

Indigenous Peoples' Day

“We’re Still Here”: Indigenous Peoples’ Day Celebration Reflects Ongoing Resistance to Colonization

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxUuDhpf6kk> Democracy Now (Oct 2019 [11 mins])

Christopher Columbus, never set foot on what is now US soil, but he, like those following him to this country, carried out a massive genocide of Indigenous people throughout the Western Hemisphere. This clip from 2019, begins with the movement away from celebrating Christopher Columbus Day toward replacing it with Indigenous People’s Day, a holiday that is now recognized in a growing number of states, counties and cities across the country. lakowi:he'ne' Oakes, a Snipe Clan Mohawk and Haudenosaunee Confederacy member, is the Executive Director of the Community House in NYC. NYC has 118,000 Native American people representing 73 tribal nations. 70% of all indigenous people live in urban areas, where erasure of their identity is often experienced. Indigenous People’s Day works against that. Oakes describes how for Indigenous people, a holiday dedicated to their history means something different. To the Indigenous everywhere, it is about, “holding identity” that “reclaim[s] space” and, “find[s] a place and presence within society today. For us it is not just a day to celebrate ‘us’. It’s a day to remind everyone else to take responsibility and step up and rescind things like the Doctrine of Discovery [an international legal principle dating to the 15th C that allowed white Christian nations to acquire land and dominion over the inhabitants of people when their land was ‘discovered’].” Describing how Indigenous People’s Day is recognized and honored, Oakes describes, “With all of our ceremonies, we celebrate life, we celebrate what creation has given to us, we celebrate... the water, the earth, the moon, the stars, the skies, the animals, all things that we depend on and need and coexist with equally.”

US recognizes Indigenous Peoples' Day

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDIX6BNljWQ> ABC News (October 11, 2021 [6 mins])

A year ago, Biden became the first president to recognize Indigenous People’s Day. Matthew Fletcher, JD, Professor of Law, Michigan State University, specializing in Federal Indian Law and American Indian tribal law describes the importance of Biden’s act and of the holiday. Despite the centuries of oppression and assimilation, “It benefits all Americans to have a greater sense of what all the complexities are. That there were good and bad things that came out of relationships between United States America and non-Indian America citizens, and the Indigenous Peoples. There has been a tremendous amount of give and take that benefited the United States more generally between Indian people and non-Indian people.” For example, Indigenous Peoples’ ingenuity, insight and efforts have developed staples now used all over the world. Currently Indigenous tribal communities have offered “cutting edge ideas” that support childcare, and others that address climate change—areas where we all benefit.

Why the US celebrates Columbus Day

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNqOGhDMm8k> Vox (Oct 8, 2018 [6 mins])

Italian explorer, Cristobal Colon, “Christopher Columbus”, never landed in North America. Yet he, “is all over America. There are statues in his honor. Streets and [50] cities [and towns] named after him,” and he has a holiday. So why do we celebrate him and when did that begin? American children have for centuries been fed misinformation mythologizing Columbus such as his peaceful interactions with native peoples. However, one friar at the time describes how Columbus and his



men, “forced their way into settlements, slaughtering small children, old men and pregnant women,” details minimized or omitted from American textbooks. Post-Revolutionary War, our fledgling country needed a “rebellious leader” who was not British. Columbus checked that box and his name and image began to be stamped all over. In the early 1800s, a popular biography further eulogized him—again leaving out the mass genocide of Indigenous families.

In the later 19th Century, Italians began arriving to the US in large numbers and faced significant discrimination from a power structure that ostracized Catholics and did not accept Italians as European. “So they embraced Columbus,” who was like them, and Columbus, “quickly became an icon for Italian immigrants who, they argued too belonged in America.” In 1892, 400 years after Columbus arrived in the so-called New World, a day in his honor was first celebrated in highly patriotic ways in schools across America where children, “pledged allegiance to the flag for the first time.” Following that, Chicago’s World Expo centered Columbus as our hero. Finally, the Knights of Columbus was born, an organization of Italian Catholics. They lobbied for Columbus Day and FDR signed it into law in 1937. Decades and decades ago, Indigenous Peoples began to speak out against yet another racist myth central to our nation, and finally, every day Americans are wondering why do we celebrate Columbus?

Additional Resources:

<https://www.almanac.com/indigenous-peoples-day>

<https://unexpectedvirtualtours.com/indigenous-peoples-day>

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/12/opinion/columbus-day-italian-american-racism.html>