

Reflective Essay

The beginning of “Christopher Columbus: *Christoferens* or Pharisee” happened fairly ordinarily. I was assigned a paper to do for my ENGL289B class, and since I had just finished reading Columbus’s *Diario*, *Book of Prophecies*, and other affiliated works, I found myself not liking the man. I thought he was a hypocrite, and I decided that I would use this paper to express this opinion, backed up by research. I knew that I would be able to get many reputable sources to back me up, because I knew many Columbus scholars found his actions of exploiting natives for riches repugnant.

I especially disliked that the man professed to be a Christian when he was enslaving natives and doing whatever he could to obtain gold.

Of the many research topics proposed by my professor, Dr. Bauer, I chose the one that best fit this kind of interest in Columbus.

“Focusing on one text of your choice, discuss the relationship between religion and commerce in the European of discovery.”

I started off focusing on Columbus’s Letter to the Sovereigns of Spain on the Fourth Voyage.

As expected, I found a wide range of sources online. I began my research by checking out the sources my professor recommended and provided, such as Zamora’s *Reading Columbus* and Greenblatt’s *Marvelous Possessions*. From there, I found other sources that were cited by those sources by going to Google Scholar and searching the title of the source. Fortunately, all those sources were available, thanks to UMD-provided access to online versions of them. I used JSTOR, a database of sources recommended to me by a librarian for another project, and also used the University catalogue to find sources.

For the offline sources, I pulled a lot of information from our required primary readings about Columbus, and cited them appropriately.

In order to make sure my sources were accredited, I would only use them if 1) they were published by a reputable journal/publisher, 2) they were cited by at least one other accredited source, and 3) what they claimed was backed up by other accredited sources that they cited.

When I went in to seek advice about my paper, my T.A., Ms. Compton, told me that it was good, but it wasn’t original enough. I revised it one more time before going to see Dr. Bauer, my professor, for help, changing the order and some of the content of the body paragraphs and majorly

reworking my thesis and conclusion. I still hadn't changed the purpose of my paper, and I didn't add any other sources.

When I went to see Dr. Bauer, he pointed out that my thesis and conclusion still didn't match. The logical conclusion of my thesis was not the conclusion I arrived at. He proposed three topics that I could look into to strengthen my paper: the church militant and the reconquest of Jerusalem, apocalyptic prophecy, and along with my original focus, the relationship between souls and gold. I decided I had to conduct more research in order to understand what I was trying to say in my thesis and conclusion.

After consulting more sources, especially Delaney's "Columbus's Ultimate Goal: Jerusalem", I realized that I didn't agree with my own thesis and conclusion anymore. Logically, I saw the truth of the other side. So, instead of proving that Columbus was a hypocrite, I began to research in order to prove that he was earnest in his beliefs and intentions, even if his actions weren't exactly noble, and I tried to discover the true purpose behind his journeys to the New World.

I then revised my thesis to include the three topics that Dr. Bauer had proposed that I research. I saw these three topics becoming a threefold purpose for Columbus's journeys to the New World.

With that, I began to research more about Columbus's religious life. I read in Delaney's article that he was affiliated closely with the Franciscans, so I found a paper delving into the connections between Columbus and the Franciscans. I returned to *Zamora's Reading Columbus*, and found discrepancies in the editions of the original sources that were published by the Crown and posthumously. From there, I went to find the original sources that included more information about Columbus's religious purpose. That very information was left out from the editions of the original sources published by the Crown.

Along that mindset, I acquired many more sources, exceeding the required number for the paper. Though completely revising my paper was extremely difficult, I believe that Dr. Bauer's advice allowed me to break free from the negative opinion I had of Columbus. Thus, I was able to greatly improve my paper, because I no longer had to hold to an anti-Columbus mold.

During the entire research process, I learned a great number of things. The most important thing was the virtue of patience. To be exact, persevering with research even when finding a source to back up your argument seemed impossible. In order to find that source, I realized that I would have to be creative in the way I was searching for the source.

Instead of searching for exactly what I needed, I would have to be indirect and find a source that cited a more relevant source.

I think that if the research process became less arduous, I would have been able to finish my paper faster and had more time to revise it. In order to make the research process smoother, having an online tutorial to look back at when I was struggling would have been really helpful. Also, including a database of the names of accredited academic journals would have been a great way for me to know which sources were good to use. If there were a database of past sources used by students taking similar classes, it would have helped a lot.

Overall, the challenging research process for this paper really acquainted me with how to research well, and I now am confident in my abilities to find reputable sources for future research papers.