



Removing Columbus Day is Not about Cancel Culture

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In fourteen hundred ninety-two

Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

Many adults know these lines. After hearing these lines as children, adults were told that Italian explorer Christopher Columbus discovered America.

Wondering if times had really changed, at the dinner table yesterday, I asked my sons who Christopher Columbus was and what they had learned about him. One of my sons said he learned that “Some people believed he discovered America, but he did not.” My husband and I looked at each other and nodded. Then I said, “Good answer. If you had said something else, it would have been a whole history lesson during dinner.”

Just because you don't know about it doesn't mean it is a discovery. Why couldn't history book writers understand this simple concept? We know that the victors craft the stories, and people pass them down without even looking at the facts. If they had looked at the facts, people who are adults today would have been told that Christopher Columbus, who was Italian and a devout Catholic, was a person who was supposed to be going to Asia but ended up in the Caribbean and Central and South America on his many trips. He never stepped foot on what is known as North America. He was a colonizer, committed heinous acts against Natives, and sought fortune for his family.

Fordham University has excerpts from Columbus' journal online. Let's take a look at one excerpt.

In 1492, Columbus wrote:

So after having expelled the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses, in the same month of January, ordered me to proceed with a sufficient armament to the said regions of India, and for that purpose granted me great favors, and ennobled me that thenceforth I might call myself Don, and be High Admiral of the Sea, and perpetual Viceroy and Governor in all the islands and continents which I might discover and acquire, or which may hereafter he discovered and acquired in the ocean; and that this dignity should be inherited by my eldest son, and thus descend from degree to degree forever.

His focus was not on exploring and learning about other places. His focus was on conquering, obtaining a fancy title, and ensuring that any fortune he earned was passed down to his son if he died.

Vincent Schilling (Akwesasne Mohawk), a journalist whose writing brings me joy or pushes me to think, has written about Christopher Columbus many times. In his article “8 myths and atrocities about Christopher Columbus and Columbus Day,” Schilling shares Columbus' heinous acts, such as enslaving Natives, using them as sex slaves, smashing babies' heads into rocks, and using Natives as food for dogs.

The shift from Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day is not about cancel culture but about telling the true story of Columbus's life and shining a positive spotlight on Indigenous Peoples.

A rapist and torturer should not have a day dedicated to him. This should not be hard for anyone to comprehend.