



ORIGINS OF COLUMBUS DAY

Columbus Day is the U.S. federal holiday commemorating explorer Christopher Columbus' landing in the New World on October 12, 1492. It also celebrates the cultural heritage of Italian Americans, since many scholars believe Columbus was born in Genoa, Italy.

The first recorded celebration of Columbus Day in the United States took place on October 12, 1792, as a commemoration of the 300th anniversary of Christopher Columbus sighting land from a Spanish ship called Pinta.

President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation in 1892, "recommending to the people the observance in all their localities of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America..." and describing Columbus as "the pioneer of progress and enlightenment."

In 1934, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt named Columbus Day a national holiday and set the date for the holiday on October 12. Since 1971, when Columbus Day was designated the second Monday in October, it has been celebrated as a federal holiday. In many locations across the country Americans hold parades to commemorate the day.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The arrival of Columbus in the Americas is a huge symbol of Italian heritage. Many Italian Americans celebrate their heritage on this day with parades and street fairs. Other nationalities use the day to honor the indigenous people of the Americas. It presents an opportunity to learn and teach about Native American culture and history, which many feel were violated by the arrival of Columbus in the Age of Exploration.

Opposition to the holiday has grown as an understanding of the goal of Columbus's expedition has increased. History reveals the primary goal of Columbus's expedition was to find riches and conquer and exploit the new lands. Various indigenous peoples had lived in the Americas long before Columbus arrived. Since October 12, 1992, the Intercontinental Gathering of Indigenous People in the Americas, a group of more than 350 indigenous groups around the world, has referred to the holiday as the International Day of Solidarity with Indigenous People.

Other people oppose the holiday because Columbus did not actually discover the Americas. Norse explorers had previously visited portions of North America. And some also argue that there was not actually anything to "discover" since the Americas were already inhabited.



IMPLICATIONS FOR ENDING RACISM

In 2021, President Joe Biden issued the first-ever presidential proclamation of Indigenous Peoples Day. He said in a statement that the day is meant to "honor America's first inhabitants and the Tribal Nations that continue to thrive today." Although it is not a federal holiday, 17 states have holidays honoring Native Americans, some of which are on the second Monday in October.

Increasing awareness of Native Americans' history and culture is vital to our understanding of our nation. Indigenous Peoples Day is meant to recognize the painful history Indigenous people have faced and to celebrate Native Americans' history and culture and to recognize the challenges they continue to face.

Photo titles (from top left to top right):

Hattie Tom, Apache, 1898

Two Little Crows, 1898

Thunder Cloud, Blackfeet, 1898

Images are courtesy of Boston Public Library

Ending
RACISM_{USA}
October 2025

Advocacy in Action

Learn about the importance of artifact repatriation and the efforts being made to return Indigenous cultural items to their rightful communities. Support museums that are actively involved in these efforts. Discover more at the Repatriation Department of the National Museum of the American Indian: <https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/repatriation>

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 Columbus Day	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



Scan the QR code to learn more about significant dates in October.