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History's Turning Points (5) – Who Really Discovered America – I

Lead: Historical study often helps reveal twists in the human journey. Consider history's turning points: who really discovered America.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The ongoing debate surrounding Columbus Day, the annual celebration in the United States of that fateful dawn in October 1492 when Italian explorer, in service to the Spanish crown, Christopher

Columbus, made landfall in the Bahamas, is often quite lively. Yet, in reality this is essentially a Euro-centric argument. Scholars or ethnic advocates exercise their theories and marshal their evidence over which European or eastern explorers “discovered America.” Surprisingly, there are not a few ideas about who beat the Genoese sea captain to the Western hemisphere and they often originate with ethnic groups and their cheer leaders. Legendary black Africans were said to have made it to western shores in 1500 BCE followed by Phoenicians in 600 BCE and Roman explorers in 64 CE. One of the most interesting conjectures is that of a Chinese expedition led by Hwei-shin, sailing east across the Pacific in the

year 499. The exotic legend of the Irish cleric St. Brendan who, with 17 monks, discovered a western island where birds actually spoke Latin before piloting their Celtic boat covered with skins back to Ireland.

Venetians, Poles, Portuguese, all have advanced candidates for the honor of discovery. In his fascinating volume, *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*, Mark Kurlansky posits that clever and secretive Basque fishermen from northern Spain, in search of fish for faithful Catholics to eat on their meatless days, discovered and fished the Grand Banks off Newfoundland, using the North American coast to dry and salt their cargo before taking it

**back across the Atlantic. Next time:
the real discoverers of America.**

**At the University of Richmond's
School of Professional and Continuing
Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

Resources

**Boorstin, Daniel J. and Gerald Parshall, "History's
Hidden Turning Points," *U.S. News and World Report*.
110 (15, April 22, 1991): 52-66.**

**Kurlansky, Mark. *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that
Changed the World*. New York, NY: Penguin Books,
1998.**

**Starr, S. Frederick. "So Who Did Discover America,?"
History Today 63 (12, December 2013): 34-39.**

**Weiner, Eric. "Coming to America, Who Was First?"
National Public Radio (October 8, 2007).**