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15th Century Mariners

According to John Green, the three greatest mariners of the 15th century were Zheng He, Vasco de Gama, and Columbus. All came from different places, with contrasting goals and discoveries. To begin, Zheng He was Muslim and from China. Between 1405 and 1433, he led seven voyages throughout the Indian Ocean. Compared to Columbus, whose first voyage consisted of only three ships, Zheng led an armada of over 300 ships and a crew of over 27,000! Zheng's journey consisted of trade missions, and the goal was to hold China as the biggest trading port and community during that time. They also brought "crazy things" back from their journeys to China, according to John Green, like exotic animals from Africa. Next comes Vasco de Gama. At the time, Portugal commissioned sailors to search for a path to the Indian Ocean for spice trade and find the Kingdom of a mythical Christian King, Prester John, for help in the crusades. Vasco de Gama was the first Portuguese mariner to make it around Africa and into the Indian Ocean. His goal at that point was to find gold and Christians. They also wanted to capture and control coastal cities and did so with their well-armed ships. Their ships were comparable to those of Zheng He, but they did not have enough people or a high enough number of boats to run the Indian Ocean trade. Because of this, instead of adding to trade like Zheng He and Columbus, they focused on extortion and were known as pirates who would extract value from the trade instead of adding to it.

volume. With this, they could never take control of Indian Ocean Trade routes. Lastly comes Columbus, the most popular of the two. Columbus was the most popular not because he was the best but because his voyages had a lasting impact on the world, unfortunately negative, not so much positive. Columbus was desired for his ability to navigate completely unknown waters with a technique known as dead reckoning. He was able to figure out the direction he was going, his speed, and the time with an hourglass. Like Vasco de Gama, Columbus was in search of gold and Christians. He failed at finding riches and negatively impacted the people he encountered in the Americas. In terms of accomplishments, he was much less successful than Zheng He and Vasco de Gama. But Columbus did influence generations that came after him, and later, Spain became wealthy and led power in Europe. The video does not specifically state who the greatest of the three was, as they were all so different and left distinct impacts on history.