

ABOLISH COLUMBUS DAY

SOLIDARITY WITH
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

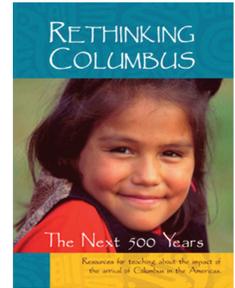
RESOURCES AND TOOLS



ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT • www.zinnedproject.org

Introduction

It is time to stop celebrating the crimes of Columbus and stand in solidarity with the Indigenous people who demand an end to Columbus Day. Instead of glorifying a person who enslaved and murdered people, destroyed cultures, and terrorized those who challenged his rule, we seek to honor these communities demanding sovereignty, recognition, and rights. We encourage schools to petition their administration and for communities to introduce legislation to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. This packet from the Zinn Education Project provides information and resources to join the campaign to Abolish Columbus Day, and is a companion to the teaching guide *Rethinking Columbus*, which offers lessons, articles, poetry, and more for grades K–12.



More at: www.zinnedproject.org/ABOLISH

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The Zinn Education Project, a collaborative project of Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change, promotes and supports the teaching of people's history in classrooms across the country.

rethinking schools





Image: © Alex Garland

TIME TO ABOLISH COLUMBUS DAY

Support Indigenous Peoples Day—a day to commemorate the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, and not just in a long-ago past, but today.

By **Bill Bigelow**

Once again this year many schools will pause to commemorate Christopher Columbus. Given everything we know about who Columbus was and what he launched in the Americas, this needs to stop.

Columbus initiated the transatlantic slave trade, in early February 1494, first sending several dozen enslaved Taínos to Spain. Columbus described those he enslaved as “well made and of very good intelligence,” and recommended to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella that taxing slave shipments could help pay for supplies needed in the Indies. A year later, Columbus intensified his efforts to enslave Indigenous people in the Caribbean. He ordered 1,600 Taínos rounded up—people whom Columbus had earlier described as “so full of love and without greed”—and had 550 of the “best males and females,” according to one witness, Michele de Cuneo, chained and sent as slaves to Spain. “Of the rest who were left,” de Cuneo writes, “the announcement went around that whoever wanted them could take as many as he pleased; and this was done.”

Taíno slavery in Spain turned out to be unprofitable, but Columbus later wrote, “Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold.”

The eminent historian of Africa, Basil Davidson, also assigns responsibility to Columbus for initiating the African slave trade to the Americas. According to Davidson, the first license granted



Columbus initiated the transatlantic slave trade.

to send enslaved Africans to the Caribbean was issued by the king and queen in 1501, during Columbus’s rule in the Indies, leading Davidson to dub Columbus the “father of the slave trade.” From the very beginning, Columbus was not on a mission of discovery but of conquest and exploitation—he called his expedition *la empresa*, the enterprise. When slavery did not pay off, Columbus turned to a tribute system, forcing every Taíno 14 or older to fill a hawk’s bell with gold every

three months. If successful, they were safe for another three months. If not, Columbus ordered that Taínos be “punished,” by having their hands chopped off, or they were chased down by attack dogs. As the Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas wrote, this tribute system was “impossible and intolerable.”

And Columbus deserves to be remembered as the first terrorist in the Americas. When resistance mounted to the Spaniards’ violence, Columbus sent an armed force to “spread terror among the Indians to show them how strong and powerful the Christians were,” according to de las Casas. In his book *The Conquest of Paradise*, Kirkpatrick Sale describes what happened when Columbus’s men encountered a force of Taínos in March of 1495 in a valley on the island of Hispaniola:

The soldiers mowed down dozens with point-blank volleys, loosed the dogs to rip open limbs and bellies, chased fleeing Indians into the bush to skewer them on sword and pike, and [according to Columbus’s biographer, his son Fernando] “with God’s aid soon gained a complete victory, killing many Indians and capturing others who were also killed.”

