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Historical novel retells the history of Queen Isabel's conquest of Española, the Taíno chieftain Anacaona's resistance, and Columbus's demise

New York, New York—Author Andrew Rowen's new historical novel, *Isabel, Anacaona & Columbus's Demise: 1498–1502 Retold*, dramatizes from both Native and European perspectives the European subjugation of Española's indigenous peoples during the least studied period of the island's brutal conquest. The book releases November 10, 2025, and is the sequel to, and readable independently from, his acclaimed *Encounters Unforeseen: 1492 Retold* (2017) and *Columbus and Caonabó: 1493–1498 Retold* (2021).

Based on primary sources, *Isabel, Anacaona & Columbus's Demise* depicts Isabel's sincere but failing effort to curtail her conquerors' enslavement and abuse of "Indians," Anacaona's then successful struggle to maintain rule of her and her brother's chiefdom of Xaraguá despite Española's conquest elsewhere, and Columbus's intellectual deterioration and removal by Isabel as Española's governor. From a dramatic perspective, the book strikingly sets a Native and European queen—remarkable woman rulers in worlds ruled by men—on comparable pedestals. Columbus's demise is told through his eyes and those of the Taíno chieftains who knew him and Spaniards who rebelled against him.

The book relates information about the three protagonists that's often overshadowed by their other legacies. While renowned as a warrior queen, Isabel instructed Columbus and his successors to treat Indians as her free vassals and liberated Indians Columbus and others enslaved. While acclaimed as a poet and for her allure, Anacaona's competent rule—first with her brother and then as chieftain alone—survived invasion longer than that of nearly all Española's other supreme chieftains and outlasted the governorships of Columbus and his successor. While often abbreviated in biographies of Columbus, the book closely traces his life, objectives, and activities for two years as governor on Española, when he wasn't at sea. After exploring the mainland on his third voyage, he settled the rebellions against him by awarding the rebels Indian land and Indians, and he resisted his successor, who sent him home in chains.

Scenes also portray daily life at the frontier of conquest, including the inception of mestizo society; the fate of Indians enslaved; the origins of the doctrines of repartimiento and encomienda by which Spain would rule its New World possessions; the slow advance of Christianity; and Isabel's commencement of the conquest of South America.

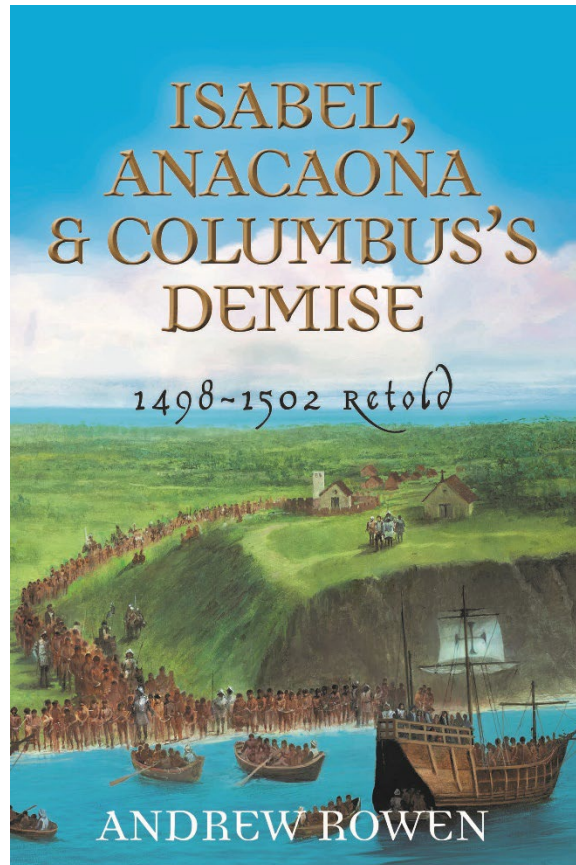
Isabel, Anacaona & Columbus's Demise: 1498–1502 Retold

Andrew Rowen | November 10, 2025 | All Persons Press | Historical Fiction |

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The cover illustrates Columbus's enslavement of eight hundred Taíno Indians for shipment to Spain in October 1498.

