

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Columbus daze

Wording of ASUN bill doesn't make sense

It seems the Association of Students at the University of Nebraska wants to have its Christopher Columbus and roast him, too.

At its last meeting on Oct. 4, ASUN unanimously passed a bill renaming the official observance of Christopher Columbus Day - Oct. 9 - American Indian Day at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The action was requested to help recognize the pain of American Indian students, many of whom believe the recognition of Columbus in the form of a holiday ignores the numerous human rights violations recent history has revealed him to have committed against the indigenous population already present when Columbus originally landed on Oct. 12, 1492.

Generally, we'd frown upon taking a historically recognized holiday and changing it because we can. Such an action opens up questions of whether or not, for example, Presidents' Day should be recognized because

Who is the student government to determine which holidays deserve to be renamed?

George Washington owned slaves. Or Veterans' Day because the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb in World War II. Or Martin Luther King Day because some claim he was a plagiarist.

Who is the student government to determine which holidays deserve to be renamed? Under what circumstances - and under what amount of oppression - does a group have to suffer

before their claim is viable enough to rename the holiday they oppose?

But wait a minute.

Apparently, rename is the wrong term for ASUN's action last Wednesday. Rather, as the bill states and as a letter from the sponsoring ASUN senator, Nathan Fuerst, implies, the real nature of the bill is to simply recognize American Indian Day along with Columbus Day, not disgrace Columbus or the holiday.

The bill is worded in such a manner: "Oct. 9 has also been protested by the American Indian movement."

Notice the word Columbus isn't broached. We see this as an attempt to please all parties involved, including those who may be critical of a renaming by saying the holiday wasn't renamed. It just gained a co-sponsor of sorts.

But when these co-sponsors are on exact opposite poles of the spectrum - indeed, the celebration of American Indian Day is in direct refutation of Columbus Day - it seems a bit wishy-washy, as if ASUN understood the criticism forthcoming from non-liberal students and could combat it with a game of semantics.

But if the symbol of American Indian Day is of critical importance, then contradicting it with a simultaneous celebration of what American Indians view as the very epitome of evil seems like no change at all. It seems like a slap in the face.

If supporters of Columbus aren't supposed to be offended, then how can't his detractors be? The bill should have, one way or another, taken a definitive stand. Based on the comments of senators, it would seem the resolution was adopted to assuage disgruntled American Indians at UNL.

It seems quite unlikely that any individual will celebrate the oppressor and the oppressed in the same breath. So what is ASUN's resolution supposed to prove? That we can have our own opinion on the matter?

Thanks, but the First Amendment took care of that for us.

Editorial Board

Sarah Baker, Bradley Davis, Josh Funk, Matthew Hansen, Samuel McKewon, Dane Stickney, Kimberly Sweet

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Neal Obermeyer/DN

Beauty's maker and his atrocities

"Look at that, Jeremy!" my Mom says while pointing outside the car window. "How can there not be a God?"

This innocuous comment is one in a long line of continuing theological remarks between my parents and I.

These debates are nice - we talk more now that I've become atheist than we ever did before. And I must admit, the sky is beautiful.

As we drive along the Colorado interstate, the sun is just beginning to set behind the mountains. The sky is purple, orange, red, other colors I cannot even describe - the kind of view at the end of an epic novel as the hero walks away to seek his destiny. The kind of sunset when the beautiful woman and handsome man embrace at the end of a romantic movie.

But I think back (why, I'm not sure) to one day during summer classes at Chadron. The campus was mostly deserted, and I had lunch alone every day, reading the newspaper and eating a mini cheese pizza - the only vegetarian meal available.

I didn't read much of the international news because I knew the same headlines would be running five years from then: Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, conflict in Northern Ireland, sanctions in Iraq.

But my eye caught a little article (a blurb, really) about a civil war in Rwanda. It stated that thousands and thousands of members of one group were "hacked and bludgeoned to death" with machetes and clubs by members of another group. *Hacked and bludgeoned!*

Summarized in the space of a paragraph and bare for the world to see. I knew no one would care; more people would read and think deeply about their daily horoscope than this.

