they're saying they're in pain, the doctors are not believing them, because they have this bias that tells them that we can withstand more pain than other people, that we have been conditioned to be immune to pain in a way that white people have not been.

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 48:04

So after this came what some historians call a Reign of Terror. This Spanish hunted the Native Americans, and they fed them to their dogs. Columbus thought that there was gold on the island and he couldn't find it. He was like, "Where is this gold? I know that there's gold." So he set up this system called the tribute system. And what he did was tell the Taino people that they had to bring a certain amount of gold to him every month and pay him. If they lived by the gold mines, they had to bring gold. But if they live somewhere else, then they had to bring cotton. So if you're not by the gold mines, you are picking cotton, and you're bringing that to pay with. And if they paid then they would get a piece of brass or a piece of copper to wear around their neck. And this was the symbol that they had paid. If they didn't pay, then the Spanish would cut off their hands. And the tribute system, it failed because there wasn't enough gold to sustain it. Columbus is saying "Where's the gold? Where's the gold?" and they're like, "We don't have gold. We don't have as much gold as you think we have. We have given you all the gold," but he didn't believe them. So we continue with a tribute system until he had cut off a ton of people's hands. And he realized finally after cutting off all these people's hands that "Oh, maybe they were telling the truth and they don't actually have any gold."

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 49:30

After the tribute system failed, Columbus set up a new system called "encomienda." And within this system, there were colonizers that were assigned to certain villages, and what they did was they would make the Taino people mine gold. They would make them plant and harvest Spanish crops, and they would make them carry them everywhere they went. So Spanish people did not walk around. They were carried by the Taino. It worked so well, this encomienda system worked really well, so it was taken to many different places. They took it to Mexico, they took it to Peru, and to Florida. And it caused a major decline in population, because the conditions were so bad that people were killing themselves. Pedro de Cordoba wrote a letter to King Ferdinand in 1517. And he described what was happening in Haiti under the rule of Christopher Columbus. He said, quote, "As a result of the sufferings and hard labor they endured, the Indians choose and have chosen suicide. Occasionally 100 have committed mass suicide. The women, exhausted by labor, have shunned conception and childbirth. Many when pregnant have taken something to abort and have aborted. Others after delivery have killed their children with their own hands so as not to leave them in such oppressive slavery." End quote.

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 51:04

Okay, I don't know if you've ever read the book "Beloved" by Toni Morrison. If you haven't, I'm going to do a little bit of a spoiler. So here's your spoiler alert. But in the book "Beloved" by Toni Morrison, she writes of a woman who is being chased down. And as they're getting close, she knows she's about to be caught, and she has a little baby. And she takes the baby, and she kills the baby, because she does not want the baby to have to suffer in the same way that she has. She does not want the baby to have to endure what it's like to be enslaved. And when Carter was telling me about this book, I couldn't read it, it was too much for me. But when he was telling me about it, I thought, "Oh, my gosh, I know that this is a book, but I also know that this actually happened." And then a couple months later, I was reading about Columbus and I came across this quote about how the women would actually kill their own children so that their children did not have to endure this suffering. I can only imagine how much pain they were in. I can only imagine how terrible that decision must have been to kill your own child so that they didn't have to live this awful life.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 52:19**

Another thing was that they suffered from malnutrition, because they weren't given the opportunity to tend to their own crops. They had to grow the Spanish food, so they were dying because they didn't have enough food. But also they were encountering diseases that they weren't familiar with. So that was killing them. And Haiti's population before Columbus, it was estimated at about 8 million people. And they estimate that by 1496, that's what? Four years after Columbus came? The population had shrunk to 3 million people. 5 million people died in four years. And then by 1516, only 12,000 people remained. And by 1542, fewer than 200 of the original Indigenous people of Haiti were alive. By 1555 they were all gone. This is where we have to get real, my friends. We have to get real. This is genocide. This completely aligns with the United Nation's definition of genocide. And I'm going to share it with you because you will be able to see how it checks so many of the boxes. So it says on the United Nations website, it describes genocide, and it says, "In the present convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national ethnical racial or religious group as such: 1) killing members of the group; 2) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; 3) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; 4) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; 5), forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 54:19**

So can we all agree now that Columbus and Hitler are like same-level-type people. The disdain that we feel for Hitler and towards the Nazis and what they did in Germany is the same disdain that we should feel for Columbus and these people. What they did was despicable. And there were so many nations who copied Columbus and also committed genocide against the Native Americans. In 1501, the Portuguese depopulated—fancy word for kidnapped and enslaved—the people of Labrador, which is a province of Canada. The Beothuk were indigenous to the land that is now called Newfoundland. It's literally spelled New-Found-Land. Like we said before, you can't find land that already has people living on it. So the Beothuk are living in what is now Canada, and they are shipped off to Europe and Cape Verde. So they are taken from Canada as enslaved people to Europe, and they are now extinct. You guys, extinct should not be a word that is used to describe a human population. This is genocide. If there are people who are extinct, that is because of genocide.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 55:43**