Isabel, Anacaona contains thirty-five illustrations, including a sketch of Anacaona set beside a historic portrait of Isabel. There are newly drawn maps to show where events took place, and the routes Columbus or others took at sea are marked on historic maps. Historic engravings by Theodore de Bry and others depicting the Spanish conquest of Española and elsewhere are woven into relevant scenes, as well as paintings by Juan de Flandes that Isabel commissioned.

About the Author

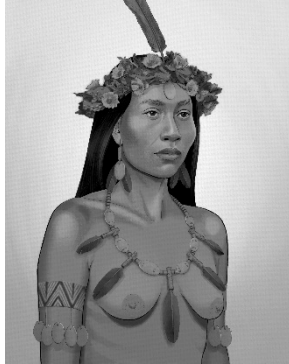
Andrew Rowen's novels retell the history of the encounters between European and Taíno peoples in the Caribbean from a bicultural perspective, based on primary sources, anthropological studies, and visits to sites where Columbus and Taíno chieftains lived, met, and fought.

Encounters Unforeseen: 1492 Retold (2017) portrays the life stories of the chieftains and Columbus from youth through their first contacts in 1492 and was praised for historical accuracy.

Columbus and Caonabó: 1493–1498 Retold (2021) relates the bitter war between Columbus and

Chief Caonabó during the period of Columbus's second voyage and was praised for scholarship. Andrew is a graduate of U.C. Berkeley and Harvard Law School.

Advanced praise for Isabel, Anacaona & Columbus's Demise



“Deeply researched, devastating novel of the dawn of Caribbean colonialism... Like all of Rowen’s principal characters, Anacaona is drawn from historical record, a savvy leader who expects and plans for betrayal... Violence is alluded to rather than relished, as the novel illuminates the drift of history and how a diverse array of leaders...arrived at decisions that shaped history.”—**booklife**

“...a wonderful reimagination of a consequence-heavy moment of world history, something like a chronicle of a holocaust foretold, slowly, methodically, and menacingly. Fascinating and compellingly written.”—**Greg Grandin**, *America, América: A New History of the New World*

An “exciting retelling of the narrative brings the people on both sides to life in an excellent page-turner...”—**Samuel M. Wilson**, *Hispaniola: Caribbean Chiefdoms in the Age of Columbus*

“A refreshing, well-informed take on a less well-known period...a fresh, scholarly perspective on Christopher Columbus...can just as easily be read as a stand-alone...Rowen’s writing is clear...an enjoyable, educational read...”—**Kirkus Reviews**

“... vividly reveals the exploits and failures of the invaders and dispels numerous myths created by past historians, including the false narrative of Taino Indian docility...humanizes our Indigenous ancestors...a people with great leaders and warriors...I wholeheartedly endorse this book!”—**Kasike Atunwa Jorge Baracutay Estevez** of the Higuayagua Taino Luku Kairi tribe

“...an excellent and original account of the dramatic and momentous events that took place at the dawn of the conquest and colonization of the New World...moving and enlightening for any reader interested in understanding the origins of American history.”—**Manuel García Arévalo**, member of the Dominican Academy of History

“An enthralling historical novel... chronicles the ruinous progress of European colonialism.”—**Foreword**

In an interview, Andrew Rowen can discuss:

Why it's important to retell the history of the period of Columbus's voyages from both Native American and European perspectives. -Columbus's voyages are one of history's seminal events and part of our children's education, but a balanced history of what happened at the time should incorporate the Native side as well. The Native peoples who opposed Columbus also made decisions and took counter actions, and their civilization had ideals and traditions which guided these actions. It's their story too, not just a "Columbus story" or the "Spanish empire story." Rowen presents both Native and European perspectives of the history, through protagonists of equivalent gravity and dignity, depicting the actions and beliefs of both peoples, all based on the historical and anthropological record.

