

Recontextualizing Columbus Circle Monument

The Columbus Circle monument is a towering tribute to Christopher Columbus. A reverent carving of a proud, triumphant, and cocksure Columbus tops a column adorned with bronze renditions of the masts of Columbus' three ships - the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria - as well as five ornate anchors. All of this sits atop a plinth that has a carved mural of Columbus and a group of early settlers reaching the shores of the "New World" on one side and on the other, an inscription that reads:

"The Italians' resident in America,
Scoffed at before,
During the voyage, menaced,
After it, chained,
As generous as oppressed,
To the world he gave a world."

Columbus thus is memorialized in the monument in a sacred light through and through. However, there is at once conspicuous lack of any reference to Native people or Native Americans in the monument - it is blatantly exclusionary. With inscriptions and imagery touting Columbus as a heroic figure and maintaining the idea that he was the discoverer of a "new world," the dominant view held by Americans is validated. However, this is highly problematic as it ignores the atrocities committed through his violent conquest of Native people in the interest of maintaining a simpler narrative.

Thanks to historical accounts, growing awareness of Native history, and a modern society where it is easier for a number of perspectives to be given a platform, we know Columbus' role in America's founding to be very different than the one perpetuated by this monument. The narrative being touted here is insensitive, irresponsible, and ultimately destructive. Overlooking the Native American narrative is simpler as it serves the American public's need for a creation myth with the story of brave explorer facing trials and tribulations in the pursuit of "[giving the world] a [new] world,]" creating a sense of nostalgia for American heritage. But in doing so, Native people are silenced and the past is sanitized in the interest of promoting a patriotic memory. It is also important to note that since he is referred to in the monuments inscription as one of the "Italians resident in America," clearly another goal of the monument is additionally being able to depict Columbus as a unifying figurehead for Italian Americans to look to, a notion still prevalent to this day as evident through the Italian American community's strong opposition to the monument being removed or modified. This is another instance of resistance to a multicultural and multifaceted history for selfish motivations. Displaced people in history are commonly proud of their early heritage and have the desire to establish it in the predominant narrative. Native Americans are no exception, but are not afforded the opportunity in the interest of maintaining these traditional hierarchies and narratives.

Thus, the narrative being pushed by the monument at all angles this is a one dimensional portrayal of American heritage catering only to certain groups and simplistic, dated ideas. It is our responsibility as a nation to accurately represent people that historically have been systematically oppressed and abused. Thus, the monument is in need of a major overhaul and should be updated to be inclusive of Native American history and perspectives.

Redesigns

The redesigns of the Columbus Circle Monument all have some representation of the Native Americans while also having representation of Columbus in the monument. The portrayal of both Colonial America and Native America are clear in the monuments making them more inclusive of the American History.

Emily

My new monument is entirely different from the original. I've removed the pedestal, as well as Columbus himself. It is abstract, there are no obvious human figures, this monument is made up of a collection of 3-D shapes that represent both Columbus and the Native Americans, without depicting them outright. It stands at twenty feet tall and ten feet wide, in the center of the circle. This giant, metal rectangle sits on top of a set of concrete steps, towering over everything around it. The steps are covered in smaller, metal cubes of various sizes, a noticeably darker shade than the object looming over them. The cubes are arranged haphazardly, no real pattern can be seen. They give the impression of having been crushed and broken into pieces. From between each step, water flows profusely and pools at the bottom of the monument. The water never stops, it is collected at the bottom and funneled back into the monument to be reused over and over.

Dante

The monument retains similar qualities to the original, referencing the Greco-Roman themes (the column and pedestal,) but simplifies the design. The original monument has a 27.5 ft column, while the redesign will feature a 10 ft column, unadorned and smoothed. Sitting atop the monument will be a statue of a Taino Native American man done in the style of monuments to Taino Indians in Puerto Rico. The column will sit atop two thinner tiered, unadorned triangular slabs (1 ft each) atop a wide triangular stone base (4 ft total), unadorned aside from engravings. These engravings will be of information and symbolism arranged in a dichotomy referencing both Columbus and the Taino Native Americans: his three ships, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria, and the three Taino groups, the Western Taino, the Eastern Taino, and the Classic Taino. Below this will be an additional, slightly wider, cubic / square stone base with Taino symbols adorning 3 of the 4 sides and the fourth engraved with a simple memorial to the lives lost due to enslavement, mistreatment, and murder by Columbus. Surrounding the statue itself will be a circle of water 13 feet in diameter, leaving a short distance at which the text can be read and the statue interacted with. Surrounding this ring of water will be arrangements of St. John's Wort and 2 informational 4 foot plaques explaining and contextualizing the relationship between the two groups.

