

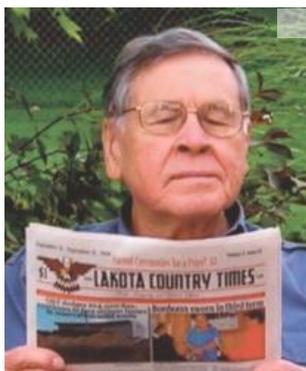
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Some thoughts about Columbus Day...

ChARLeS TRIMBLE Oglala Lakota



Charles 'Chuck' Trimble is embarking on a new adventure. he's writing a new book. Therefore his columns will be printed less frequently over the next few weeks as he gears up his energy to focus on the book. We want to thank Chuck for the time and energy he has given the Lakota Country Times over the last few years.)

Columbus Day is upon us once again, and again the controversy arises as to why we are celebrating this man with a national holiday. The only other individual we honor with a national holiday is the Rev. Martin Luther King; but Columbus is no Doctor King.

The question is valid: Why does the United States honor such a man as Columbus? Wasn't he, after all, directly responsible for the slaughter of innumerable innocent people? And why is he honored elsewhere in the New World – in Canada, Mexico, South America and the Caribbean nations? One

South American country, Columbia, is named after him, as well as the site of our national Capitol, the District of Columbia. On both American continents, cities and rivers honor his name.

In a recent essay, "Christopher Columbus: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," Anthony W. Hager, asks the question "Was Columbus the barbaric sadist his detractors claim? Or was he a great explorer and discoverer?"

Then Hager goes on to defend Columbus against those detractors, most of them liberals and academics he calls Utopian fantasists. He argues that the natives Columbus encountered in the New World – especially the Caribbean tribes, were not in a paradise of noble innocence. Instead, he maintains that "these tribes were [not] indigenous Caribbean Indians; they migrated from the mainland. Thus the peaceful natives Columbus assaulted were neither peaceful nor native, but warrior explorers and conquerors." He then describes the tribes as slave holders and cannibals who were often at war with each other, or terrorizing smaller, more peaceful tribes.

I have to admit that I can't argue with Hager's contention about the natives because I simply don't know that history well enough to do so. What I do know from historical accounts is that, upon landing and settling in, the Spaniards began immediately to enslave the native peoples, and work many of them to death in gold mines and in the fields. Many native people were killed for sport, or to give the Conquistadors' huge war dogs practice at killing men, women and children and tearing them apart. This was reported faithfully by Fra Bartolomeo de las Casas, a Catholic priest of the Dominican order. But nothing was done to stem this inhuman savagery until over forty years later, when Pope Paul III was moved by the appeals of de las Casas. In 1534 he issued a Papal Bull declaring that the natives were human beings and had human rights to life, freedom, and land and property. Accordingly, to enslave them, to take their lands and property, or to kill them was mortal sin and grounds for excommunication and eternal damnation.

We also know from history that the Papal Bull, as honorable and important a document as it was to Indians and their rights in international law, was most often ignored or circumvented so as to continue the slaughter and impoverishment of native peoples. The Papal Bull (Sublimis Deus) had a loophole that Indians could be killed in just warfare or in self-defense. Thus, ostensibly in the name of just warfare and self-defense, native peoples were slaughtered up to and almost into the 20th Century, and their lands stolen outright even beyond. Aside from Fra de las Casas' book "In Defense of the Indians," I have three recent books on that period in history that I shall study them. Knowledge of the facts of history is important, even beyond the use of it to justify our demands for justice, or even for some to justify our victimhood.

As for Columbus Day, it should not be a national holiday. There are people, perhaps many, who consider him a hero. Most Italian people, I would presume, take great pride in him as a national hero of theirs, although he sailed in the name of the Spanish crown, and claimed the New World in their names. Most people, I presume would support the holiday just to have the day off and a long weekend.

I do agree with those who propose that this day be a holiday in honor of the Native peoples instead -- American Indian Day. That sounds better.

Until then, Happy Lakota Day. Why not?

Charles E. Trimble is Oglala Lakota from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. He was principal founder of the American Indian Press Association in 1970, and served as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1972-78. His columns and cartoons were 2010 award winners in the South Dakota Newspaper Association Contest. He may be reached at cchuktrim@aol.com. His website is iktomisweb.com

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