

## #1374 Tell Stories, Not Myths: Columbus and the Centrality of Colonialism

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:00:00] Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall learn about the myths of Columbus and American exceptionalism that we cling to, and turn our gaze to some of the less understood, but more accurate and important aspects of our collective history. Clips today are from the Native Opinion Podcast, Vox, Let's Talk Native, a Progressive Faith Sermon from Dr. Roger Ray, the Katie Halper Show, BackStory, Loud & Clear, and Some More News from Cracked.

### Can You Handle The Truth? - Native Opinion Podcast an American Indian Perspective - Air Date 10-20-19

**MICHAEL KICKINGBEAR - HOST, NATIVE OPINION:** [00:00:31] Here are five things that you can keep in mind the next time we get close to this holiday again. Number one, highlight the historical and contemporary contributions Indigenous people have made and continue to make in society. Adopting Indigenous Peoples' Day is an opportunity to celebrate and honor the histories, cultures, contributions, and resilience of contemporary native peoples. We did that earlier by playing the piece on Elouise Cobell for you folks.

Number two, non-natives may push back against campaigns that center the abolishment of Columbus day. While abolishing Columbus Day is crucial to the legislation more support is garnered when the movement centers the celebration of diverse Indigenous peoples across the globe.

Number three, most non-natives were taught a romantic narrative about Christopher Columbus that omits the atrocities he committed against many different Indigenous groups. It's crucial to educate non-natives about the true history of Christopher Columbus, such as presenting firsthand accounts from Columbus's journal. Now that's what John's about to do, and that's a good thing. With this, non-natives will become aware that celebrating Columbus Day contributes to the erasure of Indigenous peoples' trauma in history.

Number four, make the issues of Christopher Columbus contemporary. Due to a lack of knowledge about native people and history, non-natives underestimate the extent to which past atrocities still affect native people today. Educate non-natives about the legacy of colonialism, which has devastated Indigenous communities historically, and continues to negatively impact them today. We try to do this on a regular basis on this show all year long.

Number five, replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day is not in opposition to Italian-Americans, instead it is a direct opposition to the genocidal colonizer that does not positively represent Italian heritage. Additionally, there are many other Italians and Italian Americans who could be celebrated instead of Christopher Columbus. See *Italian Americans who Fought for Justice* for examples of Italian Americans to celebrate and *Goodbye Columbus Day? Why Italian-Americans deserve a better holiday* or *An Open Letter to Italian Americans on Columbus Day* for an Italian American perspective on why Columbus Day should be abolished.

# Why the US celebrates Columbus Day - Vox - Air Date 10-8-20

**NARRATOR:** [00:03:23] Christopher Columbus is all over America. There are statues in his honor, streets and cities are named after him. He's got his own national holiday complete with parades. For centuries, Columbus has been celebrated as the brave explorer who discovered the New World.

**ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** [00:03:42] We celebrate Columbus Day, the anniversary of that day in 1492 when Columbus first sighted the land of the New World, America.

**NARRATOR:** [00:03:55] never even set foot on North American soil. His four voyages brought him to the modern day Caribbean islands, Central and South America, but never to the country where more than 50 cities, towns and counties bear his name. We rarely hear about the other explorers who actually landed in the US just a couple of decades after Columbus.

So how did a man who never even set foot in North America end up with a national holiday and a permanent place in American mythology?

Columbus and his arrival in the Americas is mostly introduced to kids through books, songs or cartoons like this one:

**ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** [00:04:36] I will discover a shortcut to India and bring back some of the great wealth I find there, and I can do it, for I know the world is round.

**NARRATOR:** [00:04:48] One of the many problems with cartoons like this one is that it taught a lot of wrong information. Children were told that Columbus defied conventional wisdom and proved the world was round, but at the time, people already knew the earth was round. Columbus actually claimed the world was smaller than predicted, and he was wrong. Children were also told that Columbus's voyages to the inhabited islands in the Americas were peaceful:

**ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** [00:05:11] The people Columbus called Indians were very friendly, and they gave Columbus and his men many gifts.

**NARRATOR:** [00:05:17] But they don't mention that Columbus and his men were responsible for the mass deaths of Native people. A friar who lived on the islands Columbus reached and experienced the brutality of the conquest wrote about it. He wrote, "they forced their way into settlements, slaughtering small children, old men and pregnant women." These details have been kept out of most textbooks from the beginning, allowing Columbus to become an American icon.

