

# COLUMBUS BASHING IS UNWARRANTED

Prior to Columbus Day, we posted a three-part series on the degree to which politics has been infused into discussions about this holiday. We are offering a sample of our report in Catalyst; those who would like to read more about this subject should reference our website.

## *Origins of the Assault on Columbus*

In the 1990s, Yale University gave up \$20 million given to them by Lee M. Bass: he wanted the money spent on efforts to expand the Western civilization curriculum, but highly politicized members of the faculty wanted to replace it with a multicultural program. The faculty won and Bass got his money back.

The fact is that many professors, especially in the humanities and social sciences, hate Western civilization; they have a particular animus against the United States. That this is happening at a time when many poor people from Latin America are crashing our borders is perverse. Yet the pampered professors still keep railing against the U.S. They just don't get it.

The attack on Columbus, and on Columbus Day, is traceable to the ideology of multiculturalism. Pope Benedict XVI correctly observed that multiculturalism has bred not only a contempt for the moral truths that adhere to the Judeo-Christian ethos, it has led to "a peculiar Western self-hatred that is nothing short of pathological."

No intellectual is more responsible for distorting the historical record of Columbus than Howard Zinn. His 1980 book, *A People's History of the United States*, sold millions of copies and has been the go-to book for left-wing faculty and

students for decades. He is the inspiration behind the attacks on Columbus Day and the one most responsible for replacing it with Indigenous Peoples' Day. The Zinn Education Project, which disseminates his work, is the force behind the Columbus bashing in the schools.

Zinn is falsely regarded as a man who hated oppression. He did so only selectively. He found it almost impossible to condemn atrocities committed by the Communist regimes of Stalin and Mao, owing, no doubt to his membership in the Communist Party. According to Ronald Radosh, one of the most prominent students of Communism, "Zinn was an active member of the Communist party (CPUSA)—a membership which he never acknowledged and when asked, denied."

Mary Grabar, who wrote the definitive book exposing Zinn as a fraud, *Debunking Howard Zinn*, notes that there are plenty of glaring omissions in his writings. Zinn would never acknowledge what Carol Delaney, a Stanford University anthropologist had to say about Columbus. She maintained that Columbus acted on his Christian faith and told his crew to be kind to the Indians.

It is not as though Zinn was unaware of this side of Columbus—he just glossed over evidence that contradicted his thesis. Here's a quote from Columbus he never mentions. "I want the natives to develop a friendly attitude toward us because I know that they are a people who can be made free and converted to our Holy Faith more by love than by force."

Another one of the left-wing intellectuals who has contributed mightily to the assault on Western civilization is the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. In 1970, he released his bestselling book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

This is the kind of thinking that appeals to children and intellectuals. Children understand black and white, night and day, good guys and bad guys. Intellectuals do, too, the only

difference is that they get to decide who the good guys are (the oppressed like Indians) and who the bad guys are (oppressors like Columbus).

Any objective scholar knows that the ideas of Marx and Lenin were put into play by Mao Zedong, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro. To Freire, just like Zinn, they are his heroes. That's right, the same man who is known for sympathizing with the oppressed adores some of history's most vicious oppressors.

Mao murdered 77 million of his own people, yet according to Freire and his professor clones, China's Communist genocidal maniac should be exalted and Columbus condemned.

To top things off, those who are bashing Columbus are simultaneously lauding the legacy of Indigenous peoples. Yet a closer, and independent, examination of their historical record raises serious questions about their assigned "oppressed" status. But given the Manichean dualism that is operative—the good guys are non-whites and the bad guys are white—the outcome is predictable.

### *Columbus Day or Indigenous Peoples' Day*

In 2019, the National Education Association (NEA) announced that it "believes that the history of colonization needs to be recognized and acknowledged in every state." To that end, it said "the name of the current holiday known as 'Columbus Day' should be renamed and recognized as 'Indigenous Peoples' Day.'" Its position remains unchanged.

The NEA was only partially successful. Some cities and states have adopted its stance, but many others have not.

On October 11, some schools were closed in observance of Columbus Day; some were closed in observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day; some were closed in honor of both days; others recognized neither day and remained open.

