

AHRC Proposed Warrant Article on Indigenous People's Day

Proposed Title: Indigenous People's Day

Subject Matter: Changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day

To see if the Town will vote to adopt a resolution to celebrate "Indigenous People's Day" on the second Monday in October, instead of Columbus Day, in order to celebrate the heritage of those people indigenous to Massachusetts; or take any action related thereto.

Requested by:

The Arlington Human Rights Commission



INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY RESOLUTION

They [Arawak Indians] ... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things... . They willingly traded everything they owned... . They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features... . They do not bear arms, and do not know them... . They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... . They would make fine servants... . With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.

-Christopher Columbus, 1492

WARRANT ARTICLE XX: To see if the Town will vote to adopt a resolution to celebrate "Indigenous Peoples Day" on the second Monday in October, instead of Columbus Day, in order to celebrate the heritage of those people indigenous to Massachusetts; or take any action related thereto.

Indigenous Peoples Day recognizes and celebrates the heritage of Native Americans and the history of their Nations. Honoring Columbus Day celebrates a legacy of genocide and perpetuates ongoing racism and neocolonialism towards Indigenous peoples. Columbus did not discover the Americas; you can't "discover" lands that are already inhabited. The historical record needs to be set straight in order to respect the culture, language and traditional lifestyles of the Indigenous ancestors who existed long before Columbus' voyage.

It's time to acknowledge the indigenous history of Arlington and the Commonwealth as well as the continued presence of indigenous peoples in Massachusetts.

Places that Celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day:

○ Massachusetts Cities & Towns

- Amherst, MA
- Brookline, MA
- Cambridge, MA
- Northampton, MA
- Somerville, MA

**** Active campaigns in Boston, Framingham, Marblehead, Newton and Wellesley.*

○ Select U.S. Cities

- Phoenix, AZ
- Berkeley, CA
- Los Angeles, CA
- Santa Cruz, CA
- Long Beach, CA
- Boulder, CO
- Denver, CO
- Boise, ID
- Davenport, IA
- Lawrence, KS
- Bangor, ME
- Portland, ME
- Ann Arbor, MI
- East Lansing, MI
- Minneapolis, MN
- St. Paul, MN
- Asheville, NC
- Durham, NH
- Ithaca, NY
- Albuquerque, NM
- Santa Fe, NM
- Cincinnati, OH
- Tulsa, OK
- Portland, OR
- Austin, TX
- Nashville, TN
- Salt Lake City, UT
- Harpers Ferry, WV
- Olympia, WA
- Seattle, WA
- Madison, WI

○ States

- Iowa
- Minnesota
- North Carolina
- South Dakota
- Vermont
- Alaska

Let's make Arlington next!

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY FAQ¹

Indigenous Peoples Day is about more than a name change; it's a refusal to allow the genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples to go unnoticed, and a demand for recognition of Indigenous humanity.

Recognizing this day in place of what's currently known as "Columbus Day" is a way to correct false histories, honor Indigenous peoples, and begin to correct some of the countless wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (what's now known as the Americas).

Is a name change important?

Words have meanings; words control who and what we think about, and this has implications on our actions. If we continue to erase Indigenous peoples, and celebrate a colonizer (Christopher Columbus) instead, that will have a direct impact on the ways Indigenous peoples are treated. If we can't even so much as celebrate the first peoples of this land, and not the person responsible for the largest genocide ever committed, then how can we expect good public policy or day to day treatment for Native Americans?

What good does a name change do for Indigenous peoples?

Native Americans are the [racial group most affected by suicide](#), which is unsurprising considering the [inaccurate and racist representation](#) of Indigenous Peoples (not to mention the hundreds of years of genocidal public policy). "Columbus Day" and other forms of representation that normalize colonialism and genocide no-doubt affect the way Indigenous children and adults see themselves (or don't). America has been celebrating Indigenous genocide for decades, which does damage not only to Native children but also to non-Native children, since they have a false idea that this was empty land discovered by someone. Having a positive day at least once a year for Indigenous peoples is one move that can be made to begin to affect Indigenous representation, and help to remedy some of the harmful effects.

Why can't we celebrate both?

These [myths about "Columbus Day"](#) and Indigenous Peoples Day are powerful, which is part of the reason why we are still fighting for basic recognition and rights. That's why we are still fighting to have our history represented, like this movement for Indigenous Peoples Day in Boston, and even for necessities like the right for water happening in the fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota at [Standing Rock](#).

Why can't Indigenous Peoples Day be on a different day?

Not only is it important to reject the celebration of colonialism in the form of "Columbus Day," but it's also important to celebrate and recognize the accomplishments of Indigenous Peoples despite these seemingly insurmountable obstacles in its place. Indigenous Peoples are so often erased in society, that many forget Indigenous peoples still exist. For this reason, it's important to begin to undo some of the harm done through this holiday, and to correct the false histories that have been inscribed.

