



Taking sides:

Is it appropriate to celebrate Columbus Day as a holiday?



ANTHONY C. LOBAIDO
Columnist

The 500th Anniversary of Columbus' New World discovery reflects the logical continuation of the celebration of his initiative, optimism and courage — traits synonymous with the American character.

Such celebration is nothing new. The Columbus Tricentennial of 1792 saw the renaming of the District of Columbia, Columbia University and the Columbia River. In fact, the fervor reached such a pitch that a movement began in order to change the name of America to "Columbia." The 1892 Quadricentennial Celebration was ushered in on the heels of the Wounded Knee victory of December 1890 and all but sealed America's vision of "Manifest Destiny."

For a young America dealing with conquest of indigenous peoples, Columbus was often seen as a symbol of political legitimacy. The 1890s saw Francis J. Bellamy write the Pledge of Allegiance and saw schools begin encouraging children to celebrate Columbus and learn of his achievements. National zeal reached its apex when President Benjamin Harrison declared October 12, 1892 a national holiday and ordered the Treasury to issue a commemorative coin sporting a hypothetical likeness of Columbus.

America's deep historical roots of celebrating Columbus aside, the character of the man and the purpose of his voyage provide the holiday with legitimacy. As for the notion of ushering in a New World Holocaust, Columbus' diary records the Hispanola natives — who were under siege from slave-seeking Carib Indians — "became so much our friends that it was a marvel." Critics should look to the human sacrifice of the Mayans and Aztecs for the ultimate in New World horror.

Others see Columbus as nothing more than a gold-seeking mercenary. In his diary, Columbus wrote: "I ought to be judged as a captain sent to subdue a numerous and hostile people. I have brought these under subjection by which Spain, heretofore poor, has become rich." By risking life and limb, Columbus brought untold wealth into European coffers, yet he was a man who died in abject poverty.

Still the Columbus holiday debate remains — was the man from Genoa, Italy a slave-trading, bloodthirsty colonial pirate or the personification of capitalism and entrepreneurship? Columbus once defended his character in a letter to Queen Isabella's court: "The slanders of worthless men have done me more injury than all my services have profited me."

Whether sailing an open launch on the high seas or standing humbled before the Royal Court in chains, we know Columbus lived as the world's premier explorer. He was a navigator who challenged the meridional degree of the Ptolemy atlas and an adventurer who inspired men to travel to glory in a realm empirically unknown.

In 2092, Americans living on the Moon and traveling to Mars will still be honoring his unbreakable spirit and maverick achievements. We can do so today.

When Cristobal Colon stumbled upon the Americas as the indigenous population of Hispanola, now the Dominican Republic and Haiti, was estimated at just under 8 million people. By 1496, a Spanish census registered only 28,000 native inhabitants. In a single generation more than 99 percent of the population of this Caribbean island were murdered, worked to death, or killed by European diseases. The situation was not much different for other indigenous populations. In the words of Bartolome de las Casas, a Spanish priest and early traveler to the Americas, "the greatest outrages and slaughterings of people were perpetrated, whole villages being depopulated."

It would be ridiculously unfair and misleading to lay every one of those deaths at the door of Columbus. However, the phenomenal loss of life which occurred serves to illustrate that Columbus, with or without his consent, turned out to be more the agent of a war of conquest than of a discovery.

While not marking the exact date of landfall for the conqueror-explorer, Columbus Day is in essence a celebration of a European conquest begun 500 years ago. Perfectly legitimate holiday, right? Perhaps for Europe, but not for America.

Though this land was stolen from a conquered people, it is a historical fact about which Americans are, understandably, not particularly proud. People of European, African and Caribbean descent, as well as many others, now share citizenship in this country. No one race may claim to be any more American than another. Or, if we must distinguish a particular group, it would surely be difficult to rule out the indigenous populations who lived here in the first place.

We are now all citizens of one country. Columbus Day is an inappropriate federal holiday precisely because we are one diverse people. Columbus Day commemorates the European conquest of the Americas and the deaths of millions of indigenous people. It celebrates the idea that Europeans are superior to other peoples.

However, by opposing Columbus Day I don't propose to rewrite history. As a matter of fact, I'd like to see us pay more attention to history. Instead of learning about the mythicized discovery of America, we should learn more about the reality of a war of conquest. As for Columbus himself, we should give him his due. He was a brave and visionary man who definitely lived a tragic life.

Choosing not to celebrate Columbus Day is not vilifying Columbus. Rather, we must know history from both sides and when we choose an American holiday it should celebrate how far we have come from the bloody conflicts of colonial days. We will never be able to redress historical wrongs.

However, we can quit clinging to the myth of "discovery" and face the complicated truth.

