

AMERICAN CIVIC HOLIDAY RESOURCES

COLUMBUS DAY/INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY

Teaching about Columbus Day and Indigenous People's Day

Columbus Day observance dates back to 1792, the 300th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the Western Hemisphere. Columbus Day became an annual celebration of Italian-American heritage in the 1800s and in 1934 Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared the first nationally observed Columbus Day. Beginning with a United Nations conference in 1977, indigenous people have proposed that Columbus Day be replaced by Indigenous People's Day. Last year in 2021, the White House proclaimed October 11 as Indigenous People's Day in conjunction with Columbus Day which continues to remain a federal holiday.

A core methodology of Civic Spirit is to ground discussion of complex ideas in textual study. Reading the texts below with students and asking them to compare the diverse perspectives in the text, will help students ground any conversation about interactions between indigenous peoples and American settlers in an understanding of the lives of the people who experienced these interactions.



In this resource guide, you will find some selected sources on Westward Expansion in the 1800s.

Source 1: [Painting by John Gast, American Progress, 1872.](#)



Source 2: John L. O'Sullivan - "The Great Nation of Futurity" 1839:

Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement... We must onward to the fulfillment of our mission -- to the entire development of the principle of our organization -- freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and in nature's eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man... For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen.

Source 3: Simon Pokagon (Pottawattamie Chief) - "The Red Man's Rebuke" 1893:

On behalf of my people, the American Indians, I hereby declare to you, the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands and homes...No sooner would we hold high joy-day over the graves of our departed fathers, than to celebrate our own funeral, the discovery of America. And while you who are strangers, and you who live here, bring the offerings of the handiwork of your own lands, and your hearts in admiration rejoice over the beauty and grandeur of this young republic, and you say, "Behold the wonders wrought by our children in this foreign land," do not forget that this success has been at the sacrifice of our homes and a once happy race.

Where these great Columbian show-buildings stretch skyward, and where stands this "Queen City of the West," once stood the red man's wigwam; here met their old men, young men, and maidens; here blazed their council-fires. But now the eagle's eye can find no trace of them. Here was the center of their wide-spread hunting-grounds; stretching far eastward, and to the great salt Gulf southward, and to the lofty Rocky Mountain chain westward; and all about and beyond the Great Lakes northward roamed vast herds of buffalo that no man could number, while moose, deer, and elk were found from ocean to ocean. Pigeons, ducks, and geese in near bow-shot moved in great clouds through the air, while fish swarmed our streams, lakes, and seas close to shore. All were provided by the Great Spirit for our use; we destroyed none except for food and use; had plenty and were contented and happy.

Here are some possible guiding questions for discussing the texts:

You can ask students to compare and contrast Source 2 and Source 3. How do the perspectives of John L. O'Sullivan and Simon Packagon differ towards Westward expansion in the 1800s?

You can ask students to compare and contrast Source 1 and Source 3. How is progress experienced differently by settlers moving west and Native Americans already living in that territory?

Extended Discussion Questions:

You could also use the texts as a springboard to a larger discussion about technology and the ways in which that shapes our roles as American citizens. Here are some possible discussion questions:

- How is technology both a tool for good and bad?
- How can we see that in the Westward Expansion of the 1800s and today?
- How does technology make it easier and harder for us to feel a sense of belonging in US society?
- How does technology make it easier and harder for us to participate in American democracy?