Isn't this holiday just about the discovery of America?

¹ <http://www.indigenouspeoplesdayma.org/faq/>

Columbus [didn't discover anything](#), instead stumbling upon thousands of different Indigenous groups with complex societies and systems. Columbus was so lost that he named the people he found "Indians" since he thought he'd stumbled upon the Asian country India, which is why Indigenous peoples from the Americas were historically referred to as "Indians" or "American Indians."

I thought Columbus Day was about celebrating Italian American heritage?

Beyond the fact that Columbus was [sailing for the Spanish monarchy since Italy wouldn't fund his colonial expedition](#), or that Columbus was responsible for the [deaths of millions](#) of Native peoples throughout the Americas, "Columbus Day" is more of a Catholic holiday, pushed for by [the Knights of Columbus in 1934](#) (a Catholic fraternity) than an Italian one.

It's important to note that Indigenous Peoples Day is not anti-Italian, but rather, is anti-Columbus. We understand that Columbus and the harm he caused doesn't represent the Italian people as whole. Thus, when we seek to abolish "Columbus Day" and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day, this move is not "anti-Italian," but is instead anti-colonialism/genocide/etc. Many Italian Americans see Christopher Columbus not as a point of pride or celebration, but rather as an embarrassment. The month of [October is Italian American Heritage month](#), offering Italian Americans the opportunity to celebrate the hundreds of Italian Americans who contributed to a positive, not genocidal, Italian American history.

Timeline of European settlers impact on Native people in Massachusetts¹

1616 European traders introduce yellow fever to the tens of thousands of Native Americans that occupy what is now Massachusetts. These tribes include the Pawtucket (or Penacook), the Massachusett, the Pokantoket (or Wampanoag), and several other smaller bands including the Nipmuck and Pocumtuck. To the south, in what is now Rhode Island and Connecticut, are bands of Pequot-Mohegans, Narragansetts, Western and Eastern Niantic, Quirpi, Tunxis, and Podunk Indians.

1632 John Eliot arrives from Cambridge, England and begins learning the language of the Wampanoag (Wopanatoak), a dialect of Algonquian, in order to convert Native Americans to Christianity. He will go on to launch a mission, translate the Bible into Wampanoag, and establish fourteen “Indian Praying Towns” for Native converts. By 1684, only four will remain: Natick, Ponkapoag area (the area of the Blue Hills Reservation), Wamesit (Lowell), and Chabanakongkomun (Worcester County).

1650 90 percent of Native Americans living in New England at the time of the European settlement have died as a result of European diseases (based on modern historical estimates).

Arlington’s History²

The area currently known as Arlington was originally inhabited by the Massachuset tribe. When European settlers first came to the area in 1614, it is estimated that as many as 3,000 members of the Massachuset lived in the area around Boston Bay, including present-day Arlington. Three epidemics of European disease hit this community between 1614 and 1617, resulting in mass deaths and the elimination of whole villages. These sicknesses, along with an inter-tribal war, reduced the Massachuset population to 500 within 5 years of settlers’ arrival. That was followed by a 1633 smallpox epidemic that further reduced their numbers. In 1639, Massachuset chief Squaw Sachem signed a treaty signing over much of their land to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. There have been no organized groups of the Massachuset since 1800.

Statement from the MA Center for Native American Awareness³

The Massachusetts Center for Native American Awareness (MCNAA) recognizes that indigenous inventions; words and language; farming techniques and other technology; cuisine and new foods, cooking techniques, etc. were introduced to the world through “contact.” We acknowledge that this exchange and introduction to Europe and the rest of the world was primarily facilitated by one contact in particular. Every year, there is a national holiday commemorating the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the shores of the North American continent. Given that awareness of Indigenous First Nations People history, culture, and contributions is almost invisible in American society and school curriculum, AND that available historical evidence shows the atrocities Columbus committed to indigenous people, we, the MCNAA, support the observance of *Indigenous Peoples’ Day*, and the abolishment of *Columbus Day*.

¹ <http://pluralism.org/timeline/native-peoples-in-boston/>

² <http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2008/04/squaw-sachem-of-mistick.html>

³ <http://www.mcnaa.org/position-statements.html>

Additional Resources

- MA Commission on Indian Affairs, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/indian-affairs>
- MA Center for Native American Awareness <http://www.mcnaa.org/about-the-organization.html>
- This [Wikipedia](#) entry has a very long list of IPD observing entities broken out by year adopted. The trend popped out – each year the swell is getting bigger as more municipalities and entities want to get on the right side of history.