All this and much more has long been known and documented. As early as 1942 in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, Samuel Eliot Morison wrote that Columbus’s policies in the Caribbean led to “complete genocide” — and Morison was a writer who admired Columbus.

If Indigenous peoples’ lives mattered in our society, and if Black people’s lives mattered in our society, it would be inconceivable that we would honor the father of the slave trade with a national holiday. The fact that we have this holiday legitimates a curriculum that is contemptuous of the lives of peoples of color. Elementary school libraries still feature books like *Follow the Dream: The Story of Christopher Columbus*, by Peter Sis, which praise Columbus and say nothing of the lives destroyed by Spanish colonialism in the Americas.

No doubt, the movement launched 25 years ago in the buildup to the Columbus Quincentenary

has made huge strides in introducing a more truthful and critical history about the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Teachers throughout the country put Columbus and the system of empire on trial, and write stories of the so-called discovery of America from the standpoint of the people who were here first.

But most textbooks still tiptoe around the truth. Houghton Mifflin’s *United States History: Early*



Biographer Samuel Eliot Morison wrote that Columbus’s policies led to “complete genocide” —and Morison admired Columbus.

Years attributes Taíno deaths to “epidemics,” and concludes its section on Columbus: “The Columbian Exchange benefited people all over the world.” The section’s only review question erases Taíno and African humanity: “How did the Columbian Exchange change the diet of Europeans?”

Too often, even in 2016, the Columbus story is still young children’s first curricular introduction to the meeting of different ethnicities, different cultures, different nationalities. In school-based literature on Columbus, they see him plant the flag, and name and claim “San Salvador” for an empire thousands of miles away; they’re taught that white people have the right to rule over peoples of color, that stronger nations can bully weaker nations, and that the only voices they need to listen to throughout history are those of powerful white guys like Columbus. Is this said explicitly? No, it doesn’t have to be. It’s the silences that speak.

For example, here’s how Sis describes the encounter in his widely used book: “On October 12, 1492, just after midday, Christopher Columbus landed on a beach of white coral, claimed the land for the King and Queen of Spain, knelt and gave thanks to God...” The Taínos on the beach who greet Columbus are nameless and voiceless. What else can children conclude but that their lives don’t matter?



Look deeply into each nook and cranny of social life to ask whether our practices affirm the worth of every human being.

Enough already. Especially now, when the Black Lives Matter movement prompts us to look deeply into each nook and cranny of social life to ask whether our practices affirm the worth of every human being, it's time to rethink Columbus, and to abandon the holiday that celebrates his crimes.

More cities — and school districts — ought to follow the example of Berkeley, Minneapolis, and Seattle, which have scrapped Columbus Day in favor of Indigenous Peoples Day — a day to commemorate the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, and not just in a long-ago past, but today. Or what about studying and honoring the people Columbus enslaved and terrorized: the Taínos. Columbus said that they were gentle, generous, and intelligent, but how many students today even know the name Taíno, let alone know anything of who

they were and how they lived?

Last year, Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant put it well when she explained Seattle's decision to abandon Columbus Day: "Learning about the history of Columbus and transforming this day into a celebration of Indigenous people and a celebration of social justice ... allows us to make a connection between this painful history and the ongoing marginalization, discrimination, and poverty that Indigenous communities face to this day."

We don't have to wait for the federal government to transform Columbus Day into something more decent. Just as the climate justice movement is doing with fossil fuels, we can organize our communities and our schools to divest from Columbus. And that would be something to celebrate.

Bill Bigelow is curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools magazine and co-director of the Zinn Education Project. He co-edited A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis.

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ARTICLE: CAMPAIGN CHALLENGES

TRUTH-TELLING IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Groups fight for Indigenous Peoples Day

BY TANYA H. LEE

Originally published by *Indian Country News*

From the Northern Plains to the Southwestern deserts, American Indian groups are working to correct historic falsehoods and demanding acknowledgement of what the “discovery” of this continent meant to and for Indigenous Peoples.