The idealized version of Columbus is as old as the United States. It all began during the War of Independence when the US fought the British. The new nation needed a rebellious non-British symbol, and they found one in Columbus. Once the US won independence, streets and cities were named after him. Columbus's iconic status was further cemented in 1828, when Washington Irving published a biography glorifying him. He described him as brave, heroic and a genius. But he neglected to mention his brutal treatment of indigenous people.

But Columbus's real big break came in the late 1800's, when the country he'd never visited started experiencing some massive changes. Italian immigrants were arriving in the United States in big numbers, and they faced harsh discrimination. They were treated as perpetual foreigners and restricted to manual labor. Their Catholic beliefs opened the door for even more discrimination. So, they embraced Columbus; after all, he was Italian and Catholic and already admired. So, he quickly became an icon for Italian immigrants who argued that they too belonged in America. On the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival, in 1892, Columbus Day was first brought into the school system. Schools held celebrations and students pledged allegiance to the flag for the first time, associating Columbus with patriotism in classrooms across America. A year later, Columbus became the theme of the World Expo in Chicago, branding him America's hero around the world. As Columbus and his legend became further embedded in American culture, so did the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic social club founded by Italian immigrants. By 1937, the Knights of Columbus had gained enough influence to convince President Roosevelt to proclaim Columbus Day a federal holiday.

But not everyone wanted to celebrate Columbus. While the myth of Columbus had been developing throughout history, Native Americans in the US had been dealing with destruction and discrimination for centuries at the hands of all the European settlers that followed Columbus. But in the 60's, things started changing in America. As the Civil Rights movement demanded change, Native rights became a part of the conversation.

**ARCHIVAL AUDIO:** [00:07:52] We've asked the government for hundreds of years to do things for our people or with our people. The government has only compromised, only given us token issues to deal with. We're here today as living factors of the problems that are still existing.

**NARRATOR:** [00:08:05] Historians started reexamining Columbus and his story, correcting the myth and including the missing historical facts. As revelations about Columbus have become mainstream, some people have rejected the holiday, as well as the man and the legacy behind it. Today, cities around the U S are opting out of celebrating Columbus Day. In some cities, they are choosing to celebrate Indigenous People's Day, instead. At the same time, more than half of Americans think celebrating Columbus Day is a good idea according to a poll commissioned by the Knights of Columbus. Most countries are formed with the help of myths and heroes to forge a sense of unity and belonging. It's human nature. But as the myth of Columbus is confronted with brutal historical facts, the US will have to decide which myths are worth keeping and which ones to discard.

## **Columbus In His Own Words - Let's Talk Native - Air Date 10-12-19**

**JOHN KANE - HOST, LET'S TALK NATIVE:** [00:09:08] These are the words of Christopher Columbus written by his own hand, about the people he encountered as a result of his famed voyages. Not the words of a brave hero or righteous explorer, but a merciless marauding tyrant. Rather than continuing the myths, the lies, and embellishments of this man, let's let his own words and the words of his contemporaries tell the real story. We will quote Columbus, site historical accounts, and offer the observations of a Bishop serving in the settlements established by Columbus.

The expedition of Columbus was a failure. He did not reach the Eastern regions of Asia, he did not chart a new maritime route for trade to the East Indies. Oh yeah. And the people that you encountered on the islands he ran into were not Indians. He miscalculated the size of the planet by almost half. And it would be later European navigators who had established that the land Columbus came upon was not actually Asia, but rather a vast populated world of islands and continents previously, unknown to Europe. This failure had consequences, as did Columbus' reports back to the Spanish crown of an abundance of natives for slaves, rivers of gold, and a land of riches. There was actually very little gold and other riches that could be delivered to Spain for sponsoring Columbus's voyages, and certainly no access to trade with the East. Out of desperation, Columbus relied completely on slavery to justify his settlements and voyages. Indeed, these peaceful, generous people were subjugated and enslaved and the cruelty is well documented.

In Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, Zinn sights the journals of Columbus and others under his command and the writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, a former slave owner who became a priest and the Bishop of Chiapas. Las Casas wrote, "such inhumanities and barbarism were committed in my sight as no ages can parallel. My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature that I now tremble as I write."

