



# Columbus Day Rejected:

## Trinidad Joins The Protest

The Caribbean political state of Trinidad continues to battle the cultural oppression set forth by Columbus Day. Christopher Columbus arrival to the Islands on the 31st of July 1498. The Caribbean islands, were primarily used by the British, and French Settlers as “Caribs” a place where slave owners could go to collect, purchase, and assimilate Trinidad natives. All slaves went to supply the ever growing demand for pearls within the Isla Margarita. Trinidad, described by settlers as having “peaceful natives” was not only taken advantage of by extracting resources, but torn apart by Europeans selfish market economy pulling the strings of cultural preservation. Indigenous families ripped apart and children separated from their parents. The celebration of Columbus Day is not only an insult to the Indigenous peoples of Trinidad, but in turn directs a grim shadow of European tradition within a land that was stolen by the Native born Trinidad peoples.

Trinidad on October 9th, joined the North American fight against Columbus Day, in an effort to put an end to the celebration of cultural assimilation, slavery, and colonization. The Cross Rhodes Freedom Project, or CRFP is an organization incited by the Indigenous peoples of Trinidad. Columbus Day; “decimated the first peoples of the Americas destroyed their way of life then turned around and denied their humanity.” (TelusurTV.net, 2017.) The ultimate goal of the project is to replace Columbus Day with the newly phrased “Indigenous Day.” A day where Indigenous culture can be celebrated, and recognized as a global counterpart to European or western culture. Although the cause is good, unfortunately not all means of the CRFP have been met with cooperation.

Initially the Trinidad Columbus Day protest took to light, when a statue of Christopher Columbus was vandalized with red paint covering the statue, wrote: “Genocidal Genovese Sailor”(TelusurTV.net, 2017) the paint was a symbol for the Indigenous blood spilt during the assimilation of Indigenous peoples upon the arrival of the Europeans. Unfortunately this was not received well by the local government. The local governance responded swiftly calling meetings with the group and threatening law enforcement action.

“Notwithstanding their thoughts and opinions, utilizing hate to cancel the same hate they’re fighting is not the approach.” (TelusurTV.net, 2017) Meaning to make a real change, one must not fight with aggression and use counter methods associated with the methods that they are protesting against. (ie: two wrongs do not make a right.) The Government of Trinidad does not condone the defacing of state property. Although the CRFP hit a minor obstacle, the country of Trinidad is still in support of taking the steps to change, and is currently working with Venezuela to model their approach to a reformation of Columbus Day.

The campaign against Columbus Day has taken the Indigenous communities of South America out of a cultural oppression, and promoted celebration of heritage, tradition, and Indigenous values. Originating, the grass-root programs within Trinidad, the movement is now in full force. The Cross Rhodes Freedom Project believes that the dehumanization and assimilation of Indigenous peoples should not be celebrated under any circumstance. Acknowledging the fact that Christopher Columbus is a key part in the history of Trinidad however is unavoidable.



The name Trinidad originates from “La Trinidad, in honour of the Holy Trinity;”(The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper, 2017) named shortly after Christopher Columbus’ arrival in 1498. Unfortunately counter protest has argued that, the post-Columbus era has better developed the Caribbean, and has further grown international sovereignty in regards to international affiliation, and recognition, from more wealthy states. “I understand there is a lot of build up of resentment against the colonial past but if we were really to look at some of the negative things of the colonial past then Trinidad should not even be called Trinidad. Port-of-Spain should not be called Port-of-Spain at all.” (The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper, 2017) Ultimately, protest can continue, but Christopher Columbus’ presence within Trinidad, to this day is overwhelming.

The way society is shaped within Trinidad in regards to economy, trade, and constitutional systems, makes reforming social and political boundaries quite a challenging task. Although protest continues, the current outcome has been positive. The Christopher Columbus statue within Trinidad is in process of being removed, and the Government of Trinidad is in action with renaming Columbus Day. The longevity of the situation, however can only get better. As future generations develop, so does education towards Indigenous culture and heritage. With access to resources and a global community the power of the Indigenous voice is continuing to break through within Trinidad. Neighbouring countries such as Venezuela have already re-named and decimated the holiday sending an even stronger push toward equality and cultural celebration.

written by Benjamin Eric Lenner

### Additional information:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/09/us/columbus-day-protest.html>

<https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Trinidad-Joins-World-Protests-Against-Columbus-Day-Statue-Defaced-20171010-0033.html>