One focus of this effort is to convince municipalities to pass resolutions changing the name of the holiday celebrated on the second Monday of October from Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. In 1992, the city of Berkeley, California, became the first to abolish Columbus Day, and several other California cities have followed suit. As have a number of other cities, including Seattle, Washington; St. Paul, Minneapolis; Grand Rapids and Duluth, Minnesota; and Traverse City, Michigan.

For many groups, convincing city council members to make the change has been a struggle, in large part because it requires that leaders be open to dealing with aspects of history that do not reflect the American myth every school child learns, a myth that dismisses or simply ignores the devastation colonialism inflicted

on the continent’s original inhabitants.

“There is a reluctance on the part of some people to accept the truth about Columbus and the Doctrine of Discovery and the brutal acts that he committed,” says Maylynn Warne, Pawnee/Santa Ana Pueblo, a member of the Fargo [N.D.] Native American Commission. The commission has had to make difficult compromises to write a resolution that the city council might find acceptable.

Clinton Alexander, an enrolled member of the White Earth Ojibwe Nation, is chair of the Fargo commission. “We looked at some existing resolutions and decided we wanted to further explain some of the points, to use our resolution as an educational document.” He says the commission did not want a resolution that was merely a politically correct statement.

So the first version of the resolution talked about the things that needed to be said: “great acts of genocide, sex trafficking, mass rape, mass murder. We really spelled it out, using references

to [16th-century Dominican friar and Spanish historian] Bartolomé de las Casas and his work,” Alexander explains.

Michael Yellow Bird, Three Affiliated Tribes, director of Tribal and Indigenous Peoples Studies and a professor of sociology and anthropology at the University

“Convincing city council members to make the change has been a struggle, in large part because it requires that leaders be open to dealing with aspects of history that do not reflect the American myth every school child learns.”

of North Dakota, was called in to consult and he urged the commission to be direct.

He urged the commissioners to “read some of the transcripts that de Las Casas was talking about, what happened to these children, these babies, these women, these little girls who were sold into sexual slavery. They were just taken, abducted, kidnapped and gang raped. Then they were killed and they would go out and get more. That’s got to mean something. That’s got to be in the story.”

Fargo city officials were critical of

the first version of the resolution, saying they felt the language was harsh and accusatory. Alexander says, “We worked with them, revised the language and made it more of a consensus draft. We lost a couple of our paragraphs that we felt really needed to be in there, but for myself, I was willing to make that compromise [because it means] that we can make this a focus for education over the next year and work toward a community that respects all people.”

The Fargo City Council voted 4-1 to pass the resolution on the evening of October 12.

The federal government has proclaimed November Native American Heritage Month and a number of cities celebrate the last Friday in September as Native American Day, while others have

“Let’s address some of those issues, recognize past trauma and acknowledge the impact it has had, not to get lost in that, but to name it and move our community forward.” —CLINTON ALEXANDER, THE WHITE EARTH OJIBWE NATION, CHAIR OF THE FARGO COMMISSION

renamed Columbus Day using terms such as Cultural Diversity Day.

Some 16 states do not even recognize Columbus Day as a holiday, so why is it important that this be the particular day that becomes Indigenous Peoples Day?

Melanie Yazzie, Diné, a co-founder of The Red Nation, is one of the people who worked to convince the city of Albuquerque

“Symbolic change opens the door for real material changes for the very deep-seated issues that Native people face.” —MELANIE YAZZIE, DINÉ, A CO-FOUNDER OF THE RED NATION

to change the name of Columbus Day. She explains, “It is important because the second Monday in October is officially recognized nationally and even internationally as Columbus Day. As countless people have pointed out over the past decades of trying to abolish Columbus Day, it is a holiday created to celebrate the genocide of Native people. This is experienced by Native people as a violent event that has not ended. We still live under a sort of colonialism here, at least in the United States.”

