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NAME Statement on Indigenous Peoples' Day

On Monday, Oct. 8, banks and government buildings will close for Columbus Day. Since 1937 it has been a federal holiday commemorating [Christopher Columbus'](#) landing in the Americas on Oct. 12, 1492. Teachers have drilled into generations of children how Columbus “discovered” the Americas, and children have sung songs and created artwork to take home to mark the occasion, underscoring conscious or unconscious acceptance of invasion and genocide.

The National Association for Multicultural Education applauds educators who now help students understand that Columbus and his three ships [bankrolled by Spain](#) could not have “discovered” a place that had long been occupied by Indigenous Peoples. NAME scholars have shown that the Italian explorer was hopelessly lost in an attempt to find a [western sea route to Asia](#), seeking riches that increased trade with Europe might offer. What followed in the Americas after Columbus' landing was the enslavement, torture, mutilation and murder of Indigenous Peoples. Europeans intentionally brought disease, warfare and genocidal colonization to the Americas, wiping out Indigenous civilizations which had stood for thousands of years.

[Columbus has come to represent a huge legacy of suffering and destruction.](#) He represents 500 years of colonization of the Indigenous Peoples and the near destruction of Indigenous culture.

Teaching children about the real history of the Americas is what the [National Association for Multicultural Education](#) has promoted since our founding in 1990. Empowering instruction about the actual historical context of the world is how children learn about social justice and equity. This is how we develop well-informed world citizens, which all nations—including Indigenous Nations—desperately need.

NAME also supports a growing movement for [Indigenous People's Day, to replace Columbus Day.](#) Since 1991 Indigenous People's Day has been celebrated by only a few forward thinking universities, cities, and states. A designated national holiday would honor the first inhabitants of North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean, recognizing Indigenous histories, languages and cultures. Students also would learn of European colonization, genocide and plunder of Indigenous Peoples as a parallel to the kidnapping of Africans to be enslaved in the Americas. Young people would understand that despite the lofty ideals in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, Native Americans were not [granted full citizenship](#) or the right to vote in the U.S. until 1924. [In the state of New Mexico](#), the last state to enfranchise Native Peoples, voting rights were withheld by the state's constitution until 1962. The conversation would help clarify contemporary settler colonial racism and the ongoing battles for Indigenous sovereignty. Such history needs to be recounted during Indigenous People's Day so that we never again repeat these horrors and can instead move forward to address current racist practices.

In the Sankofa tradition of knowing history in order to move forward to a better tomorrow, NAME knows that celebrating Indigenous People's Day would help heal the wounds of the past and enable our multicultural, multinational population to move more creatively into the future, where all individuals are valued as who, and how, we are.