Excerpt from Chapter 1 of Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States"

CHAPTER 1: COLUMBUS, THE INDIANS, AND HUMAN PROGRESS

Arawak men and women, naked, tawny, and full of wonder, emerged from their villages onto the island's beaches and swam out to get a closer look at the strange big boat. When Columbus and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly, the Arawaks ran to greet them, brought them food, water, gifts. He later wrote of this in his log:

They ... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned... . They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features... . They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... . They would make fine servants... . With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.

These Arawaks of the Bahama Islands were much like Indians on the mainland, who were remarkable (European observers were to say again and again) for their hospitality, their belief in sharing. These traits did not stand out in the Europe of the Renaissance, dominated as it was by the religion of popes, the government of kings, the frenzy for money that marked Western civilization and its first messenger to the Americas, Christopher Columbus.

Columbus wrote:

As soon as I arrived in the Indies, on the first Island which I found, I took some of the natives by force in order that they might learn and might give me information of whatever there is in these parts.

The information that Columbus wanted most was: Where is the gold? He had persuaded the king and queen of Spain to finance an expedition to the lands, the wealth, he expected would be on the other side of the Atlantic—the Indies and Asia, gold and spices. For, like other informed people of his time, he knew the world was round and he could sail west in order to get to the Far East.

Spain was recently unified, one of the new modern nation-states, like France, England, and Portugal. Its population, mostly poor peasants, worked for the nobility, who were 2 percent of the population and owned 95 percent of the land. Spain had tied itself to the Catholic Church, expelled all the Jews, driven out the Moors. Like other states of the modern world, Spain sought gold, which was becoming the new mark of wealth, more useful than land because it could buy anything.

There was gold in Asia, it was thought, and certainly silks and spices, for Marco Polo and others had brought back marvelous things from their overland expeditions centuries before. Now that the Turks had conquered Constantinople and the eastern Mediterranean, and controlled the land routes to Asia, a sea route was needed. Portuguese sailors were working their way around the southern tip of Africa. Spain decided to gamble on a long sail across an unknown ocean.

In return for bringing back gold and spices, they promised Columbus 10 percent of the profits, governorship over new-found lands, and the fame that would go with a new title: Admiral of the Ocean Sea. He was a merchant's clerk from the Italian city of Genoa, part-time weaver (the son of a skilled weaver), and expert sailor. He set out with three sailing ships, the largest of which was the *Santa Maria*, perhaps 100 feet long, and thirty-nine crew members.

Columbus would never have made it to Asia, which was thousands of miles farther away than he had calculated, imagining a smaller world. He would have been doomed by that great expanse of sea. But he was lucky. One-fourth of the way there he came upon an unknown, uncharted land that lay

between Europe and Asia-the Americas. It was early October 1492, and thirty-three days since he and his crew had left the Canary Islands, off the Atlantic coast of Africa. Now they saw branches and sticks floating in the water. They saw flocks of birds.

These were signs of land. Then, on October 12, a sailor called Rodrigo saw the early morning moon shining on white sands, and cried out. It was an island in the Bahamas, the Caribbean sea. The first man to sight land was supposed to get a yearly pension of 10,000 maravedis for life, but Rodrigo never got it. Columbus claimed he had seen a light the evening before. He got the reward.

So, approaching land, they were met by the Arawak Indians, who swam out to greet them. The Arawaks lived in village communes, had a developed agriculture of corn, yams, cassava. They could spin and weave, but they had no horses or work animals. They had no iron, but they wore tiny gold ornaments in their ears.

This was to have enormous consequences: it led Columbus to take some of them aboard ship as prisoners because he insisted that they guide him to the source of the gold. He then sailed to what is now Cuba, then to Hispaniola (the island which today consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic). There, bits of visible gold in the rivers, and a gold mask presented to Columbus by a local Indian chief, led to wild visions of gold fields.

On Hispaniola, out of timbers from the *Santa Maria*, which had run aground, Columbus built a fort, the first European military base in the Western Hemisphere. He called it Navidad (Christmas) and left thirty-nine crewmembers there, with instructions to find and store the gold. He took more Indian prisoners and put them aboard his two remaining ships. At one part of the island he got into a fight with Indians who refused to trade as many bows and arrows as he and his men wanted. Two were run through with swords and bled to death. Then the *Nina* and the *Pinta* set sail for the Azores and Spain. When the weather turned cold, the Indian prisoners began to die.

Columbus's report to the Court in Madrid was extravagant. He insisted he had reached Asia (it was Cuba) and an island off the coast of China (Hispaniola). His descriptions were part fact, part fiction:

Hispaniola is a miracle. Mountains and hills, plains and pastures, are both fertile and beautiful ... the harbors are unbelievably good and there are many wide rivers of which the majority contain gold... . There are many spices, and great mines of gold and other metals... .

