

**Citizen's Petition 42
Resolution to Support the Establishment of Indigenous Peoples Day
Wellesley**

**THE FOLLOWING REGISTERED VOTERS OF THE TOWN OF WELLESLEY
SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE AND REQUEST THAT IT BE PUT ON
THE WARRANT FOR THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING OF MARCH 2020.**

That the Town of Wellesley, with the understanding that since 1977 Indigenous people of our country have requested Indigenous Peoples Day as a recognition of their humanity, culture and history and with the understanding that our country was built on Native lands, shall join the growing number of cities, towns, and states that have chosen to honor this request. Town Meeting shall go on record to state that the Town of Wellesley, on the second Monday of October, will celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day as the official holiday and that the Town of Wellesley shall cease to recognize Columbus Day as a publicly sanctioned holiday in Wellesley.

Motion:

That the Town vote, with the understanding that since 1977 Indigenous people of our country have requested Indigenous Peoples Day as a recognition of their humanity, culture and history and further, that our country was built on Native lands, to

- 1. Establish that the second Monday of October henceforth be commemorated as Indigenous Peoples Day and cease to recognize Columbus Day in Wellesley, in recognition of the position of Indigenous Peoples as native to these lands, and the suffering they faced during and after the European conquest, and**
- 2. Encourage the Board of Selectmen to proclaim the 2nd Monday of October as Indigenous Peoples Day throughout the Town.**

Citizen's Petition #42

Wellesley was once part of the land belonging to the Massachusett Tribe.¹ For years before counting and European contact, tens of thousands of the Neponset band of the Massachusett made their homes on this land and across Massachusetts. They are speakers of a variety of dialects and languages, all of which are part of the Algonquian language family and lived in many communities among which some of the best known were the Massachusett, Wampanoag, Pennacook, Mahican (Stockbridge), Pocumtuck, and Nipmuck. Their settlements and hunting grounds were spread across the entire state from easternmost Cape Cod (Nauset) to the western mountains (Housatonic).²

In 1635, one hundred and forty-three years after the landing of Columbus in the Caribbean islands of the Bahamas and Hispaniola (present-day countries of the Dominican Republic and Haiti), had come the first of the English settlements in what was to become the Wellesley area, a step which would inevitably threaten and displace the "Indians" and their way of life.³ They had no desire to share their newfound land with the local indigenous folk (or "savages" as they called them).⁴ The "Indians" were driven off the land the English settlers craved, the scattered survivors were weakened by new diseases brought over from England and crippled by the white man's weapons of war and drink. The English settlers who had previously been afraid of the Indians grew emboldened and moved into the wilderness, leveling land and planting the crops.⁵ By the 1660's the northwestern part of the Dedham grant had been deemed clear of hostile "Indians" and the English settler, Andrew Dewing, felt safe in erecting a garrison home, the first in the land that became Wellesley (Cochituate).⁶

This is only some of the early history of the town of Wellesley and we encourage everyone to learn more. It has been told mostly from the perspective of white people; and we should have many questions, curiosity and eagerness to seek out the traditionally marginalized voices or who's truth has been omitted. As we expand our knowledge, so should we acknowledge all of the complex truth and understand how it makes us who we are today, affects decisions we make, stories we tell our children, people we welcome and laws we uphold. Citizen's petition 42 is a beginning path for the town of Wellesley to encourage that understanding and a gesture of peace and healing to the Massachusetts Tribe who were driven from their land, we now call home. It is important to first understand that this horrific story and our difficult town history, begins with the stories told and untold of Christopher Columbus. If we were to begin with a simple Google search "Christopher Columbus' voyage to America", the first link is History.com and an article by its Editors. The explorer Christopher Columbus made four trips across the Atlantic Ocean from Spain: in 1492, 1493, 1498 and 1502. He was determined to find a direct water route west from Europe to Asia, but he never did. Instead, he stumbled upon the Americas. Though he did not really "discover" the New World—millions of people already lived there—his journeys marked the beginning of centuries of exploration and colonization of North and South America.⁷ "Estimates for the pre-Columbus population of Hispaniola range between 1.1 million and 8 million Arawaks. By 1542 Las Casas recorded fewer than 200, and by 1555 they were all gone. Hence, the uncensored legacy of Columbus is not only the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade but the first recorded instance of full-scale genocide of an indigenous people."⁸

On his first day in the New World, he ordered six of the natives to be seized, writing in his journal that he believed they would be good servants.⁹ Columbus himself described the Natives as peaceful: "They ... brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned...They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features.... They do not bear arms, and do not know

them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane... They would make fine servants... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.”¹⁰

Throughout his years in the New World, Columbus enacted policies of forced labor in which natives were put to work for the sake of profits. Later, Columbus sent thousands of peaceful Taino “Indians” from the island of Hispaniola to Spain to be sold. Many died en route.¹¹

“Under Columbus's leadership, the Arawaks were forced under the *encomienda* system (a system of forced labor that sidestepped the word “slavery”) to mine for gold and produce cotton. When gold was not found, the irate Columbus oversaw the hunting of Indians for sport and dog food. Women and girls as young as nine or 10 were used as sex slaves for the Spanish. So many Indians died under the *encomienda* slave system that Indians from neighboring Caribbean islands were imported, and eventually from Africa. After Columbus's first kidnapping of Indians, he is believed to have sent as many as 5,000 Indian slaves across the Atlantic, more than any other individual.”¹² Those left behind were forced to search for gold in mines and work on plantations.

