

To: Delegate Wanika Fisher and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Rico Newman, Elder, Choptico Band of the Piscataway Chiefdom,
Retired: Smithsonian National Museum American Indian, Cultural Information Specialist

Re: HB 895 Columbus Day to: Indigenous Peoples Day

I am in full support of this change as it is time to put the light of truth on the man and his responsibility for his and others inhumane treatment of people Columbus himself aptly describes,

“Since they have become more assured, and are losing their terror, they are artless and generous with what they have to such a degree as no one would believe but him who had seen it. Of anything they have if it be asked for, they never say no, but do rather invite the persons to accept it, and show as much lovingness as though they would give their hearts.” (pg20, Columbus and Other Cannibals; Dr. Jack Forbes 1975

“What man of sound mind will approve a war against men who are harmless, ignorant, gentle, temperate, unarmed, and destitute of every human defense?” (pg26, In Defense of the Indian, Fray Bartoleme’ de Las Casas. ”circa 1548

Christopher Columbus is directly responsible for the deaths and inhumane treatment of thousands of Indigenous people first encountered in the Caribbean Islands. His “so-called” discovery would lead to the deaths, mutilations, slavery, rape and cultural destruction of millions in South and Central American countries.

Columbus carried out these atrocities to enrich himself and the crown heads of Spain and Portugal. This led directly to other European Nations following suit in North America; though Columbus never set foot on the North American continent.

Dr. Jack Forbes, former Prof. Emeritus, Univ. Cal., Davis, Chair of American Indian Studies, revealed in research for his work; “The American Discovery of Europe” (2007), that Europeans, Columbus specifically, knew there was land to be found by sailing west, which belies the so-called bravery and daring of Columbus that is taught to impressionable children; and adults.

One is to be mindful that Columbus did not “discover” the Continents of the Americas any more than Vikings or Senagambians did; both of whom are known or speculated to have come before Columbus.

Do we extend the doctrine of discovery to Marco Polo as “discovering” Asia, or David Livingstone as “discovering Africa or Gregory Shelikhov as “discovering” Alaska? These places had also been occupied for eons before Eurasians thought of or knew of them.

It’s time to set the record straight, to teach truth, and acknowledge the suffering, loss of Land, Culture, Traditions, Language, World View and Lifeways attributed to his so-called “discovery.” Do this by changing the date in October of each year to **INDIGENOUS HERITAGE DAY**.

One may argue that the day after Thanksgiving is American Indian Heritage Day, though one need only to ask J.Q. Public and be told, "It's Black Friday." Time to turn on the lights.