But it was my wake-up call, my little existential introduction into how absurd our world really is. I was stunned. I am still stunned.

I remember, also, news reports of the rape camps in Bosnia. Girls as young as 12 violated by an entire platoon of soldiers. Atrocities committed by both sides. Even if one army was better than the other, neither could be considered justified by any stretch of the imagination.

My body is cruising along in my parents' new Dodge Intrepid, but my mind is seeing migrant farm workers in California, killing themselves for \$5.15 an hour. Queer people walking nervously with their partners because they don't want to become the next Matthew Sheppard. A 1,000 times a 1,000 young men rotting away in 10-by-12 concrete cages for having "committed" nonviolent drug offenses.

If I am bitter, it is not from personal experience. I do not know what these people really feel like. The problem is I can guess. I guess they're not as happy as my mother is right now, secure in her white, middle-class, \$60,000-a-year job with a husband, three kids and one black Labrador retriever.

I guess they would trade the beautiful sunsets for relief from their pain.

I know any God responsible for sunsets, rainbows and warm puppy dogs is also responsible for holocausts, poverty, prejudice and the myriad other cruel ways one portion of humanity has subjugated another portion.

If God exists, he is perfectly beneficent and malevolent at the same time. The ultimate incarnation of schizophrenia.

"Whatever," I say as I flash a not-quite-real smile. I let her have this moment - there will be others, and perhaps then I'll tell her why I don't enjoy the sunset as much as she does.



Jeremy Patrick

Letters to the editor

Seat 155

I am happy to see that DN columnist Emily Moran had enough confidence in herself that she is able to criticize and judge people she doesn't know. I am one of those people.

I must say, she seems to know a lot about me. I think of class as a place to hang out, I have a need to be popular and I seem to - or as I have been told - share a brain with my peers. She knows me inside and out.

How did Emily Moran ever manage to pay attention during the lecture and learn so much about me? I am unable to understand why Ms. Moran believes she is better than I am. If anyone should be embarrassed by her actions, it should be her. Why waste space in the DN for her petty and immature complaints?

I am the one who paid just enough attention to mock the music and, oddly enough, I was still able to take notes. Maybe Ms. Moran should take this definition into account before judging people:

Ignorant (ig ner ent) adj. 1. Lacking in training and knowledge; unlearned 2. Lacking special knowledge or information 3. Uninformed 4. Showing lack of training or knowledge

Megan Auld-Wright
junior
advertising

Seat 159

While I was looking for the crossword puzzle on Thursday, I came across Emily Moran's column. I started reading it and began to empathize with her because I also have a Monday night lecture class. When I got to the seventh or eighth paragraph, I realized that she was referring to my friends and I as the rude students who share one brain.

Emily, I agree with you. Some of the rudest students are in this class, but I think they're the ones who spend their time criticizing what others are doing when they should be minding their own business.

So maybe I was reading Cosmo and maybe my friend and I did pass crossword puzzles to each other - why do you care? I still took notes on Nellie Bly's 72-day trip around the world. I didn't miss that part. Next time you insult me about how I spend my class time, think about what you are on. Obviously, it wasn't the antebellum press law lecture.

I have perfect attendance to our Monday night class, so I know I'll be there next week. If you decide to skip, Kelly, Donna and I will understand. You can meet us at the Peach Pit after class and borrow my notes.

Laura Rifkin
senior
broadcasting

Celebrate... everything!

As the sponsor of the ASUN Resolution that named Oct. 9 as "American Indian Day," I feel responsible to clear up and apologize for any confusion surrounding the resolution.

If you read it, not once does it denounce Columbus Day or any other holiday recognized on Oct. 9. Obviously, for European-Americans, Christopher Columbus was a very important man in terms of European-American history on this continent.

