



GOODBYE COLUMBUS!



An Open Letter From the AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT of COLORADO and Our Allies

When the Taino Indians saved Christopher Columbus from certain death on the fateful morning of October 12, 1492, a glorious opportunity presented itself for the cultures of both Europe and the Americas to flourish.

What occurred was neither glorious nor heroic. Just as Columbus could not, and did not, "discover" a hemisphere already inhabited by nearly 100 million people, his arrival cannot, and will not, be recognized by indigenous peoples as a heroic and festive event.

From a Native perspective, Columbus' arrival was a disaster from the beginning. Although his own diaries reveal that he was greeted by the Tainos with the most generous hospitality he had ever known, he immediately began the enslavement and slaughter of the Indian peoples of the Caribbean.

Defenders of Columbus and his holiday argue that critics unfairly judge Columbus, a 15th Century product, by the moral and legal standards of the late 20th century. Such a defense implies that there were no legal or moral constraints on actions such as Columbus' in 1492. In reality, European legal and moral principles acknowledged the natural rights of Indians and prohibited their slaughter or unjust wars against them.

The issue of Columbus and Columbus Day is not easily resolvable by dismissing Columbus, the man. Columbus Day is a perpetuation of racist assumptions

that the Americas were a wasteland cluttered with dark skin savages awaiting the blessings of European "civilization." Throughout this hemisphere, educational systems and the popular media perpetuate the myth that indigenous peoples have contributed nothing to the world, and, consequently, we should be grateful for our colonization, our dispossession, and our microwave ovens.

The racist Columbus legacy enables every country in this hemisphere, including the United States, to continue its destruction of Indian peoples, from the jungles of Brazil to the highlands of Guatemala, from the Chaco of Paraguay to the Western Shoshone Nation in Nevada. Indian people remain in a perpetual state of danger from the system begun by Columbus in 1492. The Columbus legacy throughout the Americas keeps Indian people at the bottom of every socio-economic indicator. We are under continuing physical, legal and political attack, and are afforded the least access to political and legal remedies. Nevertheless we continue to resist and we refuse to surrender our spirituality, to assimilate, or to disappear into Hollywood's romantic sunset.

To dignify Columbus and his legacy with parades, holidays and other celebrations is repugnant. As the original peoples of this land, we cannot, and we will not, tolerate social and political festivities that celebrate our genocide. We are committed to the

active, open, and public rejection of disrespect and racism in its various forms—including Columbus Day and Columbus Day parades.

For the past five years the American Indian Movement of Colorado and our allies have been compelled to confront and resist the continuing Columbus legacy in the streets of Denver. For every hour spent organizing non-violent opposition to the Columbus parade, we have lost an hour that we were not able to use in assisting indigenous treaty rights struggles, land recovery strategies, and the advancement of indigenous self-determination. However, one positive benefit of our efforts was the public debate over Columbus Day that has spread into the public schools as an educational tool for students and their teachers. Overall, we view the demise of the Columbus Day Parade in Denver as a welcome opportunity to move beyond the divisive symbolism of the past.

We therefore suggest the replacement of Columbus Day with a celebration that is more inclusive and that more accurately reflects the cultural and racial richness of the Americas. We also suggest that the community support a more honest portrayal of social evolution in this hemisphere and a greater respect for all people on the margins of the dominating society. There is no more appropriate place for this transformation to occur than in Colorado, the birthplace of the Columbus Day holiday.

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