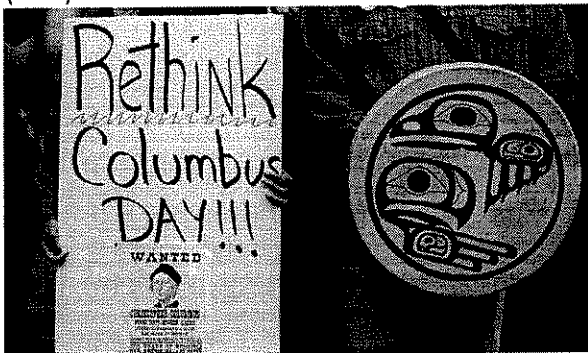


Seattle Swaps Columbus Day For 'Indigenous Peoples' Day'

OCTOBER 12, 2014 2:55 PM ET
(NPR)



This year's Columbus Day holiday will have a slightly different, more Native flavor in the city of Seattle. Thanks to a unanimous vote this summer by the city council, the federal holiday will now be known by a different name: Indigenous Peoples' Day. The name change comes after activists pushed for a day to honor indigenous people instead of Christopher Columbus, the most recognizable figure linked to European contact with the Americas.

"This is about taking a stand against racism and discrimination," Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant told the Seattle Times. "Learning about the history of Columbus and transforming this day into a celebration of indigenous people and a celebration of social justice ... allows us to make a connection between this painful history and the ongoing marginalization, discrimination and poverty that indigenous communities face to this day."

On Monday, the streets of Seattle will likely be filled with drums, singing and the faces of citizens from the city's surrounding Native Nations: the Lummi, Nooksack, Tulalip, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish, Puyallup, Colville and 22 other Washington tribes, as well as citizens from other Indian Nations that call Seattle home. Seattle isn't the first place to give the holiday a makeover. Earlier this year, the Minneapolis City Council also renamed Columbus Day Indigenous Peoples' Day. South Dakota celebrates Native American Day in "remembrance of the great Native American leaders who contributed so much to the history of our state." Hawaii observes Discoverers' Day, in which Polynesian explorers are honored.

Of course, not everybody is happy about these changes. The AP reports that some Italian-Americans in Seattle have been upset by the change because it comes "at the expense of what essentially is Italian Heritage Day." But for those who have a negative view of Columbus' impact, the new name honors a legacy of struggle and resistance.

In the past, anti-Columbus Day protesters have clashed with the holiday's supporters, most notably in Denver, where members of the American Indian Movement have taken to the streets almost yearly since the late 1980s. Those protests have quieted down in recent years, although those annual demonstrations frequently ended in arrests.

But anti-Columbus sentiment is hardly limited to the U.S. In Chile, Mapuche activists launched anti-Columbus demonstrations that turned violent last year. In 2002, indigenous people in Guatemala protested the day by shutting down highways across the country. Today, many countries in Latin America —including Mexico, El Salvador and Argentina — recognize Día de la Raza, while in Venezuela, the holiday has been renamed the Day of Indigenous Resistance.

In the U.S., the bigger issue now is whether the holiday can survive as a growing number of cities and states decide to do away with it. According to the Pew Research Center, it's already "one of the most inconsistently celebrated U.S. holidays." Apart from federal employees, workers in only 23 states are given a paid day off to observe the holiday.

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you think individual U.S. cities have the right to alter a federal holiday? Explain.

- Do you agree with re-naming Columbus day "Indigenous Peoples Day?" Explain.