Columbus was greeted by the Arawak. They offered help to the voyagers, including food and hospitality. They farmed corn, yams, cassava, and cotton. They wove fabric, but had no work animals or large land mammals for game. They had no iron, but some wore jewelry, including small amounts of gold. This would have devastating consequences.

Las Casas wrote endless testimonies. Proved the mild and pacific temperament of the natives. But our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle, and destroy. The Admiral, it is true, was blind as those that came after him, and it was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians.

Native people were enslaved for service in their own homeland, and others were shipped back to Spain. Thousands were gathered for the first transatlantic slave trade. Hundreds would die on each of these journeys while millions would die enslaved on their own lands.

Las Casas documented these conditions. He wrote of native people forced to work in gold mines to complete exhaustion and death. Those who opposed were beheaded or brutally disfigured. He wrote, "they suffered and died in the mines and other labors in desperate silence, knowing not a soul in the world to whom they could run for help."

In some provinces, all persons over the age of 14 had to fill a thimble with gold dust every three months. They would have copper shackles bound to their necks as proof of compliance. Those who could not fulfill this obligation would have their hands cut off and strung around their necks while they bled to death. Over 10,000 died, handless.

But slavery was not limited to gold production. The rape culture of Europe had an immediate effect. One of Columbus' captain's wrote, "I captured a beautiful woman whom the Lord Admiral gave to me. And having taken her into my cabin, I conceived desire to take pleasure, but she did not want it and treated me with her fingernails in such a manner that I wished I had never begun. But seeing that I took a rope and I thrashed her well. She raised such unheard of screams that you would not have believed your ears. Finally, we came to an

agreement in such a manner that I can tell you that she seemed to be brought up in a school of harlots."

Sex slaves were not just a means to compensate his crew. Columbus shipped young girls back to Spain as well. Columbus wrote, "a hundred castellanos are easily obtained for a woman, and there are plenty of dealers who go about looking for girls. Those from nine to 10 are now in demand."

Las Casas tells how the conceit of the Spaniards grew every day. Total control led to unimaginable cruelty and exploitation. Some refused to walk, forcing native people to carry them on their backs or in hammocks. Las .the Indians carry large leaves to shade them from the sun and others to fan them with goose wings." "The Spaniards," las Casas wrote, "thought nothing of knifing Indians by the tens or twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades."

Columbus and the Spaniards brought war dogs to the Caribbean as weapons against the natives. In the early years of Columbus' reign, there were butcher shops throughout the islands where Indian bodies were sold as dog food. Live babies we're fed to the war docs for sport a entertainment, sometimes in front of their horrified parents.

In two years time, approximately 250,000 Indians were dead on Haiti. Many of these deaths included mass suicides or mothers killing their babies to avoid the horrors of a life and death of persecution.

Bartolomé de las Casas wrote, when he arrived in Hispaniola in 1508, there were 60,000 people living on the island, including the Indians, so then from 1494 to 1508, over 3 million people had perished from war, slavery, and the mines. He asked, "who and future generations will believe this. I, myself writing as a knowledgeable eye witness can hardly believe it."

Today, most Americans reject the truth of Columbus. They prefer the fairytale version, the discovered America version. Italian-Americans prop him up as their patron saint, falsely associating him with their own Italian heritage. His name is celebrated with holidays, in parades, as a name for cities, towns, and regions, including a province in Canada, the U.S. Capitol, and a country of South America.

So what of las Casas question? Who in future generations will believe this? Will the truth prevail, or will the myth of a fabricated hero continue?

## **In Search of a Better American Myth - Progressive Faith Sermons, Dr. Roger Ray - Air Date 10-11-20**

**DR. ROGER RAY - PASTOR, COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH:** [00:17:16] The historical truth about Columbus is that he was an absolutely horrible human being. He was a cruel murderer, a greedy slave trader who also dabbled in capturing children to be sex slaves in Europe, all of which was to fatten his own estate. He was so greedy, in fact, he was removed from the government's role of governor in the Caribbean. All of you folks who buy a DNA test and are surprised to find that have a trace of Native American ancestry . . . yeah, that's not a happy

story. Your ancestors brought that back to the Americas from Europe in their veins and the way they got it is a very ugly narrative.

