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# It's Autumn, and I can't wait for the Fall (of Columbus)

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I write this in October, in the midst of all of the fall celebrations in the U.S. — Columbus Day, Thanksgiving and even Halloween — that can give some big headaches to Indigenous people by enhancing the erasure of Indigenous history and the stereotyping of Indigenous peoples.

Responding to these fall holidays is just a starting point, but first steps are important. Of course, we still need to get rid of the vampire economic system that profits from misery and destruction of the Earth, along with settler colonialism, racism, misogyny, homophobia and much more. But in the meantime, we can all work to ensure that Indigenous peoples and histories are not marginalized and disrespected as one of the many ways to support frontline Indigenous struggles.

Here's some more information about the fall holidays to think about, including what you can do to bring positive change to each holiday.

## **Columbus Day**

Sometimes referred to as "Cruelumbus Day" by those who oppose it, Columbus Day is a disgusting celebration of the genocide of Indigenous peoples and theft of land

that began when Columbus and his men got lost and arrived in this hemisphere in 1492. It does harm to everyone who grows up learning that he was a great hero and “discovered America.” The holiday sends the message that it is fine to completely whitewash history and celebrate the genocide of tens of millions of people.

Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean and elsewhere were not “discovered” by anybody since they were already here. Nor did they need to have civilization or spirituality brought to them, since they already had civilizations and beliefs. They had and still have the inherent right to continue to live in their own ways on their own lands.

Columbus’ policies on the islands where he landed, including slave labor, starvation, sex trafficking and slaughter, resulted in the near-complete genocide of the Indigenous peoples of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico and other places where the Spanish invaded. (Columbus was Italian, but he invaded on behalf of the Spanish crown.)

Altogether, Columbus shipped approximately 5,000 enslaved Indigenous people across the Atlantic — filling his pockets and setting the stage for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of millions of Africans as well as Indigenous people. He sold Indigenous women and girls as young as 9 and 10 into sexual slavery.

The Spaniards hunted down Taíno and Arawak people with huge dogs that tore them apart and devoured them. Babies were fed to these dogs. The men tested the sharpness of their blades by cutting off the hands of the people.

The brutality of Columbus’s actions would reverberate through all the other invasions to come and the tens of millions of deaths that would follow. In fact, so many millions of people died as a result of European colonization that it even caused a climate change – [a “little ice age.”](#)

Celebrating Columbus erases centuries of Indigenous reality; it erases the decimation of Taíno, Arawak and many other peoples. It is an effort to silence Indigenous peoples and make them invisible. Pretending it is acceptable to celebrate Columbus has a terrible impact not only on Indigenous people, especially kids, but also on non-Native people.

What you can do: The Columbus Day holiday needs to be abolished. Indigenous Peoples' Day is the holiday that replaces it. Work with Indigenous people where you live to get the truth out about Indigenous history and get Indigenous Peoples' Day celebrated instead of Columbus Day in your community, school, organization, workplace. Put up signs saying that the day is Indigenous Peoples' Day. Put the day in your union contract. We can lead and celebrate this day, making it part of everyone's life, even when some bigots refuse to pass legislation.



Credit: Southern Utah University Center for Diversity & Inclusion

## Halloween

Halloween is fun, especially beloved within LGBTQ2S communities and by kids. And yet, every year, Halloween is also a hailstorm of cultural appropriation, with non-Native people “dressing up as Indians,” wearing blackface, brownface and yellowface, and so much more.

Use of Pocahottie costumes (sexually suggestive fake-Native costumes for women) increases the view that Indigenous women exist for sexual exploitation. This is especially sickening given the crisis of thousands of #MMIWG2S (Missing & Murdered Indigenous, Women, Girls & Two-Spirits) in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

If you see someone wearing a costume that smacks of cultural appropriation, you might talk to the person or send them this link ([“Step away from the ‘Indian’ costume!”](#)) for lots of information about what cultural appropriation is and why they shouldn’t do it. When you see fake-Native costumes at a store, tell them you won’t shop there unless they stop selling those costumes. Our culture is not your costume!

## **Thanksgiving**

You may be asking yourself: “Wait a minute. Can’t I even celebrate a harvest festival without this writer complaining about something?”

Here’s the problem: Thanksgiving in the U.S. is not just a harvest festival. It is a celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims and the English theft of Indigenous lands and colonization of the U.S.

The myth of Thanksgiving is that the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, Mass., the Native people welcomed them, they had a feast together with the “Indians,” and everyone lived happily ever after. The myth doesn’t talk about the enslavement of the Wampanoag, Nipmuc, Massachusett and other Native peoples, the colonial wars against them, how their lands were stolen and they were forced into concentration camps such as Deer Island, how widespread starvation and hangings of Indigenous people came to be.

And the myth of Thanksgiving certainly doesn’t tell you that the first official day of thanksgiving in Massachusetts was proclaimed by Massachusetts colony Gov. Winthrop in 1636 to celebrate the safe return of the white men who had helped to massacre several hundred Pequot children, women and men at Mystic, Conn.

On the East Coast, you can observe the [50th annual National Day of Mourning](#) in Plymouth, Mass., on “thanksgiving” day, Nov. 28. On the West Coast, you can observe “Unthanksgiving” at Alcatraz Island. You can also do something within your

own family or community to tell the truth and decolonize the holiday.

