

The Historical Evolution of Columbus Day in the United States Has Support from Both Sides of the Aisle

History snippets compiled Sept 2020 by Roger Paul Peterson
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1792

The first recorded celebration of Columbus Day in the United States took place on October 12, 1792. Organized by the Society of St. Tammany, also known as the Columbian Order, it commemorated the 300th anniversary of Columbus' landing. (loc.gov)

1892

The 400th anniversary of the event inspired the first official Columbus Day holiday in the United States. President Benjamin Harrison [**Republican**] issued a proclamation in 1892, "recommending to the people the observance in all their localities of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America..." and describing Columbus as "the pioneer of progress and enlightenment." (loc.gov)

1893

According to the Library of Congress, school programs, plays, and community festivities have been organized across the country in celebration of Columbus Day. *Columbus and the Discovery of America*, Imre Kiralfy's "grand dramatic, operatic, and ballet spectacle," is among the more elaborate tributes created for this commemoration. The World's Columbian Exposition or Chicago's World's Fair, which opened in the summer of 1893, was designed to commemorate Columbus' discovery of the New World 400 years earlier. (loc.gov)

1907

In the decades that followed, the Knights of Columbus, an international Roman Catholic fraternal benefit society, lobbied state legislatures to declare October 12 a legal holiday. Colorado was the first state to do so on April 1, 1907 [under **Republican** Governor Henry Augustus Buchtel]. (loc.gov)

1909

New York declared Columbus Day a holiday in 1909 and on October 12, 1909, New York [**Republican**] Governor Charles Evans Hughes led a parade that included the crews of two Italian ships, several Italian-American societies, and legions of the Knights of Columbus. (loc.gov)

1920

Columbus Day begins being celebrated annually [under **Democrat** President Woodrow Wilson]. (CNN.com)

1934

[**Democrat**] President Franklin Delano Roosevelt designated Columbus Day (then celebrated October 12) a national holiday in 1934. (loc.gov)

1937

First federal observance of Columbus Day, **October 12, 1937**, under [**Democrat**] President Franklin D. Roosevelt. (CNN.com)

1968

On [June 28] 1968, Columbus Day was made a federal holiday [P.L. 90-363, 82 Stat. 250-251] [by a **Democrat** House (under Speaker John McCormack) and a **Democrat** Senate (under Senate President Hubert Humphrey, under **Democrat** President Lyndon Johnson)]. Several reasons were offered for creating Columbus Day at the federal level. Among the most prominent was that observance was already an established holiday in 45 states. By also commemorating Columbus's voyage to the New World, [the **Democrat**-led] Congress believed that the nation would be honoring the courage and determination which enabled generations of immigrants from many nations to find freedom and opportunity in America. Such a holiday would, according to a [**Democrat**-led] Senate report, also provide "an annual reaffirmation by the American people of their faith in the future, a declaration of willingness to face with confidence the imponderables of unknown tomorrows." (EveryCRSReport.com)

As part of the June 28, 1968 Uniform Monday Holiday Act, according to fas.org, the "Monday Holiday Law" "provide[d] for uniform annual observances of certain legal public holidays on Mondays, and established a legal public holiday in honor of Christopher Columbus." Prior to the passage of this legislation, Washington's Birthday was observed on February 22, Memorial Day on May 30, and Veterans Day on November 11. The act changed the dates of these holidays to the third Monday in February, the last Monday in May, and the fourth Monday in October, respectively. Columbus Day was also designated as a Monday holiday, to be celebrated on the second Monday in October. By calling for the observance of these four holidays on a Monday, Congress felt there would be "substantial benefits to both the spiritual and economic life of the Nation." In addition, the [**Democrat**-led] House and [**Democrat**-led] Senate reports cited that the holidays would

- afford increased opportunities for families to be together, especially those families of which various members were separated by great distances;
- enable Americans to enjoy a wider range of recreational activities, since they would be afforded more time for travel;
- provide increased opportunities for pilgrimages [sic] to the historic sites connected with our holidays, thereby increasing participation in commemoration of historical events;
- afford greater opportunity for leisure at home so that Americans would be able to enjoy fuller participation in hobbies as well as educational and cultural activities; and
- stimulate greater industrial and commercial production by reducing employee absenteeism and enabling work weeks to be free from interruptions in the form of midweek holidays. (fas.org)

1971

Columbus Day becomes a legal federal holiday in the United States [under **Republican** President Richard Nixon]. Presidential Proclamation (PL90-363) states that the observance of Columbus Day is always on the second Monday in October. (CNN.com)

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