We can devise a more appropriate, more American holiday that celebrates our diversity while still being aware of our violent history.



SHAWN RALSTON
Columnist

MAIL CALL

Fraternity parodies hunting of slaves

On Friday night, Oct. 3, the band of which I am a member played at a party for the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at Texas A&M. We were treated well by the social chairman and everyone at the house was helpful and friendly.

After setting up and being paid, we were horrified to find that the theme of the party was extremely racist. Pledges dressed in black face and grass skirts, and carrying spears, were chased around by actives in hunting fatigues. The decor of the party suggested the African jungle.

The party was a celebration of one of the most terrible crimes against humanity ever witnessed. No one who attended the party seemed to think anything was wrong. To have racism handled so casually was no less than frightening. As long as this attitude is supported by the Greek system, we cannot hope for an end to our racial tensions in this country.

I urge the Interfraternity Council of Texas A&M to acknowledge and denounce these practices. Individuals inside the system must stand up for what they believe. Tolerance is equivalent to endorsement.

Joe Salem
Love Squad band member

Perot commercial showed U.S. decline

In Ross Perot's commercial, he tried to show the people of the United States just what is happening to our great nation.

More regulation of industry, increased safety regulations, and the constant bickering and lawsuits that erupt as a result of equal opportunity measures cut like a double edged sword into our children's future.

These measures unnecessarily burden our already-hurting industries with more worries and a higher tax rate to pay for the government watchdogs that have to be hired to enforce them.

Others would have us believe that our government should control the health industry. They claim this would make the government pay for our health problems. Unfortunately the government does not make any money so guess who would really pay for that "free" health care, in addition to new government bureaucracy that would have to be created to run it all.

Incredible as all of these options sound, there is one more that makes me shudder at night. I recently met two foreign exchange students who believe that America is not for Americans, but is instead a world institution brought about to take care of the world. You always wondered what the rest of the world thinks about us, and there it is — you are simply, in their minds, the world's public servant. I am afraid most of our career politicians would agree.

So next time you have a chance to see old Ross on the television don't change the channel. Your children might thank you someday.

John Groenewold
Class of '92

Battalion missed the real Perot story

I have to take issue with the manner that Gary Carroll covered Perot's first television ad. Carroll missed the point. Although I applaud the work of the Perot volunteers, I don't feel that a local Perot volunteer deserves as much space or more in the article as the information that Perot presented.

The 20 words of the seventh paragraph discussing the charts and graphs should have been expanded. In fact, the charts were the story.

Perot effectively showed that the American economic engine is broken, rusting out in some junkyard while the Democrats and Republicans ignore the issues. Of our \$4 trillion debt, \$1 trillion was accumulated under four years of a Democratic president, and \$3 trillion under 12 years of Republican presidents. That fact says to me that both parties are equally inept at running our country.

The above represent just a portion of the information presented by Perot. In my opinion, they are much more newsworthy than the 35 words of a Japanese businessman.

Peter J. Ricca
Graduate student

Gov. Clinton wrong choice for president

Though I believe in every American's right to run for public office, it nonetheless defies my imagination to think that anyone could actually consider voting for someone with as questionable a background as yourself.

Billy boy, you would be a better representative of this country if you were on our Olympic marathon team. After all, you are a very good long distance runner; you ran all the way to England to avoid the draft.

Now it has been revealed that you ran off to Moscow in 1967. Billy boy, I would like for you to tell me why you were in Moscow at a time when the Soviets were supplying the North Vietnamese with many of the weapons that were killing U.S. soldiers. Bill, don't you know that your actions border on treason?

Billy boy, I understand your opposition to the war, but you didn't even have the guts to protest it here at home; you are a coward in the truest sense of the word. Gov. Clinton, you don't have enough integrity to shine my shoes, much less run my country.

Karl Krueger
Class of '93

Abortion usually result of carelessness

In an ideal world, abortions would only be performed in extreme cases of fetal abnormalities or to save the mental or physical health of the mother.

Unfortunately, most people get abortions for their own convenience,

without considering the child's rights or needs. In most cases, pro-choice means pro-carelessness. If you are old enough to choose to have sex, you are old enough to choose to accept responsibility for your choice.

The sad thing is, contraceptives, even the most expensive (the Pill), are cheaper than an abortion. If your concern is cost you have no excuse.

There are low-cost clinics and caring people who are ready, able, and willing to help you make a responsible choice to be reproductive or non-reproductive. The question should not be pro-choice, but pro-responsibility.

Annette Smith
Veterinary student
Accompanied by 3 signatures

Different looks no excuse for abuse

At the A&M vs. Texas Tech game, a very unfortunate event occurred.

While I was cheering, someone came behind me and poured nacho cheese down the inner side of my green Doc Marten boots.