Within 60 years after Columbus landed, only a few hundred of what may have been 250,000 Taino were left on their island.¹³ “Christopher Columbus himself was intimately involved in these genocidal practices. As the viceroy of Española (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), he oversaw a program of enforced slavery and mass murder that, coupled with disease, reduced the native Taino population from as many as 8 million to 100,000 by the time he departed in 1500. According to the missionary-activist Bartolomé de Las Casas, the Spaniards perpetrated all sorts of horrors upon the Tainos—hacking, roasting, burning, and working them to death. When, in response to this brutality, the Tainos attempted to defend themselves, the Spanish response was brutal and overwhelming.”¹⁴ For this horrific historical record and so much more we will never be able to fully comprehend, Indigenous

People have been calling for an end to the recognized holiday of Christopher Columbus. As it states on www.IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org, “Indigenous Peoples Day is about more than a name change; it’s a refusal to allow the genocide of millions of Indigenous peoples to go unnoticed, and a demand for recognition of Indigenous humanity. Recognizing this day in place of what’s currently known as “Columbus Day” is a way to correct false histories, honor Indigenous peoples, and begin to correct some of the countless wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (what’s now known as the Americas).” ¹⁵

Wellesley heard this sentiment echoed from Annie Hodge, a 7th grader at Wellesley Middle School, who wrote an editorial for the Townsman on November 11, 2018. “When we celebrate Columbus Day, we celebrate greed, lies, slavery, and killing. I see Wellesley as a kind community that works together. Columbus was the opposite of kind. Wellesley should celebrate the indigenous people who were here first: the Wampanoag and Massachusett tribes.” ¹⁶

Sadhana Mandala, a senior at Wellesley High School expressed to the Wellesley Advisory Committee on January 22, 2020, “There is no reason for Wellesley to continue to celebrate Columbus Day and honor Christopher Columbus... The scars of Columbus’ cruelty are still felt today and having a holiday celebrating him is just perpetuating that hatred and ignorance.” ¹⁷

Citizen’s Petition 42 is for Anne, Sadhana and all our children, indigenous and non-indigenous. Children deserve to live in a town where we live our values of standing up to injustice, searching for the whole truth and respecting each other; not just stating these values in colorful handouts, logos and value statements. This inclusive and courageous act of honoring Indigenous Peoples in our community is so much bigger than a name change; and we will never be able to completely see that if we aren’t willing to learn what we don’t know, we don’t know and be agents of change, compassion, justice and truth.

Lastly, the citizens of this petition believe it is important to include respect and empathy for our fellow Italian community members who may find this change difficult. Please understand, to honor Indigenous Peoples Day in Wellesley is anti-Columbus, not Anti-Italian. The citizens of this petition, include people of Italian decent and believe that we should revisit our connection to this man as someone to be honored, reflect on our own discrimination in America and how all people should be treated. We can and will continue to honor our Italian ancestors, heritage and contributions to America in a way that lives our values of respect, truth and justice. With all respect, celebrating both Indigenous Peoples Day and Columbus Day, on the same day, would be tantamount to celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and James Earl Ray on the same day. We would never do that and we shouldn't.

Resources

1. "Five Pounds of Currency, Three Pounds Corn, Wellesley's Centennial Story, by Elizabeth M. Hinchliffe, 1981 Preface
2. "CIS: Historical Sketch." Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/cismaf/mf2.htm
3. "Five Pounds of Currency, Three Pounds Corn, Wellesley's Centennial Story, by Elizabeth M. Hinchliffe, 1981 Page 8
4. <http://massachusettstribe.org/the-removal-of-the-neponsetts-to-ponkapoag>
5. "Five Pounds of Currency, Three Pounds Corn, Wellesley's Centennial Story, by Elizabeth M. Hinchliffe, 1981 Page 10
6. "Five Pounds of Currency, Three Pounds Corn, Wellesley's Centennial Story, by Elizabeth M. Hinchliffe, 1981 Page 9
7. <https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/christopher-columbus>
8. Gilio-Whitaker, Dina. "Setting the Record Straight on Christopher Columbus." *Thought Catalog*, 15 Feb, 2019. Accessed 2/22/2020). *** Dina Gilio-Whitaker is the policy director and a senior research associate at the Center for World Indigenous Studies and teaches American Indian Studies at California State University San Marcos. *Ms. Whitaker came to Wellesley to speak to our community in April 2019.
9. <https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/christopher-columbus>
10. Columbus, Christopher. *Diario*. 1492.
11. <https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/christopher-columbus>

12. (Gilio-Whitaker, Dina. "Setting the Record Straight on Christopher Columbus." *Thought Catalog*, 15 Feb, 2019. Accessed 2/22/2020). *** Dina Gilio-Whitaker is the policy director and a senior research associate at the Center for World Indigenous Studies and teaches American Indian Studies at California State University San Marcos.
13. <https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/christopher-columbus>
14. Hinton, Alexander. "Savages, Subjects, and Sovereigns: Conjunctions of Modernity, Genocide, and Colonialism." *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, edited by A. Dirk Moses, 1st ed., Berghahn Books, 2010, pp. 4). ***Alexander Hinton is the Director of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights and Professor in the Anthropology and Global Affairs Departments at Rutgers University, Newark.
15. www.IndigenousPeoplesDayMA.org,
16. <https://wellesley.wickedlocal.com/news/20191017/letters-to-editor>
17. <https://videoplayer.telvue.com/player/LGze1WqTsE8jwTKC--4xu4kSh8jPjdoI/playlists/2774/media/538441?sequenceNumber=4&autostart=false&showtabssearch=true> Begins at 1:50:46

The Massachusett are the indigenous nation from whom the present day Commonwealth of Massachusetts took its name.

<http://massachusetttribe.org/>

We as people who reside, work, and engage in Wellesley acknowledge this town is located on the traditional territory of the Massachusett People.