The Indians, Columbus reported, "are so naive and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone...." He concluded his report by asking for a little help from their Majesties, and in return he would bring them from his next voyage "as much gold as they need ... and as many slaves as they ask." He was full of religious talk: "Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities."

Because of Columbus's exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread of the Europeans' intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians, after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.

Now, from his base on Haiti, Columbus sent expedition after expedition into the interior. They found no gold fields, but had to fill up the ships returning to Spain with some kind of dividend. In the year 1495, they went on a great slave raid, rounded up fifteen hundred Arawak men, women, and children, put them in pens guarded by Spaniards and dogs, then picked the five hundred best specimens to load onto ships. Of those five hundred, two hundred died en route. The rest arrived alive in Spain and were

put up for sale by the archdeacon of the town, who reported that, although the slaves were "naked as the day they were born," they showed "no more embarrassment than animals." Columbus later wrote: "Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold."

But too many of the slaves died in captivity. And so Columbus, desperate to pay back dividends to those who had invested, had to make good his promise to fill the ships with gold. In the province of Cicao on Haiti, where he and his men imagined huge gold fields to exist, they ordered all persons fourteen years or older to collect a certain quantity of gold every three months. When they brought it, they were given copper tokens to hang around their necks. Indians found without a copper token had their hands cut off and bled to death.

The Indians had been given an impossible task. The only gold around was bits of dust garnered from the streams. So they fled, were hunted down with dogs, and were killed.

Trying to put together an army of resistance, the Arawaks faced Spaniards who had armor, muskets, swords, horses. When the Spaniards took prisoners they hanged them or burned them to death. Among the Arawaks, mass suicides began, with cassava poison. Infants were killed to save them from the Spaniards. In two years, through murder, mutilation, or suicide, half of the 250,000 Indians on Haiti were dead.

When it became clear that there was no gold left, the Indians were taken as slave labor on huge estates, known later as *encomiendas*. They were worked at a ferocious pace, and died by the thousands. By the year 1515, there were perhaps fifty thousand Indians left. By 1550, there were five hundred. A report of the year 1650 shows none of the original Arawaks or their descendants left on the island.

The chief source-and, on many matters the only source-of information about what happened on the islands after Columbus came is Bartolome de las Casas, who, as a young priest, participated in the conquest of Cuba. For a time he owned a plantation on which Indian slaves worked, but he gave that up and became a vehement critic of Spanish cruelty. Las Casas transcribed Columbus's journal and, in his fifties, began a multivolume *History of the Indies*. In it, he describes the Indians. They are agile, he says, and can swim long distances, especially the women. They are not completely peaceful, because they do battle from time to time with other tribes, but their casualties seem small, and they fight when they are individually moved to do so because of some grievance, not on the orders of captains or kings.

....

In Book Two of his *History of the Indies*, Las Casas (who at first urged replacing Indians by black slaves, thinking they were stronger and would survive, but later relented when he saw the effects on blacks) tells about the treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards. It is a unique account and deserves to be quoted at length:

Endless testimonies ... prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives... . But our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy; small wonder, then, if they tried to kill one of us now and then... . The admiral, it is true, was blind as those who came after him, and he was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians... .

Las Casas tells how the Spaniards "grew more conceited every day" and after a while refused to walk any distance. They "rode the backs of Indians if they were in a hurry" or were carried on hammocks by Indians running in relays. "In this case they also had Indians carry large leaves to shade them from the sun and others to fan them with goose wings."

Total control led to total cruelty. The Spaniards "thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades." Las Casas tells how "two of

these so-called Christians met two Indian boys one day, each carrying a parrot; they took the parrots and for fun beheaded the boys."

The Indians' attempts to defend themselves failed. And when they ran off into the hills they were found and killed. So, Las Casas reports, "they suffered and died in the mines and other labors in desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could turn for help." He describes their work in the mines:

... mountains are stripped from top to bottom and bottom to top a thousand times; they dig, split rocks, move stones, and carry dirt on their backs to wash it in the rivers, while those who wash gold stay in the water all the time with their backs bent so constantly it breaks them; and when water invades the mines, the most arduous task of all is to dry the mines by scooping up pansful of water and throwing it up outside... .

After each six or eight months' work in the mines, which was the time required of each crew to dig enough gold for melting, up to a third of the men died.

While the men were sent many miles away to the mines, the wives remained to work the soil, forced into the excruciating job of digging and making thousands of hills for cassava plants.

Thus husbands and wives were together only once every eight or ten months and when they met they were so exhausted and depressed on both sides ... they ceased to procreate. As for the newly born, they died early because their mothers, overworked and famished, had no milk to nurse them, and for this reason, while I was in Cuba, 7000 children died in three months. Some mothers even drowned their babies from sheer desperation... . in this way, husbands died in the mines, wives died at work, and children died from lack of milk ... and in a short time this land which was so great, so powerful and fertile ... was depopulated... . My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write... .