Columbus was also a sex trafficker. So one of the rewards that the men who worked for Columbus received was women to rape. And he would also sell these women and girls for sex. He wrote a letter to one of his friends and 1500, and it said, quote "100 castellanos" (that's Spanish currency) "are as easily obtained for a woman as for a farm, and it is very general. And there are plenty of dealers who would go about looking for girls. Those from nine to 10 years old are now in demand." End quote. He was selling nine- and 10-year-old girls for sex.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 56:25**

Not only did Columbus and his conquests have a negative effect on the Americas, it also had a negative effect on the economies all throughout the world. This obsession with gold and silver was a new thing. Before Columbus, land was the measure of wealth, so there were lots of places that had a ton of land that could compete with Europe. Muslim nations used to be competitive with Europe. But after the transition to gold and silver happened, they were pushed from power. They weren't able to have power anymore because they didn't have gold or silver. So this obsession with gold and silver caused a 400% inflation, and the economies of the countries who weren't mining gold or silver, they just couldn't keep up anymore. There was gold on the Gold Coast of Africa, but they couldn't keep up with the Americas either. There wasn't as much gold in Africa as there was in the Americas, and the Europeans didn't want gold from Africa anymore. They wanted people. They wanted enslaved people to come to the Americas and work for free. So Columbus, his actions really affected the entire world in a negative way. George P. Horse Capture says, quote, "Cherishing Columbus is a characteristic of white history, not American history." End quote. I think that that's so important to grapple with. Cherishing Columbus should not be something that we do as Americans. He actually stands against everything that we believe as Americans—liberty and justice for all. Are you kidding me? Cherishing Columbus is not American; it is pro-whiteness. It is pro-white supremacy. It is not pro-American.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 58:11**

Alrighty, so where did Columbus Day come from? Where did the Columbus Day celebration originate? This is the part that I mentioned in the beginning was important to remember that Columbus was not actually Italian. So in the 1800s, the Italians were being treated really badly in the United States. And we saw this pattern over and over again, Italians were coming in large numbers from Europe. And so they're being treated badly by the people who are already in the United States. We saw this with almost every group that came from Europe to the United States, they first weren't even considered to be fully American or fully white. I read an article by Code Switch, called "How Columbus Sailed into US history, Thanks to Italians," by Lakshmi Gandhi. And they wrote that in the 1820s, when Italian immigrants started moving to the United States, they were described as, quote, "Short of stature, darker complexion, cruel, and shifty." End quote. So there was a lot of animosity towards the Italian-Americans, and people were even violent towards them. So in order to try and get themselves into the dominant culture, into being accepted, and be considered white, they align themselves with Columbus so that someone from their heritage would be a hero. And these people actually thought that Columbus was Italian, like most of us were taught, they believed that he was Italian. And they thought, "Well, if we tell this amazing story about this man who discovered America and created the America that we know today, then they'll have to accept us. They'll have to be kinder to us and not treat us violently." In 1892 it had been 400 years since Columbus's expedition, and President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed

quote, "On that day, let the people so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer, and their appreciation of the great achievements of the four completed centuries of American life." End quote. This was just a proclamation. Columbus Day was not a federal holiday yet.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:00:25**

I want to remind you that race is a social construct; it is completely made up by people. So that means there is an entire timeline of when certain groups of people got to be accepted as white. So when the Italians were coming to the US in large numbers, people were suspicious of them and associated them with darkness. But when they aligned themselves with Columbus, then they were brought into the fold of power. And that's how whiteness works, it is very exclusionary. Whiteness is "I have power and you don't." It is used to have power over other people. So they want it to be a small group, so that the small group of people have power over everybody else. Historian Christopher J. Kaufman once wrote, quote, "Italian Americans grounded legitimacy in a pluralistic society by focusing on the Genoese explorer as a central figure in their sense of peoplehood." End quote. So he's saying, in order for them to be treated well and to be considered people, they had to align themselves with Christopher Columbus.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:01:35**

So Columbus Day, even though it's not a federal holiday, it is recognized in a handful of cities, but it wasn't widespread until 1937. And in 1937, Columbus Day became a federal holiday because Franklin D. Roosevelt established this holiday. And this was after the Knights of Columbus, this is a Catholic organization, they lobbied really hard to make Columbus Day a holiday and FDR approved it. So Columbus is one of only two people that have a holiday that's named after them. And I'm sure you can guess the other one, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. So I think it's important for us to remember that Columbus Day is not something that was celebrated from the beginning of time. It was a federal holiday from 1937. And there are lots of things that we have changed since then. And this is something that we can and should absolutely change.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:02:33**

Columbus changed the course of our entire world, and not in a good way. I was reading about how he developed two systems that set the foundation for race relations. The race relations that we see today were developed by Columbus. And these two systems are 1) taking land, wealth, and labor from Indigenous people in the West, which led to genocide; and 2) the transatlantic slave trade, developing the hierarchy of races. Ta-Nehisi Coates has a quote that I think of all the time, because it is so powerful. He says, "Race is the child of racism, not the father." Racism existed before race did. Racism and treating people differently and badly and systemically disenfranchising groups of people based on race was already happening. So in order to account for racism, they had to develop races. They thought, "Okay, we're treating these people badly, we have to give a reason for this." So they developed a racial hierarchy, where white people are at the top and Black people are at the bottom, and everyone else is somewhere in between. And Columbus had a really big hand in making that happen.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:03:52**