Last month, President Trump gave a speech in which he was literally demanding that schools become propaganda centers teaching the next generation to be more proud of being American by downplaying their knowledge of actual American history. He even specifically named the work of the famous American historian Howard Zinn as being an author who should be removed from libraries and not discussed in classrooms. I don't know who wrote that speech from Donald Trump, but I'm willing to bet that he had no idea who Howard Zinn was. But someone put him in there. I am confident that he never read his books because it seems relatively apparent that he hasn't read any books at all.

It was however my honor to meet and talk with Howard Zinn on three occasions, the first two times, actually, here in Springfield, once at Missouri State and then our school of religion at Drury University had him come and speak there, and then later, I got to have a longer visit with him when he was speaking at Harvard when I was a fellow there in 2004. He was a very amazing man, so insightful in his ability to strip away propaganda and myth from the stories that we've told ourselves about our history. It was just so amazing that when we started this church in 2008, our very first class was led by our own Dr. David Adams who spent nearly a year guiding us through a study of Howard Zinn's book "A People's History of the United States" because I wanted our church to be started with a fierce orientation to our true history and the cultural prejudices that we were inheriting.

Trump doesn't know much about history and he cares even less, but he knows that he doesn't want you to know that Christopher Columbus was a murdering slave trader who got rich by abducting children for the sex trade. Still, the problem here is not just that Columbus was historically a bad guy. There were lots of bad guys in history and there are a lot of dark chapters in our history of conquest, invasion and frankly pathological land theft on our way to declaring ourselves to be "the greatest nation in the world."

The problem is that Italians picked Columbus to be the central figure in a useful myth. Myths can be based on facts; a lot of times they're based on thin air. But myths have a function in society; they put a certain spin on history to give us self-confidence and pride and to justify our sense of privilege.

In this sense, the Hebrew bible is a perfect example of the use of myth as propaganda. The stories that were recorded by the Israelites who were in captive in Babylon in the fifth century B.C. describing their history from five, six, seven years earlier as being a rather testy love story between their nation and God. Their story claims that they grew as a nation while they were slaves in Egypt and that God delivered them from slavery and gave them their own land, a promised land. There is no persuasive reason to believe that any part of that myth is based on anything that happened in history. The Jews were one of many Palestinian tribes fighting for control of real estate that happened to be located between two great continents where empires have been fighting since humans laid down their clubs and started to build walled cities. I never cease to be amused by evangelicals who have never noticed how ironic it is that the Jewish holy book, written by Jews for Jews is the book where they find the claim that God gave them this particular piece of real estate. What could be more convenient?

I took an Israeli government subsidized trip to Jordan and Israel when I was in grad school. I was out of place even then in a bus full of evangelical preachers. But I was excited to see what even I at that tender, young age thought of as the “holy land.” But as we crossed the Jordan River and saw the impoverished refugee camps in the West Bank brimming with displaced Palestinians, our government guide shrugged off the obvious poverty and suffering of the camp and said to us, “They don’t belong here, God gave this land to us.” The bus erupted in loud amens from the preachers on the bus, and the tour guide has this wry grin on his face as he had obviously practiced that line and perfected playing American preachers like a fiddle. It was at that moment that I began to question the validity of what I had been told about the promised land.

Folks, let me break it to you: God doesn’t wear a gold jacket and doesn’t work for Century 21. God no more parcels out land to one rival group over another than God prefers one football team or one baseball team over another. Apparently, I have it on good sources that God is an ice hockey fan.

Religious myths and national myths help to gloss over some of the sordid details of reality. We want to think of George Washington as a courageous military leader who helped American colonists to gain freedom. We don’t want to then dwell on the hundreds of slaves that he kept mercilessly captive on his Virginia farm or those that he brought to Washington to serve in his household.

While some myths just evolve in the self-congratulatory stew of society, many are intentionally created to promote and justify the abuses of the dominant culture.

None other than Rudyard Kipling — I kinda hate to think that he turned his hand to this but Rudyard Kipling wrote a famous poem titled, “The White Man’s Burden,” and it was written to support our invasion of the Philippines, suggesting that White people in North America were obligated to carry Blacks, Latinos and Native Americans towards civilization, and that we were obligated to do the same for Philippine natives, Muslims and Asians. As if our enslavement of Africans, our genocide of Native Americans and abusive practices towards Latinos was all a charitable education exercise on the part of White America.