When he arrived on Hispaniola in 1508, Las Casas says, "there were 60,000 people living on this island, including the Indians; so that from 1494 to 1508, over three million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this? I myself writing it as a knowledgeable eyewitness can hardly believe it... ."

Thus began the history, five hundred years ago, of the European invasion of the Indian settlements in the Americas. That beginning, when you read Las Casas-even if his figures are exaggerations (were there 3 million Indians to begin with, as he says, or less than a million, as some historians have calculated, or 8 million as others now believe?)-is conquest, slavery, death. When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure-there is no bloodshed-and Columbus Day is a celebration.



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Across the US, more cities ditch Columbus Day to honor those who really discovered America

By Holly Yan, CNN

Updated 12:17 AM ET, Mon October 8, 2018



Italian-Spanish explorer Christopher Columbus is depicted landing in the New World in October 1492.

(CNN) — By now, you probably know Christopher Columbus didn't discover America. He wasn't even the first European to do it.

So why does the 45th century Italian explorer still get his own national holiday? Six more cities and states are dropping Columbus Day to honor the people who were here first.

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Just this year, at least a dozen US cities -- including San Francisco and Cincinnati -- decided to stop observing Columbus Day and will instead celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day on Monday.



Related Video: Which Native Americans did Columbus encounter? 02:03

For Joe Curtatone, the mayor of Somerville, Massachusetts, the decision was easy.

"Columbus Day is a relic of an outdated and oversimplified version of history," the mayor wrote when announcing the decision last month.

"This issue is a lot like the Confederate flag for southerners. As an Italian-American it feels good that there is an official holiday that is nominally about us. We are proud of our heritage. Yet the specifics of this holiday run so deep into human suffering that we need to shift our pride elsewhere."

Dozens of other cities and entire states, including Minnesota, Alaska, Vermont and Oregon, have also replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day. Hawaii celebrates Discoverers' Day on the second Monday of October. And South Dakota celebrates Native American Day.

So what did Columbus really do?

He wasn't the first to discover the New World, the term generally used to refer to the modern-day Americas. Indigenous people had been living there for centuries by the time Columbus arrived in 1492.



A 76-foot statue of Christopher Columbus stands in New York City's Columbus Circle.

He wasn't the first European in the New World, either. Leif Eriksson and the Vikings beat him to it five centuries earlier. But Columbus did pave the way for the "European exploration, exploitation, and colonization of the Americas," according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

While many schoolchildren learn about the Niña, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, less appealing details of Columbus' journeys include the enslavement of Native Americans and the spread of deadly diseases.



The indigenous societies of the Americas "were decimated by exposure to Old World diseases, crumbling under the weight of epidemic," historian David M. Perry wrote.

"Columbus didn't know that his voyage would spread diseases across the continents, of course, but disease wasn't the only problem. ... He also took slaves for display back home and to work in his conquered lands."

But there's no doubt that Columbus' voyages "had an undeniable historical impact, sparking the great age of Atlantic exploration, trade and eventually colonization by Europeans," Perry wrote.

The very different presidential takes on Columbus Day

President Benjamin Harrison started celebrating Columbus Day in 1892 to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing in the Bahamas. In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made Columbus Day a national holiday.

Since 1971, presidents have traditionally written a proclamation for every second Monday of October

Related Article: Columbus Day Fast Facts

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Last year, President Donald Trump drew criticism when his first Columbus Day proclamation didn't mention Native Americans.

"The permanent arrival of Europeans to the Americas was a transformative event that undeniably and fundamentally changed the course of human history and set the stage for the development of our great Nation," Trump wrote.

"Therefore, on Columbus Day, we honor the skilled navigator and man of faith, whose courageous feat brought together continents and has inspired countless others to pursue their dreams and convictions — even in the face of extreme doubt and tremendous adversity."

Contrast that with President Barack Obama's proclamation a year earlier, which lauded Columbus' ambition but also acknowledged the uglier side of Columbus' voyages.

"As we mark this rich history, we must also acknowledge the pain and suffering reflected in the stories of Native Americans who had long resided on this land prior to the arrival of European newcomers." Obama wrote, citing "violence, deprivation, and disease."

"As we reflect on the adventurers throughout history who charted new courses and sought new heights, let us remember the communities who suffered, and let us pay tribute to our heritage and embrace the multiculturalism that defines the American experience."

