**Historical Mythbusters #1**

**"New World" Myth:**When the early explorers landed in North America, they discovered a sparsely populated "New World."

When Columbus landed in Hispaniola in 1492, he did not discover this land. Columbus could not “discover” what other people already knew about and inhabited.  Rather than finding a "New World," Columbus established contact with a very old world and initially facilitated the meeting of two ancient cultures - European and Native American (or First Nations).  With the arrival of the slave trade, the Europeans facilitated the meeting of three ancient cultures - African, European, and Native American.

By the time European explorers landed in North America, the inhabitants of the native communities comprised somewhere between 5 and 10 million people who belonged to between 500-600 different tribal societies.

* It is believed that on the northwest coast alone, over 130,000 Native Americans lived in hundreds of communities.
* When Columbus landed in Hispaniola (known today as the Dominican Republic and Haiti), it is believed that somewhere between 1-3 million indigenous people lived on the island. When compared with the population of Spain - about 6-10 million in an area seven times as large - North America appears quite populous.
* Another comparison finds that the Aztec capital had about 165,000 to 250,000 occupants which was larger than many of the great European cities of the day: Constantinople, Naples, Venice, Milan, and Paris.
* The tribal peoples of North America spoke more than 700 different languages - many of which can be found on the accompanying map illustrating the major languages spoken prior to European settlement - and made their livings in a wide array of different environments.