An overview of the history of 1498-1502. -The period 1498 to 1502 is the least studied and written about of Española's brutal conquest, and *Isabel, Anacaona* uniquely brings together in one volume all the most important information about the European conquest of the island, the Taínos resistance to subjugation, Columbus's record and removal as its governor, and the beginning of the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Information about each of Isabel, Anacaona, and Columbus that is often overshadowed by their other legacies:

-**Isabel's** great legacies are giving birth to both modern Spain and Spanish America, as well as her use of the Inquisition and expulsion of the Jews to Christianize her kingdoms. *Isabel, Anacaona* focuses on her governance of her conquerors in the Indies; from 1498 through 1502, she consistently ordered and insisted that non-resisting Indians be treated as her free vassals, neither enslaved nor abused, a perspective that was dismissed or unappreciated by most of her contemporaries.

-Traditional depictions of **Anacaona** relate her preeminent stature as a poet; her uncommon beauty and allure; her exercise of authority during her brother Chief Behechchio's rule and ascension to chieftain on his death; and her inclination and ability to negotiate with Española's conquerors. *Isabel, Anacaona* relates her shrewdness and competence in making decisions—first as her brother's advisor and then as chieftain alone—on how to prevent Columbus's and his successors' conquest of central Española from extending west to envelope Xaraguá. Xaraguá was spared from conquest invasion and build-out during the entire period of the book; while little noted, Anacaona's rule survived longer than that of nearly all Española's other supreme chieftains and that of Columbus himself. She became the first woman chieftain known to resist the Spanish invasion of the Americas.

-Often abbreviated or ignored in biographies of **Columbus**, *Isabel, Anacaona* closely traces his life, objectives, and activities as governor on Española from September 1498 to his removal in October 1500, when he doesn't go to sea. His slave awards depicted on the book cover were intended to induce the rebels to return to Spain, but the rebels chose not to depart, and he later settled their rebellion by awarding them Indian land and labor. But rebellions against him recurred, and overwhelmed by opposition, he retreated into religious devotion and experienced a mental decline. When Francisco de Bobadilla arrived to replace him, he outright resisted, ordering Spaniards and Indians to disobey Bobadilla, whereupon Bobadilla sent him home in chains. The book relates the testimony taken against him in Bobadilla's investigation, first discovered and published in 2006 and hence not discussed in most biographies of him.

Some themes less written about during the period 1498 to 1502, including societal practices originating then that would substantially impact history thereafter:

-the tortured inception of **mestizo society**, when the Spanish rebels in Xaraguá cohabitated with Xaraguán women and Spaniards loyal to Columbus did so elsewhere on Española

-the origins of the doctrines of **repartimiento** and **encomienda** by which Spain would rule its New World possessions

-to the extent known, **the fate of Indians enslaved** by Columbus and others

-**Isabel's commencement of the Spanish conquest of the mainland**, led by minor conquistadors who enslave Indians, including Alonso de Hojeda, with an unknown Amerigo Vespucci participating

-the slow progress of the **missionary effort** in Española, which developed within the intellectual framework of Isabel's actions to Christianize her Spanish kingdoms through the Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews, the completion of the Reconquista, and—as depicted in *Isabel, Anacaona*—her decisions to expel the Muslims from Spain

More intimately, personal themes relating to the three protagonists:

Isabel is forty-seven at novel's outset, with her domestic legacies largely behind her and suffering recurring illness. In addition to governing her Indies conquest, from 1498 to 1502 she struggles to arrange her own succession following the deaths of her son and eldest daughter and raises a newborn grandson. Rowen can discuss: Isabel's relationships with her daughters; the paintings she commissioned to illustrate Christ's life on earth set in Castilian settings (three are included in the book); and the anguish she felt removing Columbus from authority and their special relationship.