This is not a healthy situation. A country that cannot agree on who to honor is in trouble. Worse, a country whose public

officials take no action against those who destroy statues on public land of those who have made significant contributions to American society are sending the wrong message. When a nation's historically renowned figures become part of our throw-away culture, it does not bode well for instilling patriotism in young people.

Judging past historical figures through today's lens will likely mean that some of those in favor of excising tributes to legendary persons will themselves be erased from history. So be it.

### *The Dark Side of Indigenous Peoples*

Serious historians know that when it comes to war, different parties to the conflict have had different motives, ranging from the just to the unjust. They also know that it is a rare occasion when all sides are equally innocent or guilty. To be sure, some may be more aggressive, but it is a mistake to assume that had the vanquished been in possession of the means to do so, they would not have been as vicious as the victors. Not all the losers in war were noble.

This needs to be said in light of what is now fashionable every October—Columbus bashing is all the rage. Just as bad, some promote the idea that virtually all the Indians were kindly souls who respected the land and treated each other with dignity. This is a romantic fairy tale having no basis in history. The truth is that some were gentle while others were brutal.

It is also part of the conventional wisdom that almost all the Indians were massacred by the white man. Wrong.

Renowned historian William D. Rubinstein, in his book, *Genocide*, writes that "recent historians sympathetic to the plight of the American Indians at the hands of European settlers from 1492 onwards have repeatedly noted that while 95 percent of Indians living in the Americas perished (according

to those historians) over the century or so after the coming of the white man, most of this diminution in population occurred through such factors as the importation of virulent diseases previously unknown in the Americas, the destruction of settled life-styles, enslavement, and the psychological effects of conquest rather than through overt murders and slaughters, although plenty of these took place."

On the flip side, we have some commentators who want to portray the Indians as savages who never contributed to America's greatness. They, too, are wrong.

The Indians served with distinction in both World Wars. During the First World War they enlisted in the Army in greater numbers, proportionally, than non-Indians. In the Second World War, tribes with very strong warrior traditions volunteered, again with "disproportionate numbers."

It should be noted that the term "Indigenous" is misleading. The Indians immigrated to the New World just like everyone else. In "prehistoric times," they "crossed the land bridge across the Bering Strait to the lands of the Western Hemisphere."

The following are a few examples of the ignoble practices of the Indians.

- The Navajo believed that witches ran rampant and caused all manner of destruction. This belief filled the tribe with a sense of fear and foreboding. To counteract this, anyone believed to be a witch (usually someone on the fringes of the tribe) faced violence and death. Frequently witches were scapegoats for anything that negatively impacted the tribe.
- The Chumash Indians, who lived on the Channel Islands off southern California, had an established class system in which the upper class owned slaves. Because the Chumash had no established agriculture, their food came from fishing, hunting, and gathering, they appeared to own slaves for no

other purpose than for wealthy tribe members to flaunt their power.

- Among the Yanomamo, women were forbidden to have intercourse with their husbands throughout pregnancy and until the child was weaned. To avoid extended periods of celibacy, Yanomamo couples would kill their infants.

- Inuit adults encouraged children to kill small animals and birds by torturing these defenseless creatures to death. Even their sled dogs, vital to their ability to cross the vast icy expanses, were not spared abuse. Sled dogs were frequently kicked and abused for no reason. If a dog was injured during a journey across the tundra, the dog would be mercilessly beaten and then abandoned to die alone in the frozen wilderness. Although some have claimed that this might have been done to direct aggression away from humans and towards animals, the Inuit were prone to outbursts of lethal violence and killed one another at alarmingly high rates.

- The men of the Mehinaku tribe in Brazil frequently used threats of gang-rape to assert their dominance over their women.

- The Kwakuitl people of Canada practiced an extremely hierarchical society. About 15 percent of the population lived as slaves and the sole property of the chief. The chief's family subsisted entirely off the labor of their slaves. The economic productivity of the tribe went primarily to the chief. Further, the Kwakuitl would war with neighboring tribes to capture more slaves.

- The Aztecs sacrificed as many as 250,000 people per year to appease their blood-thirsty gods. Victims had their beating hearts ripped out of their chests, and their corpses were eaten by the Aztec nobility. Most of the sacrificial victims were either prisoners of war or tribute from surrounding tribes.