It is similar to the passionate support for America’s manifest destiny that’s portrayed in John Gast’s late 19th century painting, depicting the “spirit” of a sort of Italian-looking woman named Columbia flying through the air, Columbia obviously playing on Columbus, and she is guiding the westward movement of White people who beneath her are building railroads as she is stringing telegraph wire as they drove the Native Americans out of their way. She carries a text book under her arm as if education was the hallmark of our conquest of lands that you just have to admit did not belong to us. The assumption was the our superior culture: our education, our agriculture, our technological advances justified genocide and homicidal land theft we engaged in.

## **Jon Schwarz on social silence and hidden history - The Katie Halper Show - Air Date 11-22-18**

**JON SCHWARTZ:** [00:27:15] And every everything that you need to know about on Columbus Day, you should be thinking about on Thanksgiving as well, and it's really a better

opportunity because you're there with your family and you can discuss the history of the last 500 years . . .

**KATIE HALPER - HOST, THE KATIE HALPER PODCAST:** [00:27:26] Right? You're not playing a game where you run into people's houses and kill them and take their stuff, which is the right way to celebrate Columbus Day.

Yeah,

**JON SCHWARTZ:** [00:27:33] The reason I say that is that the central fact of essentially all politics on earth is the history of European colonialism over the past 500 years. The incredible thing about it is that that is never discussed. And in fact, I would say it's precisely because it is the central fact that it's never discussed.

You know, I talked about a phenomenon that anthropologists call social silence, which is exactly that, which says that the way human cultures work is that in terms of what we focus on and we'll discuss, you know, it's like looking at the sun, like the sun is the central fact of life on earth, but we never look at the sun.

We never look at European colonialism, and the fact that, starting in 1492, Europeans conquered I think like 85% of the land mass on earth. The only place on earth that really escaped being colonized was Japan. And that is a significant fact: why was Japan the first country to catch up to European and American economic standards and have what we would consider a modern economy where people were prosperous. Well, the only place where that happened immediately was Japan, and those things are probably connected.

And so, European colonialism was unquestionably -- nobody would deny, could deny -- it was the driving force until World War II, and what was called decolonization after World War II, which was real in some senses.

But the aftereffects and what Pope Francis has called look new forms of colonialism in another guise mean that European colonialism in many ways has just never ended. And you cannot understand life on earth unless you understand that. And I went through a whole bunch of different things that seem totally unconnected, but if you understand that European colonialism is what matters, they fit together very well. I can talk about some of my favorites,

**KATIE HALPER - HOST, THE KATIE HALPER PODCAST:** [00:29:28] There are too many to count, right.

**JON SCHWARTZ:** [00:29:30] Okay, so you take the money out of your wallet. Nobody knows for sure where the dollar sign came from, but there is a lot of speculation that makes sense that it comes from the city seal of Potosi in Bolivia. The only reason I know about the history there is weird happenstance. My grandfather was a historian of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. Yeah. And he actually is an honorary citizen there. He wrote a history of the city.

**KATIE HALPER - HOST, THE KATIE HALPER PODCAST:** [00:30:00] That's so cool.

**JON SCHWARTZ:** [00:30:02] Yeah, it is really interesting. And the history is this: is that there's a gigantic mountain outside the city. The city grew up around it. It had maybe the world's greatest deposits of silver over a period of hundreds of years. It's estimated that 10 million



people were worked to death in the mines. This would be indigenous Bolivians; also Africans were enslaved and sent to Bolivia. That's why it was called the mountain that eats man. On the city seal, you can see actually two things that look very much like a dollar sign. At the time of the US Revolution and in the decades afterwards, just everybody knew that this is where wealth came from. You know, it was a topic of discussion and, and these coins would have circulated in the United States. And so it was quite possible that that's where the dollar sign comes from. This example of sort of the essence of European colonialism, which is that for some people, this mountain meant gigantic amounts of wealth, all of this money floating out of the mountain to the Spanish government. And it's why there are gigantic, beautiful buildings in Spain in Madrid built 400 years ago. And then for people on the other side of colonialism, it meant mass death, right, slavery and being condemned to live underground and live and die in the darkness.

**KATIE HALPER - HOST, THE KATIE HALPER PODCAST:** [00:31:22] Yeah. There's no better metaphor for capitalism than mining.

**JON SCHWARTZ:** [00:31:26] Yeah, and we carry that around with us every day on our money, but nobody knows that. And so we don't see it. Right. But it is right there. It's right there in our pockets. That's one example; you see it in our culture, but people are completely blind to it.

