



CLEVELAND AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT

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To Oberlin City Council Members:

Cleveland American Indian Movement is happy to endorse the initiative to adopt October 12th as Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Columbus Day is viewed as a day of mourning for many indigenous people in the Americas. Throughout many parts of the world, the name of Christopher Columbus is synonymous with imperialism and genocide – the widespread torture, rape, and murder which followed on three continents as a result of his lust for gold should never be excused.

It is with good reason we call Columbus Day one of mourning. When Columbus and his compatriots fell onto our shores, they renamed our lands, prohibited our worship, stole and raped our children, terrorized and brutalized everyone they could find, enslaved whom they could and murdered all others who resisted. Columbus by his own accounts was not only complicit but actively participated in the extermination of the Tainos of Ayiti (Hispanola). By 1514 the census taken in Hispanola said that of the 3,000,000 Tainos who inhabited Ayiti before Columbus arrived, only 20,000 remained. Through torture, rape, mass murder and enslavement Christopher Columbus, his brothers, and the other Spanish invaders annihilated 99% of the indigenous population in just over 20 years. By 1548 only 500 Tainos had managed to escape Spanish slaughter, and Spaniards had already begun to look to Africa to provide the slave labor in their colonies and thus launching the second phase of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Any single one of these atrocities should be enough to denounce Columbus, just as his many of his contemporaries did. His later arrest and indictment on charges of "crimes against humanity" should at least give us pause when we question if he is worthy of honorifics.

Forty years ago, the First Conference on Indigenous Peoples at the UN declared October 12th to be "International Day of Solidarity and Mourning with Indigenous Peoples of the Americas." Since that time, some progress has been made in persuading the international community to acknowledge the true extent of Columbus's actions. In the Bahamas, for example, Discovery Day is no longer celebrated. In Haiti, the statue of Columbus no longer stands in Port-au-Prince. These places have a far more direct connection to Christopher Columbus and have chosen to reject imperialism and historical revisionism, and to tell the truth about the legacy of Christopher Columbus.

We hope that the City of Oberlin will make a similar choice, and adopt October 12th as Indigenous Peoples' Day. As Oberlin moves to address questions of immigration and refugees, it would be a disservice to fail to recognize how Columbus's exploitation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa continues to manifest itself in contemporary society. As the groundwork for today was laid in 1492, we believe that workable solutions to today's issues are those that acknowledge and seek to overcome this framework.

Thank you,

Sundance
Executive Director