I realize that being "different" would draw strange looks or even laughs, but when people physically cause damage to another's property, that is unacceptable. If it was your goal to hurt me and make me feel uncomfortable, it did. I hurt that they were so disrespectful to me, my property, and my rights as a "person."

I am here for an education, not to be condemned for being "myself." I feel lied to. At my conference in June, I was told repeatedly how Aggies were so diverse and accepting no matter how different. Videotape after videotape, diversity was engraved into my brain and I was excited and anxious to be a part of it. I can't tell you how this event has affected.

You don't have to accept me for who I am or what I represent, but there's no excuse for what has been done. I have not done anything bad to anyone. I walk through campus with a smile on my face and even say "howdy." To some, this is just nacho cheese poured on my boots, but to me, this is threatening my rights of expression and to be "included" as an Aggie... how sad.

Tiffany McEachern
Class of '96

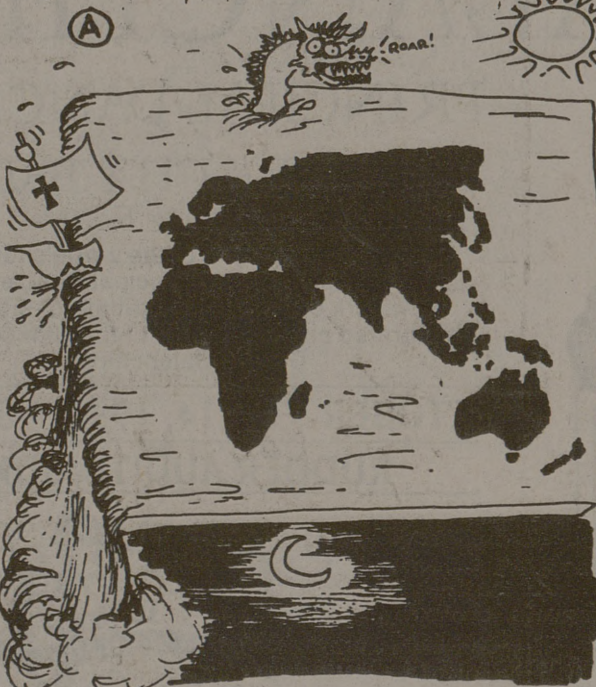
Reader plans to vote strictly pro-life

I would like to sincerely thank the Battalion for helping me out with my voting decisions on Nov. 3. Of course, I am talking about the article entitled "Abortion rights groups list candidates" in the Oct. 6 paper. This was a very informative article that I have cut out and will take with me to the voting booth. This makes my voting easy because all I have to do is look at the candidates the abortion people want elected and then proceed to vote against them. I sincerely hope many other people will do the same.

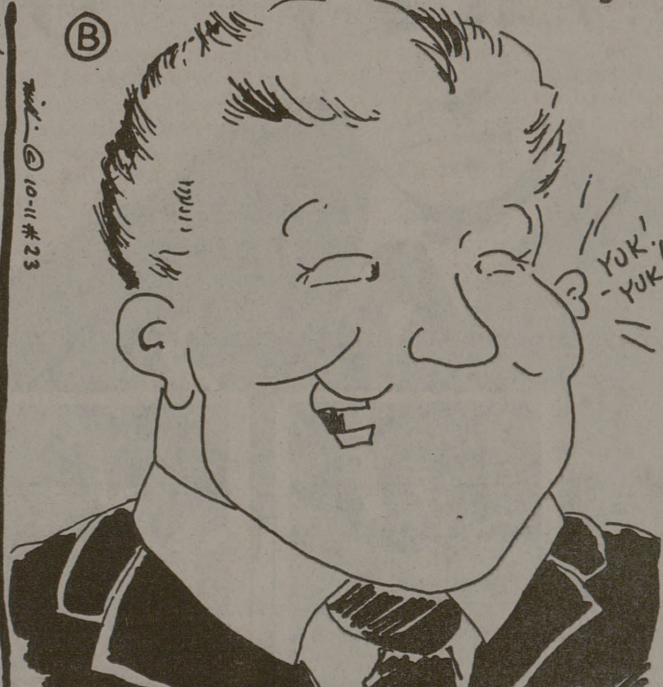
Each year in this country over 1.6 million babies are put to death. Abortion is the only issue worth looking at when choosing the candidates for public office because without human life, nothing else really matters.

Damian J. Krahl
Class of '93

Q: WHICH IS HISTORY'S MOST POPULAR MYTH?



THE WORLD IS FLAT.



BILL CLINTON WILL SAVE OUR ECONOMY.

LoBaido is a doctoral student in educational technology

Ralston is a graduate student in English

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