Anacaona is in her early thirties at the outset, widowed two years earlier (Caonabó was her husband) and relocated to her native Xaraguá. In parallel to Isabel, Rowen can discuss Anacaona's relationship with her daughter and the daughter's liaison with a Spaniard resulting in Anacaona's mestizo granddaughter.

Columbus is forty-six at the outset, and he's fallen from the acclaim that followed his first voyage. In addition to relating his failure and enslavements as Española's governor, *Isabel, Anacaona* portrays his genius as a mariner. Rowen can discuss: Columbus's exploration of the coast of modern Venezuela on the outward portion of the third voyage, his realization that he'd "discovered" a continent, and his belief that it encompassed the Terrestrial Paradise. Other topics might include Columbus's personal wealth or his writing of his *Book of Prophecies*, a compilation of biblical prophecies.

An Interview with Andrew Rowen

Your novels retell the history of 1492 from both Native and European perspectives. Why do you think that's important, what does *Isabel, Anacaona & Columbus's Demise* add to our understanding, and why is it relevant to read today?

The history of the European conquest of the Caribbean is the story of the collision of two proud civilizations with different political organizations, social traditions, moral beliefs, and religions. It's not just "a Columbus story" or "a Spanish empire story." For five hundred years and to this day, most histories of the events—whether pro- or anti-Columbus—focus on the victor's side of the story or on Columbus himself. My books are an attempt to tell both sides of the history.

The period 1498 to 1502 is the least studied and written about of Española's brutal conquest. I believe *Isabel, Anacaona* brings together in one volume the most important information about the period—the conquest's slow advancement, the Taínos resistance to subjugation, and Columbus's record and removal as its governor. I believe it's unique in setting the conqueror Isabel's objectives side by side with the resister Anacaona's counter strategies and in comprehensively depicting Columbus's life, decisions, and actions while on land as governor of Española from 1498 to 1500.

Isabel, Anacaona also explores some societal practices and events that trace their origin to the period, including: the inception of mestizo society; the systems of repartimiento and encomienda by which Spain would rule its New World empire thereafter; the slow advance of Christianity, including in mestizo households; and the commencement of the Spanish conquest of South America. These influenced the course of societies in the Americas for centuries and are important for understanding the resulting world today.

Why write the series as historical fiction? How historically accurate are the books? Can your books be read independently?

I've chosen to write historical novels rather than histories because the Taínos had no written history and a novel's greater speculative latitude is necessary to achieve commensurate treatment of the Taíno and European protagonists. I also want readers to experience—not merely understand—events through the eyes of both Taíno and European protagonists.

I try to present each participant's actions and thoughts consistent with my interpretation of the historical record to the extent one exists and—to the extent not—as I speculate likely could have occurred, fictionalizing detail. I rely principally on primary sources (necessarily all European) and reconstruct Taíno voices from the information about Taínos contained therein as interpreted in the more bias-free analyses of anthropologists, archaeologists, and other experts. Historians and anthropologists themselves disagree as to what events occurred and what the protagonists thought, and I include discussion of alternative interpretations in *Isabel, Anacaona's* Sources section.

I've written all three books to be readable independently because there may be different audiences. *Encounters Unforeseen* dramatizes the intimate lives of the Taíno and European protagonists prior to their encounters in 1492—their childhood educations, love affairs and marriages, and rises to power or prominence—a personal and bicultural dive into a history most people think they already know. *Columbus and Caonabó* depicts Columbus's invasion of

Española and the initial Taíno resistance, including the war many people are unaware of. Perhaps most relevant to our modern world, *Isabel, Anacaona* relates a period of coexistence that shaped the institutions of Spanish conquest and missionary efforts and mestizo society thereafter.

Are your books revisionist history?

Generally, I don't think that I'm writing revisionist history.

I believe *Isabel, Anacaona* and my prior books portray the European side of the history consistently with that of one or more modern historians. Historians of the European side disagree among themselves as to many things, and my choosing among competing views isn't revisionist.