The resolution was simply intended to recognize American Indians and their rich history and culture that was established on this continent prior to the arrival of Columbus.

The recognition of American Indian Day is just that. Celebrate it as Columbus Day and American Indian Day as well as any other holiday you would normally celebrate on Oct. 9. It was never the intention of ASUN to take any holiday off the calendar and send disgrace to Columbus Day.

Nathan Fuerst
junior
communications
ASUN Arts and Sciences Senator

Evil, evil Chris

In response to the letters, comments and cartoons opposing ASUN's renaming of Columbus Day, there seems to be some issues that need to be addressed.

Jason Klindt's letter ("Big Decision Makers") is indicative of the ignorance that persists regarding Columbus. Considering Mr. Klindt thought Columbus lived in the year 1600, I would assume he is equally ignorant of other important details of the navigator's life.

Among other things, Columbus ordered his soldiers to cut off the hands of Taino Indians if they weren't paying him enough gold. After a short and sadistic career as the Viceroy of Hispaniola, he was forcibly removed from the island for general incompetence.

He went to his grave believing the world was not round, but rather shaped like a woman's breast. He also believed Haiti was somewhere very close to Japan.

Columbus was a very important person. That doesn't mean we should celebrate his life with a holiday.

Hal Hansen
senior
history

Holiday a travesty to some

This Daily Nebraskan guest column is written by Daniel Justice, a Ph.D. student in English, an enrolled member of the Cherokee nation and a secretary of UNITE.

It's an annual event, an annual conflict. "In fourteen hundred and ninety two..." America - that is, White America - once again celebrates "Columbus Day." There's very little celebration in most parts of the country. It's not a day that most people really think much about.

Until the Indians speak.

For us, and for other marginalized communities in this country, Columbus is not a great hero who proved the world was round (this was well known to intellectuals across the world at this time), discovered this hemisphere (it was already populated by thousands of societies), or brought civilization to the "Indians" - his word - or showed them the way to Christian piety and cultural sophistication.

"... Columbus sailed the ocean blue."

Instead, Columbus is the most damning example of the many men and women who participated in the wholesale slaughter of our people through European weapons, diseases and ideologies.

He enslaved and tortured Native people, ravaged indigenous civilizations and territories, stole or destroyed vast material and cultural resources and advocated the supremacy of European domination in the Americas.

Whatever his service to Spain and Europe may have been, Columbus is only a bitter reminder of the more than 500 years of colonization, exploitation, appropriation and genocide our people have endured.

Few Americans seem to care about Columbus until we and our allies bring these facts to light. Then the backlash begins. We are said to be hypersensitive, too "politically correct," concerned about trivialities when there are "real" issues to worry about.

As if the decimation of tens of millions of people is unimportant.

And we are accused of being ahistorical, of imposing 21st century politics and mores on earlier centuries.

We are told that we cannot judge Columbus by today's standards, that what he, his cronies and successors did in the name of God, nationalism and white supremacy must be looked at in their own historical context.

What is overlooked in these claims is the fact that we are looking at this in historical context: from the view of those who were butchered and brutalized by this man and those who followed and shared his world views.

The indigenous people who were enslaved and murdered by Columbus are certainly worthy of being honored as well.

To ignore their experiences, and the continued resistance of native communities across the world to colonialism and exploitation by European and American political and industrial interests, is to fully ignore the complexities and the realities of history.

In celebrating Columbus Day, Americans are not celebrating the nautical achievements of a man driven to find new lands and resources for the glory of his country and his ego.

They are celebrating the continued refusal of the United States and its people to take responsibility for not only our varied histories - good and bad - but also for the present inequities: racism, misogyny and homophobia that are some of the devastating legacies of Christopher Columbus and his successors.

I applaud Vernon Miller, Joel Shafer and the other conscientious and enlightened students of ASUN who risk the wrath of white entitlement to try, in a small, symbolic way, to bring these issues to light by changing Columbus Day to American Indian Day. If the backlash is any sign, this resolution came none too soon.