Related Article: At a Navajo veterans' event, Trump makes 'Pocahontas' crack



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Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Contributor
Los Angeles County Board Supervisor, First District

Why Indigenous Peoples Day Matters

10/03/2017 05:30 pm ET

For centuries, American schoolchildren have learned about Christopher Columbus and his voyage to the New World. However, this education has often been incomplete, with limited study dedicated to the treatment of and impacts on the indigenous populations by the colonizing Europeans. Frequently, myths about Europeans bringing a civilizing influence upon the “savage” indigenous populations were shared, learned, and taught to future generations, and these myths slowly engrained themselves in what became our collective interpretation of our national history. The deaths of millions of Native Americans after 1492 to war, famine, forced deportation, and disease were often papered over and ignored, in favor of the celebration of a man who “discovered” a continent where millions of native inhabitants already lived.

Since 1970, the United States has recognized the second Monday in October as “Columbus Day.” Beginning no later than 2019, that will change in the County of Los Angeles.

Today, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion I authored, along with my co-author Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, that will remove Columbus Day as an official County holiday and replace it with “Indigenous Peoples Day.” Since 1970, instead of Columbus Day, Native Americans have celebrated Indigenous Peoples Day, a day of remembrance of our ancestors, a means of dispelling the myth that Columbus discovered America, and to celebrate the survival, resilience, and deep contributions to all people who now live on this continent.

Recognizing the contributions, history, and sacrifices made by the original inhabitants of Los Angeles and this continent is long overdue. As declared by the presidential proclamation of 2015, Native Americans and their traditions inspire the ideals of self-governance and determination that are the framework of our Nation. Native Americans have provided significant contributions to our American cultural tapestry, including agriculture, medicine, self-governance, music, language, and art. Indeed, the Native American community includes globally-recognized inventors, scholars, and spiritual leaders. This one act of restorative justice is important to many communities throughout the United States and Los Angeles, especially Native Americans, who have some of the highest percentages of depression,

My action at the Board is about publicly recognizing our true and complete history: that America's ancestors, for centuries, oppressed certain minority groups. This is not about erasing history; I believe the full history and impact of Christopher Columbus should be taught to current and future generations. I also believe that the positive contributions of Italian-Americans to our culture should be celebrated and recognized: my motion also designates October 12th of each year as Italian American Heritage Day in the County of Los Angeles. Italian American Heritage Day provides an opportunity for County residents to recognize the contributions of Italian-Americans to the history and culture of Los Angeles.

While we cannot change the past, we can realize and remember the pain that millions suffered throughout our nation's history. We can also recall the tremendous achievements of the original inhabitants of our continent. With Indigenous Peoples Day, I hope we advance this fuller understanding of our history.

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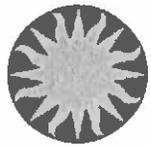
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Indigenous Peoples' Day: Rethinking American History

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Sarah Shear (left), assistant professor of Social Studies Education, Penn State University, and teachers working with students from kindergarten through high school take part in an Indigenous People's Curriculum Day and Teach-In presented by Teaching for Change and the National Museum of the American Indian. September 2018, Washington, D.C. (© Rick Reinhard)

“The most American thing about America is American Indians.” —Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche)

The first documented observance of Columbus Day in the United States took place in New York City in 1792, on the 300th anniversary of Columbus's landfall in the Western Hemisphere. The holiday originated as an annual celebration of Italian-American heritage in San Francisco in 1869. In 1934, at the request of the Knights of Columbus and New York City's Italian community, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared the first national observance of Columbus Day. President Roosevelt and the U.S. Congress made October 12 a national holiday in 1937. In 1972 President Richard Nixon signed a proclamation making the official date of the holiday the second Monday in October.

In the forefront of the minds of many Native people throughout the Western Hemisphere, however, is the fact the colonial takeovers of the Americas, starting with Columbus, led to the deaths of millions of Native people and the forced assimilation of survivors. Generations of Native people have protested Columbus Day. In 1977, for example, participants at the United Nations International Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations in the Americas proposed that Indigenous Peoples' Day replace Columbus Day.

Indigenous Peoples' Day recognizes that Native people are the first inhabitants of the Americas, including the lands that later became the United States of America. And it urges Americans to rethink history.

The movement to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day has gained momentum and spread to states, cities, and towns across the United States. The first state to rename Columbus Day was South Dakota in 1990. Hawai'i has also changed the name of its October 12 holiday to Discoverers' Day in honor of the Polynesian navigators who peopled the islands. Berkeley, California, became the first city to make the change in 1992, when the city council renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day. In 2015 an estimated 6,000 Native people and their supporters gathered at Randall's Island, New York, to recognize the survival of the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The demonstration's success and the worldwide media attention it attracted planted the seeds for creating an Indigenous Peoples' Day in New York City.