While some think changing the name of a holiday should not be a priority given the many other pressing needs in Indian country,

Yazzie says, “Symbolic change opens the door for real material changes for the very deep-seated issues that Native people face. So when we mobilize and come together around these issues we’re demonstrating that we care, that we can actually tackle the bigger issues that Native people face.”

Alexander sees a direct relationship between what happened 500 years ago and those bigger

issues. “When I look at disparities, such as health outcomes, in North Dakota, I have to think that is somehow related to this [history]. I want people to understand that. Let’s address some of those issues, recognize past trauma and acknowledge the impact it has had, not to get lost in that, but to name it and move our community forward.”

On October 7, the Albuquerque City Council passed the resolution to abolish Columbus Day and declare the second Monday in October Indigenous Peoples Day. The city joined several other municipalities that in the past two weeks have made that change, including Lawrence, Kansas; Portland, Oregon; Anadarko, Oklahoma; Olympia, Washington; Alpena, Michigan; and Bexar County, Texas.

These are victories for Indian country and for the nation as a whole. Crystal Gonzales, Three Affiliated Tribes and a descendant of the Kiowa people of Oklahoma, has been on the Fargo Native American Commission for five years. She says, “We need to be sympathetic to the people in our country [Native and non-Native alike] because they’re not taught [an accurate history of colonialism]. It’s not their fault. You can’t fault people for not knowing what they’re not taught.” © 2015 Indian Country Today Media Network

RESOLUTION: SCHOOL DISTRICT

Seattle School District #1 Board Resolution

Resolution No. 2014/15-10



A RESOLUTION of the Board of Directors of Seattle School District No. 1, King County, Seattle, Washington reaffirming the Board's commitment to promote the well-being and growth of every District student, especially of Seattle's American Indian and Indigenous students.

WHEREAS, the School Board recognizes that the Indigenous Peoples of the lands that would later become known as the Americas have occupied these lands since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, the School Board recognizes the fact that Seattle is built upon the homelands and villages of the Indigenous Peoples of this region, without whom the building of the City would not have been possible; and

WHEREAS, the School Board values the many contributions made to our community through Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, labor, technology, science, philosophy, arts and the deep cultural contribution that has substantially shaped the character of the City of Seattle; and

WHEREAS, the School Board has a responsibility to oppose the systematic racism towards Indigenous people in the United States, which perpetuates high rates of poverty and income inequality, exacerbating disproportionate health, education, and social crises; and

WHEREAS, the School Board seeks to combat prejudice and eliminate discrimination and institutionalized racism, and to promote awareness, understanding, and good relations among indigenous peoples and all other segments of our District; and

WHEREAS, the School Board promotes the closing of the equity gap for Indigenous Peoples through policies and practices that reflect the experiences of Indigenous Peoples, ensure greater access and opportunity, and honor our nation's indigenous roots, history, and contributions.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED, that the Seattle School Board of Directors strongly encourages District staff to include the teaching of the history, culture, and governments of the indigenous peoples of our state, as recommended by Chapter 205, Session Laws of 2005; and therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that the Seattle School Board of Directors commits to amend Policy No. 2336, Required Observances, to observe the second Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples' Day; and therefore be it further

RESOLVED, that the School Board commits to continue its support of the well-being and growth of every District student, especially of Seattle's American Indian and Indigenous students.

