



making history
unbiased

October 8, 2021

Observing Indigenous Peoples' Day at BU

"By choosing to commemorate Indigenous Peoples' Day, BU joins an international movement to redefine relationships with indigenous populations and to honor and preserve their rights and culture."

- ANDREA L. TAYLOR

For decades, Boston University has closed on the second Monday of October in observation of Columbus Day, established as a federal holiday in 1937 to celebrate the 1492 landing of Christopher Columbus in the Americas. This year, the University will again close on the second Monday of October—this time, in observation of Indigenous Peoples' Day.

The change in the University's calendar comes at the recommendation of BU's [Antiracism Working Group](#). We made this change amid debate about U.S. history and the efficacy of an observance that overlooks genocide, violence, forced removal, and oppression toward Indigenous populations in North America. We advocated for this change to the academic calendar following intense discussion and campus-wide focus groups.

Commemorating Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America dismisses the reality that native people were already present when Columbus and his European crew landed on these shores. Paleo-Indians are believed to be the first humans to populate the Americas around 10,000 BC, or possibly earlier according to recent discoveries. By choosing to commemorate Indigenous Peoples' Day instead, BU joins an international movement to redefine relationships with indigenous populations and to honor and preserve their rights and culture.

I spent portions of my childhood living in Mashpee, Mass., where many of my classmates and friends were members of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, which has inhabited present-day Massachusetts and Rhode Island for more than 12,000 years. Today, I recall how proud these students were of their rich heritage. This year I urge you to celebrate by learning more about this regional history and culture and also the challenges and opportunities facing the 5.7 million Americans who identify with American Indian or Alaska Native racial backgrounds according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Hopefully, acknowledging Indigenous Peoples' Day, reflecting on this history and reaching out to tribal youth who may be interested in our educational programs, will inspire the BU community to seek a deeper understanding of the customs and history of indigenous people and to become advocates for their future. Providing our first people the attention and investment they deserve is long overdue and will enrich us all.

Andrea L. Taylor
Senior Diversity Officer

Recommended events and resources for observing Indigenous Peoples' Day:



Why Did BU Rename Columbus Day Indigenous Peoples Day?

Podcast exploring BU's shift from Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day, featuring Adrienne Young (SSW'21)

Caution: Cultural Emergency

October 8 to October 25;
BU's George Sherman Union Plaza

Art installation by Erin Genia (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), part of the Indigenous Voices in the Americas series sponsored by the BU Arts Initiative

Raven Reshapes Boston: A Native Corn Garden at the MFA

Through October 12m
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Living art installation by Elizabeth James-Perry (Aquinnah Wampanoag)

The museum is also offering [special programs](#) on October 9 in observation of Indigenous Peoples' Day. Museum admission is always free with a BU ID.

Developing Stories: Native Photographers in the Field

Online exhibit from the National Museum of the American Indian

The museum has many other excellent [online resources](#).

The First Americas Museum

Newly opened museum in Oklahoma City, built to honor the 39 tribes in Oklahoma today. The FAM is the country's largest single-building tribal cultural center. [Visit Website](#)

Recommended Reading:

The Wampanoag of Martha's Vineyard by Thomas Dresser (DGE'67, CAS'69, Questrom'83) is one of many perspectives on the Wampanoag's tribal history.