The following states now observe Native American or Indigenous Peoples' Day:

- Alaska
- Hawai'i
- Minnesota
- Oregon
- South Dakota
- Vermont

Cities have often led the way, including:

- Anchorage, Alaska
- Flagstaff and Phoenix, Arizona
- Berkeley, Burbank, Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Fernando, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, and Watsonville, California
- Boulder, Denver, and Durango, Colorado
- Moscow, Idaho
- Evanston and Oak Park, Illinois
- Davenport and Iowa City, Iowa
- Lawrence and Wichita, Kansas
- Berea, Brodhead, Burnside, Corbin, Crab Orchard, Frankfort, Harrodsburg, Hopkinsville, Junction City, Lancaster, Liberty, Livingston, London, Louisville, Mt. Vernon, Perryville, Prestonsburg, Richmond, Russell Springs, Science Hill, Somerset, Springfield, Stanford, and Taylorsville, Kentucky
- Bangor, Belfast, Brunswick, Gouldsboro, Orono, and Portland, Maine

- Amherst, Brookline, Cambridge, Northampton, and Somerville, Massachusetts
- Alpena, Ann Arbor, Detroit, East Lansing, Traverse City, and Ypsilanti, Michigan
- Bemidji, Grand Rapids, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Red Wing, Minnesota
- Kansas City, Missouri
- Bozeman, Montana
- Lincoln, Nebraska
- Durham, New Hampshire
- Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Akron, Ithaca, Newstead, Rochester, and the Village of Lewiston, New York
- Asheville, Carrboro, and Kernersville, North Carolina
- Fargo, North Dakota
- Cincinnati and Oberlin, Ohio
- Anadarko, El Reno, Lawton, Okmulgee, Norman, Oklahoma City, Tahlequah, and Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Corvallis, Eugene, and Portland, Oregon
- Lancaster, Pennsylvania
- Austin, Texas
- Nashville, Tennessee
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- Charlottesville, Virginia
- Bainbridge Island, Olympia, Seattle, Spokane, Tacoma, and Yakima, Washington
- Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
- Madison, Wisconsin

Even so, in 2018 Columbus mythology continues to be young American students' first introduction to encountering different cultures, ethnicities, and peoples. Teaching more accurate and complete narratives and differing perspectives is key to rethinking history. Universities and schools across the country are considering this and have changed the holiday's name. This September the museum and Teaching for Change, a Washington-based national education organization, hosted an Indigenous People's Curriculum Day and Teach-In for more than 100 teachers working with students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Sessions ranged from how to join the movement to Abolish Columbus Day; to skills-based sessions such as critical literacy, art, and facilitated dialogue; to inquiry-based lessons on American Indian Removal available in the museum's Native Knowledge 360° online resources.

The Teach-In began with a keynote presentation by Dr. Sarah Shear, assistant professor of Social Studies Education at Penn State University—Altoona, who has researched U.S. national and state history standards from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Her research—conducted with Ryan T. Knowles, Gregory J. Soden, and Antonio J. Castro and published in 2015 in “Manifesting Destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous Peoples in K–12 U.S. History Standards”—includes a statistic now cited by many different stakeholders in education: 87 percent of references to Native Americans in U.S. curricula are in the context of American history before 1900. “The narrative presented in U.S. history standards,” Dr. Shear and her colleagues believe, “when analyzed with a critical eye, directed students to see Indigenous Peoples as a long since forgotten episode in the country's development.” They see serious implications in the way the United States teaches its history:

When one looks at the larger picture painted by the quantitative data, it is easy to argue that the narrative of U.S. history is painfully one sided in its telling of the American narrative, especially with regard to Indigenous Peoples' experiences. . . .

The qualitative findings further illuminate a Euro-American narrative that reinstates the marginalization of Indigenous cultures and knowledge. Indigenous Peoples are left in the shadows of Euro-America's destiny, while the cooperation and conflict model provides justification for the eventual termination of Indigenous Peoples from the American landscape and historical narrative. Finally, a tone of detachment, especially with long lists of legal and political terms, dismisses the humanity of Indigenous cultures and experiences in the United States.

But things are changing. On Monday, October 8, 2018, states, cities, towns, counties, community groups, churches, universities, schools, and other institutions will observe Indigenous Peoples' Day or Native American Day with activities that raise awareness of the rich history, culture, and traditions of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas.

They will do so thanks to Native people, their supporters, and others who have gathered for decades and continue to gather now at prayer vigils, powwows, symposiums, concerts, lectures, rallies, and classrooms to help America rethink American history.

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Tags:

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The New York Times

STUDENT OPINION

Should Columbus Day Be Replaced With Indigenous Peoples Day?

By Katherine Schulten

Oct. 4, 2018

Does your school or community recognize Columbus Day as an official holiday? What do you know about Christopher Columbus, and what did you learn about him in school?