War of the Worlds, Avatar, Apocalypse Now, Day of the Jackal: those are all movies that are either metaphorically or literally about European colonialism, but nobody knows that. Nobody knows that about Avatar, that that's really how it was conceived. Nobody knows that about War of the Worlds. They see the remake with Tom Cruise, directed, I think, by Steven Spielberg. That was never discussed when the movie came out, that HG Wells wrote that very specifically as an allegory about colonialism. If you are living in sort of the world capitals of colonialism, it's like, well, what's, you know, what's the big deal? Like, was colonialism really that bad?

Well, it was that bad. It was an ideology as brutal, as cruel as fascism, as Nazism, as Stalinism at its worst. In fact, there's a very good argument to be made that fascism grew out of colonialism. My grandfather wrote about that. My historian grandfather wrote at the time, this is growing out of colonialism. And the sort of extremely powerful ideology of racism that colonialism created, fascism adopted.

## **Voting Is Not Enough: Fight Voter Suppression & Help Restore Native Voting Rights - Best of the Left**

**AMANDA HOFFMAN - ACTIVISM, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [00:32:45] You've reached the activism portion of today's show. Now that you're informed and angry, here's what you can do about it. Today's activism: Voting is not enough. Fight voter suppression and help restore Native voting rights

As of the publishing of this episode, there are only 3 weeks left until Election Day. Just 21 days.

Visit [BestoftheLeft.com/2020action](https://BestoftheLeft.com/2020action) to explore our 2020 Election Action Guide, which we're calling "Voting Is Not Enough." Because...it's just not.

Voting is happening NOW in record numbers. But at the same time we're also witnessing desperate attempts by the GOP to suppress votes in any way they can - legally and illegally.

We need to counter these voter suppression efforts with action. So, if you haven't volunteered yet, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

Help voters in voter ID law states get the IDs they need with [VoteRiders.org](http://VoteRiders.org).

Phone-bank and text-bank with a get-out-the-vote campaign and arm voters with the accurate information they need to ensure their vote is cast and counted. Go to [TheLastWeekends.org](http://TheLastWeekends.org) to instantly find a shift for the final weekends before the election.

And if you or someone you know encounters a problem with ballot drop boxes, early voting, absentee ballots, or something else, call Election Protection at 866-OUR-VOTE or visit [866OurVote.org](http://866OurVote.org). If you want to help, sign up to assist with Election Protection's nonpartisan poll monitoring program at [ProtectTheVote.net](http://ProtectTheVote.net).

It's important to note that Native peoples have not only been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, but they are also disproportionately affected by voter suppression tactics. In fact, many barriers to the ballot uniquely target Native peoples.

Native peoples are less likely to have a traditional street address, making it more likely that their voter registration applications will get rejected. And many states with Voter ID laws just flat out don't accept tribal IDs. Then there's the closure of polling places and reducing ballot drop boxes in reservation counties, conflicting information from poll workers and lack of interpreters in states with high Native populations. The gutting of the Voting Rights Act in 2013 only made targeted voter suppression of Native peoples easier for states like Arizona and Alaska and certain counties in North Dakota.

To help counter this suppression, nonprofits IllumiNative, Native Organizers Alliance and First Peoples Worldwide, have launched Natives Vote - a get out the vote effort providing detailed information on each state's voting laws, registration dates, and who to contact if issues arise, and more.

In a release, IllumiNative Executive Director Crystal Echo Hawk said, "Exercising our grassroots political power is crucial to rebuilding what we've lost and preparing the future for the next seven generations." Visit [NativesVote2020.com](http://NativesVote2020.com) to learn more.

You can also help restore and protect Native voting rights by demanding your members of congress to support the Native American Voting Rights Act, which has already been introduced in both the House and Senate. Spearheaded by the Native American Rights Fund, the Act would "create more communication channels between Washington and Native American tribes, direct states to accept tribal ID cards for voting purposes, and establish a clear pathway for Native communities to request federal election observers."

The segment notes include all the links to this information as well as additional resources, and, once again, this segment is available on the "Voting is Not Enough" page at [BestoftheLeft.com/2020action](http://BestoftheLeft.com/2020action).

So, if making sure everyone can access the ballot - especially those we stole this land from - is important to you, be sure to spread the word about Fighting Voter Suppression & helping restore native voting rights so that others in your network can spread the word too.