RESOLUTION: UNIVERSITY



S. 14-9 A Resolution to Reconstitute Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day

- 1 WHEREAS Tufts University sits on lands that historically belonged to the Massachusetts people;¹
- 2 WHEREAS in President Monaco's inaugural address he stated that "Diversity remains one of Tufts'
3 proudest traditions, a defining characteristic of this university";²
- 4 WHEREAS Tufts University has made substantial changes in the past 3 years to incorporate the
5 narratives of colonized peoples including the establishment of an Africana Studies major; Asian
6 American Studies minor; Colonialism Studies minor; Center for the Study of Race and Democracy;
7 and Consortium of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora;
- 8 WHEREAS Indigenous People's Day is a day that aims to recognize and "commemorate the
9 contributions of Native people";³
- 10 WHEREAS Cornell University, University of California, Berkeley and other universities are officially
11 recognizing Indigenous People's Day in place of Columbus Day;^{4,5}
- 12 WHEREAS Hawaii, South Dakota, Oregon, and Alaska do not observe Columbus Day and many
13 other states are considering renaming it;⁶ therefore,
- 14 BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Tufts Community Union (TCU) Senate urges Tufts University to
15 recognize Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day on any calendar distributed by the university,
16 every year from this day forward.
- 17 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the TCU Senate urges Tufts University to offer
18 programming on the history of indigenous peoples in the Americas on the aforementioned day.

Respectfully submitted by Genesis Garcia, A15, and Andrew Núñez, A15, on 28 September 2014.

Passed 28-1-3

¹ <http://anthonymorrismassachusetts.blogspot.com/2008/09/wampanoag-indians.html>

² <http://president.tufts.edu/2011/10/inaugural-address/>

³ <http://ipdpowwow.org/IPD%20History.html>

⁴ <http://assembly.cornell.edu/SA/20111201R28v2>

⁵ <http://ipdpowwow.org/IPD%20History.html>

⁶ <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/us/columbus-day>

Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska



PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples' Day was first proposed in 1977 by a delegation of Native Nations to the International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of American cities have recognized the second Monday of October as "Indigenous Peoples Day" reimagining Columbus Day as an opportunity to celebrate indigenous resiliency; and

WHEREAS, the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) recognizes the historical importance of the Indigenous Peoples of lands that later became known as the Americas, including the lands which became known as Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the MOA recognizes the fact that Anchorage is built upon lands first inhabited by the Indigenous Peoples of this region; and

WHEREAS, the MOA values the many contributions made to our community through Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, stewardship of these lands, labor, technology, science, philosophy, arts and the deep cultural contribution that has substantially shaped the character of the MOA; and

WHEREAS, the MOA recognizes that Anchorage is Alaska's "biggest village," with more than 23,000 Alaska Natives calling Anchorage their home.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Ethan Berkowitz, Mayor of Anchorage, Alaska, do hereby proclaim the second Monday of October to be

Indigenous Peoples Day

AND strongly encourage public institutions, businesses, and organizations to recognize and support Indigenous Peoples' Day; reaffirming the Municipality's commitment to demonstrate appreciation of Alaska's first peoples.




MAYOR

RESOLUTION: STATE

WHEREAS, the Indigenous Peoples of the lands that would later become known as Alaska have occupied these lands since time immemorial, and Alaska is built upon the homelands and communities of the Indigenous Peoples of this region, without whom the building of the state would not be possible; and

WHEREAS, we value the many contributions made to our communities through Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, labor, technology, science, philosophy, arts, and the deep cultural contribution that has substantially shaped the character of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the State recognizes the fact that Alaska is one "big village," with over 16 percent of the State population having indigenous heritage – the highest percentage among all the United States; and

WHEREAS, the State opposes systematic racism toward Indigenous Peoples of Alaska or any Alaskans of any origin and promotes policies and practices that reflect the experiences of Indigenous Peoples, ensure greater access and opportunity, and honor our nation's indigenous roots, history, and contributions; and

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples' Day was first proposed in 1977 by a delegation of Native Nations to the United Nations sponsored International Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas; and

WHEREAS, in 2011 the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, representing 59 Tribes from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Northern California, Western Montana, and some Alaskan Tribes, passed resolution #11-57 to "Support to Change Columbus Day (2nd Monday of October) to Indigenous Peoples' Day;" and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska joins a growing number of cities that have recognized the second Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples Day, creating an opportunity to promote appreciation, tolerance, understanding, friendship, and partnerships among Indigenous Peoples and all Alaskans.

