



The Last Voyage of Columbus

Being the Epic Tale of the Great Captain's Fourth Expedition, Including Accounts of Mutiny, Shipwreck, and Discovery

by [Martin Dugard](#)

Reading Group Guide

- It is quite possible that no historical figure has been more written about than Christopher Columbus. Some historians have asserted that he was a great hero, while others have painted him as a greedy villain. How did reading *The Last Voyage of Columbus* affect your view of him?
- Christopher Columbus claimed that his fourth voyage was his greatest. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Columbus knew about the Inquisition and all of its attendant horrors, but he remained loyal to Ferdinand and Isabella. How would you characterize his relationship with them? How did his relationship with the king differ from his relationship with the queen?
- Many Spanish people of Columbus's time looked upon men of Genovese extraction with great suspicion. Indeed, foreigners were seen as a "destabilizing influence." To what degree did this prejudice contribute to Columbus's fall from grace? Are there any modern-day equivalents to this scenario?
- *The Last Voyage of Columbus* may be a "swashbuckling history," but it also features a very personal look at Columbus and his son Fernando. Did Fernando change throughout the voyage? How did his relationship with his father evolve?
- "The Admiral of the Ocean Sea" was a good captain, but he made several questionable decisions on land. Would you characterize Columbus as a great leader? Why or why not?
- To what extent were Columbus's travails the result of poor decision making, hubris, or greed? To what extent were they the result of bad luck or meddling outside forces?
- In 1495, Fonseca decreed that Columbus would no longer be the only explorer in Spain's New World. Furthermore, he demanded that all individuals—including Columbus— obtain special governmental clearance. Columbus wasn't happy, of course, as he had a proprietary feeling about the territories that he had discovered. Was Columbus justified in thinking he should be given special treatment in the New World?
- Martin Dugard writes that, unlike Ojeda's, "Columbus's voyages had some measure of curiosity and purity." Do you agree with this assessment? Why? 10. Dugard writes that the only certainty about Columbus is that "for better or worse, he chose to live a bold life rather than settle for mediocrity." Did you find the tale of Columbus's final voyage inspiring?