

## Columbus Day-Indigenous Peoples Day

(Note: Inspired by a "Southern Poverty Law Center" editorial comment)

**Columbus Day**, which is on the second Monday of October, may be the federally recognized holiday of Columbus Day, but millions across the country will instead observe **Indigenous Peoples' Day**, now officially observed in some states and cities.

When Christopher Columbus arrived in what is now known as North America, the region was hardly unoccupied. It was not a "New World" to be discovered but home to **millions of diverse, Indigenous people** with their own cultures, languages and sovereignty who had **occupied the land for thousands of years**.

Historians agree that for people indigenous to the Americas, the arrival of Columbus and the Europeans who followed him was a calamity of **catastrophic proportions**. Over time, the population was decimated through war, disease, **enslavement, forced displacement** and **outright murder**.

White European colonizers defended their actions through the "**Discovery Doctrine**," the ruthless notion that land they "discovered" belonged to them, with no regard to whether that land was **occupied by people native to it**.

Those who survived were stripped not only of their ancestral lands but of their cultural heritage through **forced assimilation** in Christian missions and brutal government-run boarding schools, injustices that lasted well into the 20th century.

American Indians were not **granted U.S. citizenship** until 1924 **and were not given the right to vote** until 1948. They were not granted **religious freedom** or the right to determine **the welfare of children** in their communities until 1978.

The effects of colonization are clear today.

A quarter of American Indians and Alaska Natives **live in poverty** and experience extreme inequities in **employment and housing**. Many Indigenous nations are **still working to reclaim** their languages, traditional ceremonies and spiritual practices. American Indians and Alaska Natives face significant barriers to **exercising their right to vote**, especially after the U.S. Supreme Court gutted Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. And Euro-American culture continues to **homogenize, appropriate and commodify** the very same cultural practices that Indigenous peoples themselves were discouraged from openly expressing through state-sponsored violence.

It's past time to rethink history.

This Monday, rather than celebrate Columbus' arrival in North America and the massive cultural erasure that followed, we can honor the survival and cultural heritage of the diverse American Indians and Alaska Natives – more than 5 million in the present-day United States – who've found resilience and perseverance in spite of political, social and economic barriers. We can honor the countless historical, cultural and diverse contributions that Native people have and continue to make.

We can practice a more ethical remembering by celebrating the history of Indigenous peoples *whose land we reside on* and by sharing stories of Native resilience, like the stories of Debra Haaland and Sharice Davids, the first Native American women elected to Congress; or Joy Harjo, the first Native American U.S. poet laureate; or the leadership of *Indigenous peoples* in the climate justice movement.

Observing Indigenous Peoples' Day instead of Columbus Day is an important step in dismantling a white supremacist understanding of U.S. history. This Monday, we encourage you to join with us in celebrating the rich history, wisdom and resiliency of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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