Jake

The new monument's layout is very similar to the current Columbus monument in terms of landscape and environment. Consisting of a circular floor plan, broken up into rings the centermost ring being the Columbus monument itself. The outermost ring terraformed for grass and trees. The middle ring holds water and multiple fountains. The closest ring to the monument serves as the main walking area while also providing benches for sitting, the floor is made up of stone tile and extends all the way up to the center pool of water. This pool is larger than the outer ring and is home to a few species of fish. Bridges from all four sides extend over the pool of water to the main attraction, a stone slab platform supporting a large stone Columbus era exploration ship replica. Each side of the slab mounts a plaque commemorating lives lost on Columbus's voyage and Native lives lost throughout his era. The ship replica is modeled after the previous monument Spanish era ships, complete with a mast and sail.

Divyashakti

This redesign of the Columbus Circle Monument shows more of an inclusion of the American history through my addition of symbols and representations of the destruction of the natives' culture although along with Columbus's voyages even though he had mistreated the natives. The physical monument is a big cube that is placed on top of a much smaller cube. The representation of Columbus is the big cube to show his influence over the world because of his accomplishments and of the Native Americans it is the smaller cube because they had less to no power during colonial times. The placement of the cubes in the new monument would show how Columbus oppressed and mistreated the natives. While the placement shows the history of the mistreatment of the natives, there are certain details on the bigger cube to commemorate Columbus's leadership and bravery in his voyages: on each side of the cube there is an anchor that marks the four voyages of Columbus and on each of these sides there is a carving of a ship's steering wheel, which has a certain number of spokes that correspond to the number of ships that Columbus had on a particular voyage. While the details and carvings make the bigger cube a definite representation of Columbus and why he was superior in his achievements, there is a definite texture with many tones on the smaller cube to represent the culture of the natives and how it dissolved. This texture is not present on the bigger cube, since I wanted to show that it was Columbus's achievements and voyages that made him superior to others and then dominate over the natives. Currently, the monument does not honor the native American culture but only Columbus's voyages, which is a distortion of the American history and does not commemorate the history in its entirety. This redesigned new monument would serve both these important aspects of the Colonial and American History.



Brand colors: Red, Yellow, White, Black (Native American Circle of Life/Directional Colors)

Brand imagery: Taino Indian seal + New York State seal

To create a brand that resembles that of a Colonial American / Native American Peace Treaty Seal. This reference and recalls seals that were made to celebrate peace treaties between Native Americans and Colonizers, but updated with contemporary historical consideration and sensitivity. We hope to honor both peoples in the seal and combine references to and imagery of both Colonial American and Native American cultures.

Columbus' achievements will be highlighted in order to honor lives lost, the hardships of his Atlantic voyages, and their lasting impact on the American people. However, Native peoples will be the focus of the seal, to subvert traditional Eurocentric imagery and honor the dissolution and destruction of Native culture. They will be represented alongside Columbus and Colonial Americans in the monument and highlighted in this seal.

The New Monument Souvenirs

Pennant Flag

A pennant is a commemorative flag typically used to show support for a particular athletic team. However, historically pennants have been used to represent one's allegiance towards a specific cause or organization that represents their interests. Political pennant flags, professional pennant flags, and collegiate pennant flags are all examples of use cases that embody an organization's values and principles in a physical item. Pennant Flags often have the name and logo of the organization being represented.

My monument's Pennant Flag will include text, reading "New Columbus Monument." The flag will also include a reference to the four directional colors (black, red, yellow, and white) which in Native American culture traditionally symbolize the circle of life and the four directions of a compass rose. (north, east, south, west)

Water Bottle

Our second souvenir is a flat glass water bottle covered in squares that use colors from both the New York State seal and the Taino Indian seal. These colors are arranged in a cohesive way that symbolizes the inclusion of Native History with our own. We chose a water bottle because water represents both Columbus' journey across the ocean and the sadness (tears) for the Native lives that were lost as a result of this voyage. With our rebranding of the monument and these new souvenirs, we hope to commemorate Columbus' journey while also recognizing his crimes.

THE

NEW

MONUMENT