

# Indigenous Peoples' Day: An Alternative to Columbus Day

Today is Columbus Day, a federal holiday in the United States.

However, only about half of the states observe that day, and four states - as well as many cities - celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day instead.

Columbus Day was first celebrated in the U.S. in 1792, and 100 years later President William Henry Harrison issued a proclamation encouraging Americans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the "new world."

Then, in 1937, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt proclaimed Columbus Day as a national holiday, largely as a result of lobbying by the Knights of Columbus, the Roman Catholic fraternal service organization that was founded in 1882 and named in honor of Christopher Columbus.

In recent decades, though, there has been growing opposition to Columbus' undeniable connection to the oppression of indigenous peoples and the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade.

Beginning in 1992 (in Berkeley, California), an increasing number of cities - as well as the states of Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon and South Dakota - now celebrate Indigenous Peoples' Day in the place of Columbus Day. In South Dakota, though, the day is called Native American Day.

So, which holiday should be celebrated?

There are those who see the mistreatment of indigenous people and slavery as two aspects of "America's original sin," in the title words of Jim Wallis' 2016 book.

Wallis asserts that "the near genocide and historic oppression of America's Native American peoples and the enslavement and debasing of African peoples for profit

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were both sins – America’s original sin.”

True, the activity of Columbus in the last part of the 15th century may not be directly related to what happened in British North America beginning in the first part of the 17th century – but the latter is definitely rooted in the ethos of Columbus with regard to both the treatment of indigenous people and the enslaving of both people of the new world as well as of Africa.

In a [previous column](#), I introduced Miguel De La Torre, an acquaintance for whom I have great respect, even though I sometimes disagree with him.

He is professor of social ethics and Latinx studies at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver.

One of the most challenging books I have read in many years is his book, “Embracing Hopelessness.”

In the introduction, De La Torre makes this hard-hitting assertion: “Christians are behind all of this nation’s atrocities – the genocide of the indigenous people to steal their land, the enslavement of Africans to work the stolen land, and the stealing of cheap labor and natural resources of Latin Americans under the guise of ‘gunboat diplomacy’ to develop the land.”

Then, in his second chapter, De La Torre writes compellingly about his visit to the site of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in Colorado.

That tragic event was under the direction of U.S. Army Col. John Chivington while the Civil War was still being fought.

When Chivington, who died in 1894, was a young man, he was ordained to the Christian ministry and even served briefly as a missionary to the Wyandot Indians in Kansas – of particular interest to June and me because our church is in Wyandotte County.

Reading De La Torre’s chapter about the Sand Creek Massacre strengthened my

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resolve to push for the observance of Indigenous People's Day in the U.S. on the second Monday of October from now on.

People of goodwill need to work diligently to rid society of the highly detrimental results of America's original sin, striving to combat the evil effects of white supremacy both with regard to the indigenous people of North America as well as to those who are the descendants of enslaved Africans.

*Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on Seat's [blog](#), A View from this Seat. It is used with permission.*