NOW THEREFORE, I, Bill Walker, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF ALASKA, do hereby proclaim October 12, 2015 as:

Indigenous Peoples Day

in Alaska, and encourage all Alaskans to celebrate the thriving cultures and values of the Indigenous Peoples of our region and to continue efforts to promote the well-being and growth of Alaska's Indigenous community.



RELATED RESOURCES

More information at:
zinnedproject.org/ABOLISH

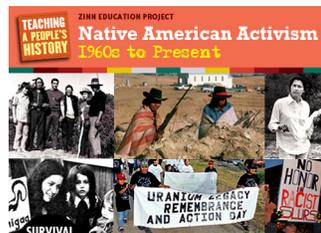
LESSONS

- Discovering Columbus: Re-reading the Past
- The People vs. Columbus, et al.
- The Cherokee/Seminole Removal Role Play
- Andrew Jackson and the “Children of the Forest”
- ‘Don’t Take Our Voices Away’: A Role Play on the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change
- Dirty Oil and Shovel-Ready Jobs: A Role Play on Tar Sands and the Keystone XL Pipeline

ARTICLES



Italian Americans Who Fought for Justice



Native American Activism: 1960s to Present

FILMS



The Columbus Controversy: Challenging How History Is Written

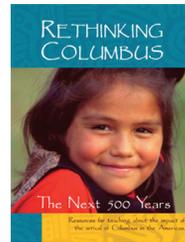


Even the Rain/También la lluvia

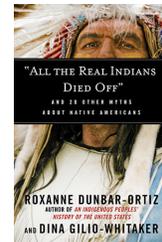


Unlearning “Indian” Stereotypes

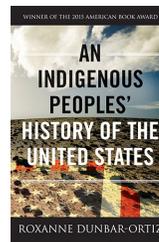
BOOKS



Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years



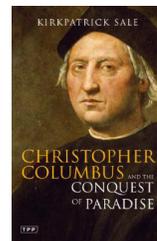
“All the Real Indians Died Off”: And 20 Other Myths About Native Americans



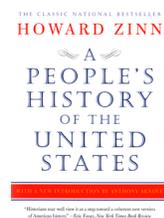
An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States