In my view, adding the Taíno side of the history—albeit speculative—to the European itself isn't revisionist. It simply adds what's typically been ignored. Sometimes, when I think the European primary sources aren't credible, I present what I suspect more likely occurred on the Taíno side and note that in the Sources section. For example, there's European conquest lore about romantic love relationships between European men and Taíno women, where I often see compulsion by men or non-romantic motivations on both sides.

With that said, *Isabel, Anacaona* focuses in detail on information about each of the three protagonists that isn't generally appreciated or is overshadowed by their other legacies.

Tell us about that, starting with Isabel. What does *Isabel, Anacaona* retell about her? What steps did she take to stop Columbus's and his successors' enslavement and abuse of Indians?

Biographies of Isabel generally depict her extraordinary legacies in giving birth to both modern Spain (ruling Castile and Aragón jointly with her husband for decades and completing the Reconquista) and to Spanish America, as well as the cruelties of her use of the Inquisition and expulsion of the Jews to Christianize her kingdoms.

Isabel is forty-seven at the novel's outset, with her domestic legacies largely behind her and suffering recurring illness, and the book focuses on her governance of her conquerors in the Indies. From 1498 through 1502, she ordered and insisted that non-resisting Indians be treated as her free vassals, neither enslaved nor abused, a perspective that was dismissed or unappreciated by most of her contemporaries.

The book cover illustrates Columbus's enslavement and shipment to Spain of eight hundred Tainos in 1498, and the narrative depicts Isabel's furious reaction when the three hundred surviving the voyage arrived. Columbus's disobedience to her became one of a number of factors in her decision to replace him as Española's governor in 1500, and she manumitted these Indians—the mere nineteen then located and still surviving—and sent them back to Española with Columbus's immediate successor, Francisco de Bobadilla. In 1501, she envisioned a coexisting Spanish-Indian society on Española without slavery and gave specific instructions to Bobadilla's successor, Nicolás de Ovando, to reform her conquerors' treatment to that end.

What happened—as the novel depicts—fell short of Isabel's vision. Spanish-Indian relationships on Española evolved during the period from Columbus through Ovando to a system of subjugation defined as repartimiento and encomienda (in theory, not slavery) by which Spain would rule its American possessions thereafter. In short, repartimiento was the award of Indian lands with the resident Indians to Spanish settlers, encomienda the award of the Indians' labor

itself. Regardless of theory, *Isabel, Anacaona* depicts that the Taínos understood the practices simply as slavery.

What atrocities did Europeans commit on Española?

In addition to enslaving Indians (whether resisting conquest or not), they forced Indians to work as servants, physically punished those refusing that, and raped women and domineered them to serve as concubines. When placer gold was discovered in quantity in 1499, they forced Indians to pan the gold, and the harsh conditions of that servitude grew to become—together with disease—a major source of Taíno death and population decline.

The “Black Legend” characterizes portrayals of Spanish conquerors as crueller than other European conquerors as the exaggerated propaganda of competing European kingdoms.

I haven’t studied conquest in the Americas itself, but it’s certain that Spaniards and other Europeans committed atrocities on Española. That verdict is essentially unanimous among all European contemporary observers, the only issue being who committed the atrocities. The rebels and other critics who opposed Columbus blamed Columbus and his loyalists; Columbus and his son Ferdinand blamed the rebels and other critics; and less partisan observers blamed one or the other or both. Isabel learned of the abuses, was disgusted, and acted to prohibit them, albeit ineffectively.

What does *Isabel, Anacaona* retell about Anacaona? What were her accomplishments that make her an important historical person?

Traditional depictions of Anacaona relate her preeminent stature as a poet; her uncommon beauty and allure; her intelligence and cunning; her exercise of authority during her brother Chief Behechchio’s rule and ascension to chieftain on his death; and her inclination and ability to negotiate with Española’s conquerors.

