CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS - A Timeline

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1451: Christopher Columbus (Cristoffa Corombo in his native Ligurian) was born, **almost certainly in Genoa**, Italy, despite many fascinating and fun alternative theories. He was the son of a middle-class wool merchant.

1478: Columbus began his seafaring career in his late teens, sailing on commercial voyages in the Atlantic as far north as Iceland, west to the Azores, and as far south as Cape Verde. He was an experienced sailor throughout the (known) Atlantic by the time he was 25.

1476: Columbus was shipwrecked off the coast of Portugal and subsequently stayed in Lisbon, which was the undeniable capital of cartography, navigation and entrepreneurial exploration at the time.

1478: Columbus moved to Porto Santo in the Madeira archipelago, where he worked in the sugar trade. He married well above his class to Filipa Perestrelo, daughter of the island's Governor and an accomplished navigator and explorer whose stories and knowledge would inspire the young mariner.

1479: Columbus' eldest son, Diego, was born. Filipa would die soon thereafter. Her death would mark an inflection point for the young Columbus, who would again take to sea - for the rest of his life.

1485-1491: Columbus and his brother Bartolomeu indefatigably and widely sought sponsors for their **'Enterprise of the Indies'** proposal - a plan to reach Asia by sailing westward across the Atlantic in order to compete with the Portuguese in the spice trade and perhaps discover new lands with new sources of wealth. The royal courts of Portugal, Spain, France, and England all declined to fund the ambitious and far-fetched idea. Queen Isabela of Spain, however, was intrigued by both the man and his plan, and she kept a place for him in her court. In 1488, Columbus had a 2nd son, Fernando, with his long-term mistress, Beatriz de Arana.

1492:
January: With the Fall of Granada and completion of the 700-year Reconquest of Spain from the Moors, Isabela reconsidered the brash Italian's bold proposal. She managed to convince King Ferdinand to agree to finance the project. Columbus was granted the august title of **'Admiral (*El Almirante*) of the Ocean Sea**', as well as Viceroy and Governor of any lands 'discovered' en route to Asia. He was assured a significant share of the wealth generated from such lands. These promises were documented in the Capitulations of Santa Fe (and Columbus and his heirs would subsequently spend generations seeking to receive full recompense).
August 3: Columbus set sail from Palos de la Frontera, Spain, on his **1st voyage,** with **88 men** on 3 now-famous ships: the flagship *Santa Maria*, and the nimble *Niña* and *Pinta.*. Before the trans-Atlantic crossing he would stop in the Canary Islands for repair of a broken (sabotaged?) rudder and provisioning (and also for to spend time with the beautiful and imperious Beatrice de Bobadilla who he had met in the Spanish court.
September 6: The fleet leaves the Canary island of La Gomera to attempt the westward crossing to Asia. His destinations were Marco Polo's Cathay (China) and Cipangu (Japan)., not India.
October 12: After **36 days** and teetering dangerously close to mutiny, the ships arrived on a small island in the Bahamas which the indigenous Taino people called Guanahani and Columbus named San Salvador.
The world and human history would be forever changed on the day of this momentous encounter.
Columbus believed he had reached the coastal islands of eastern Asia. For the next 4 months he would explore **Cuba (thought to be a peninsula of China) and Hispaniola (which he believed to be Japan).**
Christmas Day: The *Santa Maria* was irreparably damaged on a shoal on the north coast of present-day Haiti. Columbus built a fort and left 39 men on the site, known as **La Navidad - America's first colony**.

1493:
Columbus **returned to Spain in March** with gold, new botanicals such as chili peppers, and captives from **'the Indies' (the medieval European term for all of Asia)**. He was feted as a hero and **this was his apogee**. A 2nd much larger voyage was immediately organized. In **September 1493,** Columbus set sail on his **2nd voyage** with 7 ships and 1500 men on a colonizing and exploratory voyage. After a **swift 21-day crossing** using a

southerly route, he made **landfall on the island of Dominica** n the Lesser Antilles, and proceeded up to the Greater Antilles and explored **Puerto Rico**, which he named San Juna Bautista.

