

“Discovery”

by Evan Guy Konkey

I'm sure everyone has heard “In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue!”. He found America; he should be praised as a hero! Right? History books wouldn't lie to us. Well it turns out they did. At least in my experience, learning about Christopher Columbus was an annual thing in elementary school. The part that was left out was, Columbus wasn't actually the first person there. Those Indians? They were in America thousands of years before Columbus, and had lives of their own before Columbus made it to America. I believe education before conclusion is incredibly important. Rightfully named, “Indigenous Peoples Day” is misunderstood by many.

To fully understand why “Columbus Day” is wrongfully named, we must first learn about the origin story of America. Before Columbus landed in 1492, America was already prospering. While European explorers were already taking over the rest of the world, American life was simple. With tribes usually classified by family structure, Native Americans were incredibly advanced for not having access to what the rich white Europeans did. They had advanced farming (which benefitted from the rich soil of the land) and a well put together law system. Things were going well until Columbus landed, and took six natives as slaves against their will. That show of power would symbolize the utter dominance and immorality to come. The next 400 years revolved around Europeans (and eventually new Americans) pushing the Natives out, and many bloody battles between them. Present day, there are very few native American originated families left, as the plague of expansion consumed many of our past and present government officers. Clearly now, Columbus didn't actually discover America, he just told everyone he did.

By the time Europeans arrived in America they had already been conquering closer territories. European motives were mainly fueled by racism and the hunger for power. Europeans were able to conquer new lands because of their state of power. No other country could rival the Spanish or the English. They used this power to their advantage by invading new lands without permission. Much of the workforce in Europe was from slaves. After Europe had a good hold on the slave trade, they began to tell their people why their morals were correct. For example,

common white citizens were told that Africans and Indians were lesser people, and needed to be cleansed by God. European ideas are even better represented in the book, “Stamped” by Jason Reynolds, which I highly recommend.

Columbus Day was sadly a staple of American culture up until recently, when the idea of “Indigenous People’s Day” was proposed. In 1977, much too late, Indigenous People’s Day was proposed by Indigenous people of America at a United Nations meeting. It wasn’t until twelve years later that South Dakota became the first state to officially change the name of Columbus Day. It is unsettling to realize that people that represented the minority in that time had been silenced by our culture. Everyone was supposed to believe that Columbus was a hero, and we wouldn’t be here without him. Thinking like that has been a huge factor for racial injustice present day.

In the end, it is inspiring to see that the common people of America are starting to stand up to our racist past. From protests resulting of the murder of George Floyd (among others) to revamping a holiday based on a racist foundation, people are starting to voice their opinions and take action for people who have been oppressed for too long. As we near Indigenous Peoples Day, it is important to educate ourselves on and remember the unacceptable racism that happens in our country every day.

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Author Statement:

Hello everyone, I really hope you enjoyed this article as much as I did write it. Learning about something new is always fun and interesting. Going into this, I thought I had a solid viewpoint on Indigenous Peoples Day. Now, I come from a predominantly white neighborhood, and I am part of that majority. Learning about other cultures and peoples has been incredibly beneficial to me, since in school we weren't taught much about racism and Anti-Racism. Through research and reading, it has become clear to me that my lack of education on racism is something I need to work on. I learned a lot through this article, but not nearly enough. There is a lot I still don't understand, and Justice Generation seemed like the perfect place to learn! Again, I hope you enjoyed my article and learned a little bit!

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