This history is extremely significant to me, because as I was doing the research for this episode, I could not stop thinking of my ancestors. If you listen to Episode Two of the podcast, Episode Two of Season Three, I talked about this story, but I want to tell it again, for anybody who might have missed it. So as I mentioned, my ancestors are from the Caribbean. But the way that they got to the Caribbean is because they were kidnapped and put on slave ships. And when they were on the ships, they were thrown overboard because they got so sick, and if you're sick, then you can't work, then you are worthless to them. So they threw my ancestors overboard, and they were floating in the ocean. Well the Arawak people, the people that we have been talking about this whole episode, they rescued my ancestors from the ocean, and they nursed them back to health. And I kept thinking about what the Arawak were going through, and I kept thinking about the fact that they saw my ancestors and they knew what torture they had been through. They knew what hurt they had endured, and they thought, "We have to help them." They did for my ancestors what they wanted someone to do for them. And for that I am so grateful. The only reason I exist is because the Arawak took compassion on my ancestors. And in the book "Rethinking Columbus," Bill Fletcher, Jr. writes, quote, "Faced with a common oppressor, Native Americans and enslaved Africans were often allies." End quote. Of course, we're allies, we have to be allies. We are the only ones who know what the other group has gone through.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:05:38**

The history of Native Americans has been erased by the colonizers. During my research, there were so many times when I was looking for an original name of a tribe, and I couldn't find it or I was reading about original languages and how they're dead. Because the Indigenous people were punished for doing anything related to their culture, practicing their spirituality or using their original language. Those languages are now gone. They have been stolen from our history by colonizers. But it's not just their history that's been erased. It is their very existence. In Episode 15 of Season One I did an episode called "Native American Voices, Part One," and I interviewed Ryan Kamper. And in it he shares about how people have literally told him that they thought all the Native Americans were dead. He explains that he's Dine, and they're like, "Wait, I thought all of the Native Americans were gone. I thought they were all dead," as they're looking him right in the face. So it's not just the history that is being erased. It's also the actual existence of these people, and the Taino people they're trying right now to revive their history.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:06:52**

One of the articles I was reading, it said, quote, "According to Christina M. Gonzalez, writing in the fall 2018 issue of American Indian, the Taino revival began around the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival. The Renaissance focuses on language, art, religion, pharmacology, agriculture, fishing, and cooking." End quote.

**Jasmine Bradshaw 1:07:18**

So what do we do about this? Well, the first thing we need to do is spread the truth. We need to spread this story far and wide. We need everybody to know what really happened and what Columbus really did. We need to go to our schools and demand that they teach truth. As a former teacher, I can tell you that parents have a lot of power in the school, parents have so much power over what their children are learning, the education that they are getting. So we need to hold our schools accountable, hold our educators accountable to teaching the true history. And the thing is, how can educators teach the truth

when they don't even know what it is? You guys I spent a month, over a month, doing all of this research to figure out what really happened. This is not easily accessible, but it needs to be and we can be a part of making that happen.

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 1:08:19

In that same article by Bill Fletcher, Jr, he poses the question, "What should we celebrate?" He says, quote, "While Columbus deserves condemnation for many of his actions, we should also remember to criticize the political and economic forces, which he both represented and encouraged. When asked to commemorate the legacy of Columbus, we should reply that we refuse to celebrate the European plunder of the Western Hemisphere as riches. We refuse to celebrate the European subjugation of the Western Hemisphere as native peoples. We refuse to celebrate the kidnapping and enslavement of millions of Africans. There is only one thing we should celebrate—the 500 years of resistance to Columbus, and the greed and cruelty that he represents." End, quote. We need to be part of that resistance. And I'm going to link a guide in the show notes. It has resources and tools, and it's called "Abolish Columbus Day: Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples." It has articles, it has a lesson plan about Columbus that's for middle and high schoolers. It has sample resolutions that you could use in a school district, a university, a city, and a state on how to abolish Columbus Day and turn it into Indigenous Peoples' Day. Now Arizona is not usually on the ball with this kind of stuff, but I actually found out that—I can't remember if it was earlier this year or last year—but Governor Ducey changed Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day. So that was really exciting to hear, but I still know that we have so much work to do. We literally have a street in Arizona called Indian School. So there's lots of stuff that still needs to be changed and lots of resistance that still needs to be had. So I am committing to being part of that resistance, and I hope that you will, too.

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 1:10:16

Wowza what a roller coaster this episode was. I usually try to be really cool, calm and collected, but the thing about this is that it should make you mad. It should make you angry. It should make you cry. The idea of families being ripped apart, the idea of people being killed and raped and all for what? For stuff. For gold, for land. It's disgusting. So I hope that you will pass this on to somebody who also needs to hear this story. I am really grateful that you took the time to listen, and I highly encourage you to go figure out who are the Indigenous people that inhabited the land before you got there. Whose land are you living on?

**Jasmine Bradshaw** 1:11:07

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site. I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there. So you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.