1494-6: Columbus returned to La Navidad only to find that all the colonists had been slaughtered by the native Taino. **This would darken his outlook and spirit**, **and lead him to infamously pursue increasingly genocidal treatment of native Americans over the ensuing years**. He founded a new colony to the east and named it La Isabela. He then explored more of **Cuba** and northern **Jamaica**. He left his brothers Bartolomeu and Diego in charge of the colony at La Isabela; the colony failed due to poor soils and limited water supply, resulting in moving to a new capital on the south shore of Hispaniola, which Bartolomeu named **Santo Domingo** - **the oldest city in the Americas.** Meanwhile, El Almirante returned to Spain after almost 3 years at sea. He was greeted less enthusiastically, as the yield from the 2nd voyage was far less than its costs.

1498-1500: Columbus's **3rd voyage** sailed from Spain in May with 6 ships and 100 colonists, bound for the Santo Domingo colony. After first landfall on **Trinidad**, he lands on the South American continent - his first contact with the mainland - in the Bay of Paria in **Venezuela**. He then returns to Hispaniola, only to find civil strife under Bartolomeu's rule. Efforts to restore order were marked by **brutality** and the rule of the Columbus brothers **would come to be deeply resented**. When Ferdinand and Isabela received word of the unrest, they sent Chief Justice **Francisco de Bobadilla** to investigate and adjudicate. In a swift trial, **the 3 Columbus brothers were convicted of tyranny and sent back to Spain in chains**. On return to Spain, Columbus proclaimed his innocence, was pardoned and released by Isabela, and managed to convince the monarchs to finance a 4th voyage to locate the realms of gold he had yet to find as well as the passage to Asia he had been seeking.

1502-1504:
The **4th and final voyage** sails from Càdiz in May with 4 ships and 147 men. After a swift 20-day crossing they make first landfall on **Martinique**. Columbus had been forbidden by the royal court to return to Hispaniola, a directive he promptly ignored. However, the new Governor of Hispaniola refused him entry. After a fierce storm which Columbus had predicted and warned about (his warnings were ignored and many ships and lives were lost, including that of his nemesis, Francisco de Bobadilla), Columbus sailed to Jamaica, Cuba, and then **Central America where he explored the coast from Honduras to Panama** looking for a westward passage. He **landed on the Central American mainland at several points**. Failing to find gold in Panama and in the face of ongoing native hostility, Columbus decides once again to head to Hispaniola. Battered by storms and riddled with hull-destroying shipworm, his 3 remaining ships were forced to beach on the north coast of Jamaica - where they were **stranded for a tumultuous yea**r due to internal conflict as well as a tenuous relationship with the Taino natives. The castaways were eventually rescued after 2 of Columbus's men paddled 450 miles in a canoe across the Jamaica Channel to Hispaniola. An **ailing Columbus (with crippling arthritis and failing vision at just 55 years of age**) returned to Spain - **as a passenger** - in November of 1504. His primary benefactor, Queen Isabela, died 3 weeks later, and Ferdinand refused to see him. Although he had accumulated significant wealth, it was a fraction of what he had been promised, and his letters show he was disillusioned and felt he had been wronged and had not received the recognition he deserved.

1506: Columbus **died in Valladolid, Spain, a broken man at age 55, on May 20, 1506.**
(The remains of) Columbus would make several more voyages, between Valladolid, Santo Domingo, Havana, and **Seville, where they rest today** in the beautiful Cathedral of Santa Maria de La Sede.

Posthumous Legacy:
Columbus' voyages initiated **the Columbian Exchange aka The Great Exchange**, leading to the exchange of plants, animals, cultures, and diseases between the Old World and the New World.
Columbus' explorations **ended the era of 'fabulous geography'** - geography became an evidence-based science. His explorations would unleash a centuries-long tsunami of violence and greed that had **profound and often devastating consequences for the indigenous populations**.
Despite **controversies and potent criticisms surrounding his actions and impact on land**, Columbus is remembered for his maritime achievement of connecting the hemispheres, and the **world-changing cultural and geopolitical shifts** which resulted from the accomplishment that his bold vision, superb sailing skills, grit, determination, and resilience at sea made possible.