Columbus: His Enterprise



Christopher Columbus and the Conquest of Paradise



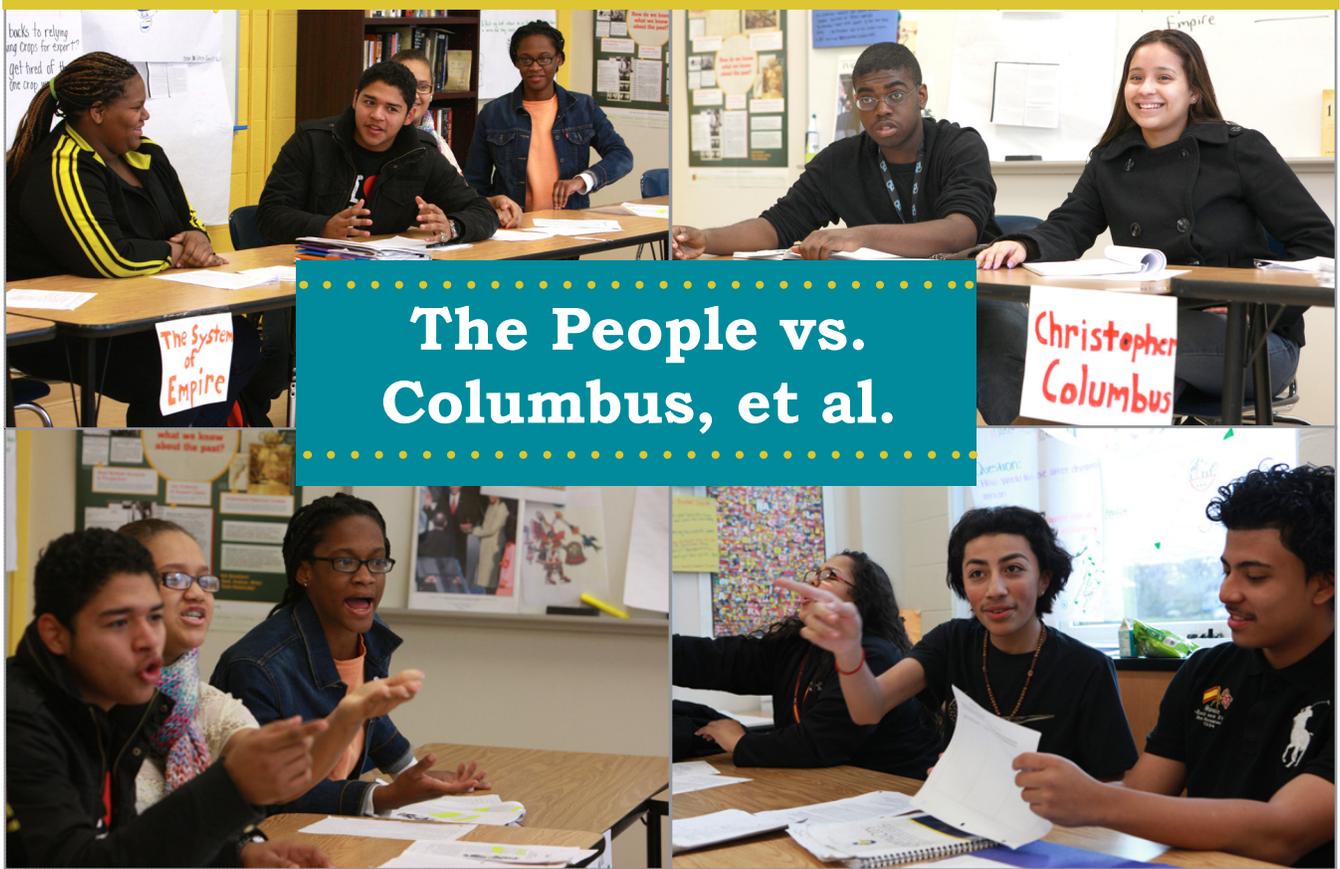
A People's History of the United States

MORE

Visit www.zinnedproject.org/ABOLISH to view more resolutions and add your actions to the map.



LESSON: PREVIEW



A widely used lesson for upper elementary through high school students, “The People vs. Columbus, et al.” challenges students to critically examine the motivations for and impact of Christopher Columbus’s arrival in Hispaniola. The lesson engages students in a trial role play to determine who is responsible for the death of millions of Taínos on the island of Hispaniola in the late 15th century.

This lesson is by Bill Bigelow and was originally published by Rethinking Schools in *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*. It is available for teachers to download for free at www.zinnedproject.org/ABOLISH.

Here are comments from teachers who have used the lesson:

“The People vs. Columbus” is the most interactive lesson that my class has ever used. The students love it and become enlightened about a perspective on history they have never heard of before. —Larry Johns, social studies teacher, Denman Junior High, McComb, Miss.



I always begin my U.S. history course with “The People vs. Columbus, et al.” It is amazing how engaged students become to not only learn the truth but also be able to defend themselves using the evidence provided. Students love creativity and this case allows students to come to their own conclusions. —Miroslaba “Lili” Velo, U.S. and world history teacher, Tennyson High School, Hayward, Calif.