Below, more information about the movements to remove statues of Columbus and replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day — as well as an Op-Ed that questions those movements. After you read both, let us know what you think by posting a comment.

In this 2014 piece, “Columbus Day, or ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Day?,” Jake Flanagin explains why many are arguing it should be replaced:

It’s a controversial day with a turbulent history. “This historically problematic holiday — Columbus never actually set foot on the continental U.S. — has made an increasing number of people wince, given the enslavement and genocide of Native American people that followed in the wake of the Nina, Pinta and Santa Maria,” writes Yvonne Zipp for The Christian Science Monitor. “The neighborhood wasn’t exactly empty when he arrived in 1492.”

Back in 1992 — 500 years after Columbus’s fateful landing in the Caribbean — Berkeley, Calif., was the first American city to repurpose his day in honor of Native America. “Talk of an alternative Columbus Day dates back to the 1970s,” writes Nolan Feeney for Time, “but the idea came to Berkeley after the First Continental Conference on 500 Years of Indian Resistance in Quito, Ecuador, in 1990. That led to another conference among Northern Californian Native American groups.” Attendees brought the idea in front of the Berkeley City Council, after which they “appointed a task force to investigate the ideas and Columbus’ historical legacy.” Two years later, council members officially instated Indigenous Peoples’ Day in lieu of Columbus by a unanimous vote.

The California state senator Lori Hancock, then the mayor of Berkeley, remembers encountering Italian-American pushback similar to that in Seattle. “We just had to keep reiterating that that was not the purpose,” she told Mr. Feeney. “The purpose was to really affirm the incredible legacy of the indigenous people who were in the North American continent long before Columbus.”

In September 2017, a statue of Columbus in New York City was defaced with red paint stained on his hands, symbolizing his role in the genocide of Native Americans. In Baltimore, another statue of Columbus was graffitied with the words: "Racism: Tear it down."

But in an Op-Ed last October called "Tearing Down Statues of Columbus Also Tears Down My History," John M. Viola, president and chief operating officer of the National Italian American Foundation, argued:

I appreciate that for many people, including some Italian-Americans, the celebration of Columbus is viewed as belittling the suffering of indigenous peoples at the hands of Europeans. But for countless people in my community, Columbus, and Columbus Day, represent an opportunity to celebrate our contributions to this country.

...I have never been one to blindly uphold any single figure as the representative of all things Italian-American, since all individuals are flawed, and all monuments represent just a snapshot of our history, now measured against 21st-century sensibilities. Some undoubtedly require re-evaluation, but that process should not include violence, vandalism and destruction of property. The "tearing down of history" does not change that history. In the wake of the cultural conflict that has ripped us apart over these months, I wonder if we as a country can't find better ways to utilize our history to eradicate racism instead of inciting it. Can't the monuments and holidays born of our past be reimagined to represent new values for our future?

...Respect for historical monuments should not signify blind acceptance of the values and judgments of past societies; rather, they should be instructive tools in our quest to understand our history and use it to better meet the challenges of the present. If we allow uncontrolled tearing down of memorials or unilateral reinterpretation of American history, then we will be damaging our democracy by limiting vigorous debate on our history, with all its beauty and blemishes. In his first inaugural address at the onset of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called on Americans to allow a national dialogue led by the "better angels of our nature." I think his counsel remains as wise and essential today as it was then.

We at the National Italian American Foundation strongly condemn the defacing of historical monuments and expect elected officials and law enforcement to protect our public memorials from further damage so that a true conversation on their place in modern society can be organized. We believe Christopher Columbus represents the values of discovery and risk that are at the heart of the American dream, and that it is our job as the community most closely associated with his legacy to be at the forefront of a sensitive and engaging path forward, toward a solution that considers all sides.

Students: Read both articles, then tell us:

— Why does the United States celebrate Columbus Day? In your opinion, is the holiday problematic?

- What do you think of the argument for changing the name and focus of the holiday from Columbus to Indigenous Peoples Day? Does it dishonor the heritage of Italian-Americans, a group that has also faced discrimination? Or does it serve to recognize and affirm the overlooked history and contributions of Native Americans?
- Do you think changing the name of the holiday can change the way indigenous peoples are treated and remembered in United States history? Or is this move largely symbolic?
- Where do you stand in terms the statue debate? Should all Christopher Columbus statues across the United States be taken down? Why or why not?
- What ideas or arguments in the two articles do you find most compelling or interesting? Why?

Related: *The Teaching Channel offers resources for teaching “Un-Columbus Day,” the Anti-Defamation League has a lesson plan called Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples Day, and the Zinn Education Project offers Indigenous Peoples Day Resources.*

Students 13 and older are invited to comment. All comments are moderated by the Learning Network staff, but please keep in mind that once your comment is accepted, it will be made public.