Anacaona is in her early thirties at the novel’s outset, widowed two years earlier (Caonabó was her husband) and relocated to her native Xaraguá. *Isabel, Anacaona* relates her shrewdness and competence in making decisions—first as her brother’s advisor and then as chieftain herself—on how to prevent Columbus’s and his successors’ conquest of central Española from extending west to envelope Xaraguá. Together with Behechchio and then alone, Anacaona was successful in doing so, sparing Xaraguá from conquest invasion and build-out during the entire period of the book. While little noted, this survival was longer than nearly all Española’s other supreme chiefdoms and outlasted the governorships of both Columbus and Bobadilla. Anacaona became the first Native woman ruler known to oppose the Spanish invasion of her chiefdom in the Americas.

Initially, Behechchio and Anacaona harbored the Spaniards rebelling against Columbus in return for the rebels’ promise to defend Xaraguá from Columbus’s rule. After the rebels settled with Columbus and broke this promise, Behechchio and Anacaona nevertheless maintained rule of their people and chiefdom as a separate polity, as fresh Spanish uprisings against Columbus recurred in Xaraguá.

The strategy of relying on Spanish rebels was always infirm. In my interpretation of the historical record, when the strategy appeared to be failing, Anacaona approved as a protective alliance her daughter Higüeymota’s engagement to a Spaniard opposed to Columbus, resulting in

Anacaona's having a mestizo grandchild. Conquest lore typically casts the relationship as romantic. Whatever, the marriage never occurred, and no protective benefit was realized.

Yet the strategy of limited coexistence continued to work; the presence of Spaniards in Xaraguá remained minor and static after Columbus's removal through the time of Ovando's arrival.

What about Columbus and his demise. What does *Isabel, Anacaona* tell us about his governorship of Española and treatment of Indians?

Often abbreviated or ignored in biographies of Columbus, *Isabel, Anacaona* closely traces his life, objectives, and activities as governor on Española from September 1498 to his removal in October 1500, when he didn't go to sea.

Columbus is forty-six at the book's outset, and he'd already fallen from the acclaim that followed his first voyage, principally because his promises to find gold and a shortcut to Cathay had failed and many Spaniards at Isabel's court and on Española distrusted or despised him. He was also impoverished, as there hadn't been profits from the Indies for him to share in. He departed on his third voyage desperate to produce gold for Isabel and Fernando, as well as himself and his heirs, via the system of Indian gold tribute payments he'd established with Isabel's approval on Española in 1495 and 1496.

When he arrived on Española, Columbus struggled to settle the initial Spaniards' rebellion against him. The 1498 slave awards and shipment depicted on the book cover were intended to compensate and induce the rebels to return to Spain, but the rebels chose not to depart. In 1499, Columbus succeeded in settling the rebellion by awarding Indian land and the resident Indians to the rebels, and he gave the Spaniards loyal to him comparable awards. When he saw that the system of tribute failed to produce gold in quantity, he authorized the use of forced Indian labor in gold mining.

Additional rebellions against him recurred in 1500. Overwhelmed by opposition, Columbus retreated into religious devotion—perceiving himself as Christ's messenger to evangelize the Indies—and experienced a mental decline and even collapse. When Bobadilla arrived to replace him, he outright resisted, ordering Spaniards and Indians to disobey Bobadilla. Bobadilla sent him home in chains. *Isabel, Anacaona* relates the testimony taken against Columbus in Bobadilla's investigation—first discovered and published in 2006 and hence not discussed in most biographies of him.

Did Francisco de Bobadilla treat Columbus appropriately when removing him?

The question is Eurocentric. As I depict in *Isabel, Anacaona*, the Indians rejoiced in Columbus's removal.

Pro- and anti-Columbus European writers have partisanly and heatedly debated the question for five centuries, complicated by distortions of Isabel's orders to Bobadilla and Bobadilla's own improper conduct.