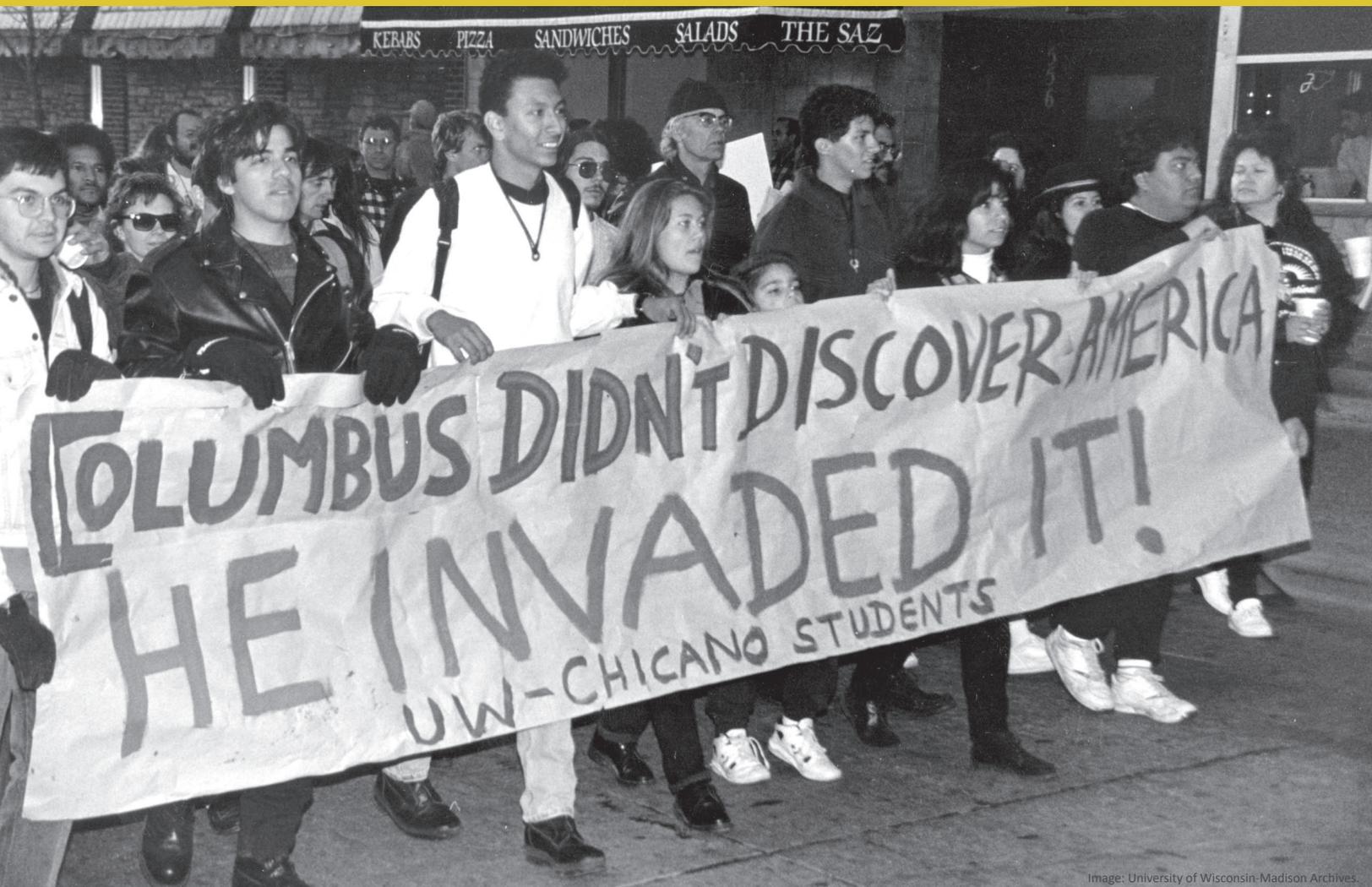


Image: University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives.

ABOLISH COLUMBUS DAY

Solidarity with
Indigenous peoples



TEACHING
A PEOPLE'S
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