In my view, the ultimate answer is that Bobadilla's arrest and removal of Columbus fell within his authority, based on the following observations, as dramatized in *Isabel, Anacaona*: Isabel's written orders to Bobadilla directed him to investigate and punish the Spaniards who'd rebelled against Columbus and, regardless of that investigation, to replace Columbus as temporary governor of the Indies; the rebels' conduct constituted rebellion to the crown for which they were guilty; Columbus resisted Bobadilla's authority; Bobadilla punished Columbus, justified by that

resistance, but disobeyed Isabel's orders to investigate and punish the rebels; and Bobadilla treated Columbus harshly, contrary to Isabel's orders.

Does *Isabel, Anacaona* relate anything positive about Columbus?

Yes. In all my books, I try to be analytical and portray what each Taíno and European protagonist—including Columbus—did and thought at different times in their lives as validly as I can determine or speculate based on research of the historical record. I also try to present each protagonist's thoughts within the context of his or her fifteenth century perspective and to leave moral judgments to each reader. I don't decide upfront to depict any character as entirely good or bad and then cherry-pick the historical record in support, as does much Columbus literature.

Columbus had both admirable and deplorable qualities—the former including perseverance through adversity, rising from a humble origin to nobility, and extraordinary skill as a mariner. Many scenes in *Encounters Unforeseen*, when he achieves the pinnacle of his career, and to a lesser extent, *Columbus and Caonabó*, depict those qualities.

Isabel, Anacaona largely depicts the demise of his career and his greatest failings, wrongs, and dark legacies. But it does continue to depict his genius as an explorer and mariner; stories dramatize his exploration of the coast of modern Venezuela on the outward portion of the third voyage and his realization that he'd "discovered" a continent. His perseverance through adversity is also portrayed, both during his attempts to quash the Spaniards' rebellions against him and when he partially resuscitates himself by securing Isabel's approval for a purely exploratory fourth voyage.

What does *Isabel, Anacaona* tell us about the inception of mestizo society and the early Christian missionary efforts on Española?

Mestizo society began on Española when the Spanish rebels settling in Xaraguá cohabitated and had children with Xaraguán women and Spanish settlers loyal to Columbus did so elsewhere on Española.

Isabel, Anacaona depicts the evolution of the cohabitation from both Taíno and Spanish perspectives. Initial unions were largely but not entirely the result of Spanish men domineering and the threat of force. Over time, some unions evolved into family units where the Taíno woman incorporated Taíno custom into daily family life, and other unions were simply discarded at will by the Spanish man, when he returned to Spain or otherwise. Some Spanish men wished their partners to be baptized and to marry them and that the offspring be baptized and be treated as free men.

Isabel's missionary effort on Española failed to achieve a significant number of baptisms during the initial years of conquest, and *Isabel, Anacaona* relates her efforts to invigorate it with the dispatch of eighteen missionaries with Ovando in 1502. However, Christianity did root in the households where Spanish men and Taíno women cohabited.

Should Columbus Day be officially recognized?

Columbus conquered Native peoples on Isabel's behalf and enslaved them, and men under his command committed atrocities—all facts recorded by contemporaneous chroniclers. These actions often are excused on the basis that Columbus was simply a European man of his times; but his enslavements depicted in *Isabel, Anacaona* contravened Isabel's orders. From our twenty-

first century perspective, as well as the fifteenth-century Taíno perspective, Columbus did many bad things.

In my view, federal and state governments shouldn't recognize Columbus Day because doing so honors a historical figure whose legacy—while foundational to our present civilization and possessing some qualities and heritages we admire—is eviscerated by enslavements and atrocities our governments in the twenty-first century should condemn. Indigenous People's Day should be recognized instead. Our governments' non-recognition of Columbus Day doesn't deny his role in history or prevent citizens from honoring him in parades, as protected by the first amendment; it simply reflects that our governments don't elevate his entire legacy.

What's next for you?

There will be one final sequel.