## City Upon A Hill: A History Of American Exceptionalism - BackStory - Air Date 1-22-16

**PETER ONUF:** [00:36:13] Before the break we were hearing from historian Mark Peterson about the true origins of the phrase "city upon a hill." It's one of the catch phrases of American exceptionalism. He was telling me that it's author, Puritan John Winthrop, intended it not as prophecy, but rather as a sort of warning to his fellow colonists that the eyes of the world were upon them.

But the second interesting thing Peterson told me was that the text doesn't show up at all in the historical record until 200 years later. That's when a hand-written copy of it was found in a New York City attic.

**BRIAN BALOGH:** [00:36:51] This particular copy was discovered in the early 19th century, in the early 1830s, among a collection of papers that belonged to one of John Winthrop's very distant descendents. In 1838, this document was published for the first time by the Massachusetts Historical Society, in their ongoing series of publications of important documents in Massachusetts history.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:37:16] So why should the Massachusetts Historical Society and readers of this document think it was so prescient and prophetic? What was it about the 1830s that shaped the reception of this document?

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:37:32] Well, this is a time in which there is a great deal of attention being paid in the United States to its earlier history, largely driven by the growing sectional conflict between the Northern and the Southern States at the time.

And of course by the 1830s, with the rise of abolitionism in Boston, the publication of, William Lloyd Garrison's famous abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, the beginnings of major slave revolts in the South, like Nat Turner's rebellion in Virginia, these issues are becoming more and more inflamed. As the two sides differentiate themselves from each other in political and intellectual terms, there's a kind of contest to seize the mantle of history, to prove that one side versus the other is—

**PETER ONUF:** [00:38:18] Well, slow down. Mark, Mark, Mark.

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:38:19] Yes.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:38:19] This is the great statement of American exceptionalism now, and modern American presidents invoke it all the time.

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:38:26] Yes.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:38:26] And you're telling me it really comes out of a Yankee nationalism that is America is New England writ large?

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:38:33] That's exactly right. And in fact in the 19th century, after Winthrop's text comes to light, it's not something that's embraced by Southern Americans, by the future Confederacy. Rather it's part of the kind of historical mythology that new Englanders build around themselves. It's a piece with the development of Thanksgiving as first a regional and then, eventually, a national holiday. But, of course, as I assume your listeners will know, Thanksgiving is not a national holiday until president Lincoln declares it to be one in the midst of the civil war in 1863. Before that it had been pretty exclusively, New England regional celebration.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:39:14] When do you think that that phrase became a patriotic nationalistic text that it is today? Was that in the 19th century or is it only in the 20th century that it begins to take on that powerful meaning?

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:39:30] Well, as far as I can tell, it really is a 20th century phenomenon. And part of the reason for that is that despite many of the efforts of 19th century, sort of patriotic New England historians to promote the idea of American origins in the founding of Massachusetts, there was a kind of equal and opposite fear of and loathing of and detestation of puritanism.

And so a lot of the scholarship of the 19th century tended to suggest that a lot of what more sort of progressive or liberal people thought was wrong with the American character could be traced to the sort of meanness and anti-life qualities, if that's a phrase, of puritanism.

And so I think it was really with the scholarly recovery of the complexity and richness of puritanism in the 20th century, that many of these texts, like Winthrop's, came to the forefront. And so, on this particular case, the city upon a hill phrase, I actually would have to pin the blame on Perry Miller, the great Harvard literary scholar.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:40:39] Oh my goodness— one of our great historians, a literary scholar. Yeah.

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:40:42] Right. But as brilliant as Miller was, this particular phrase he treated rather sloppily. And in an extremely influential and well-known essay that he wrote called *Errand into the Wilderness*, he actually suggested that John Winthrop, in using that phrase—city upon a hill, he was quite literally suggesting that Winthrop was being prophetic.

He said something like here, John Winthrop had a preternatural sense of the future greatness of America. He was wrong. He was not doing his homework on this particular text as well as he should have. but it is the case that Miller was the predominant intellectual figure interpreting American history and culture at the time that John Kennedy was a Harvard undergraduate.

**PETER ONUF:** [00:41:30] That's right.

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:41:30] And so I'm not particularly surprised that Kennedy gave a famous speech in Massachusetts to his supporters in which he invoked that phrase in much the way that Perry Miller had used it.

**JOHN F. KENNEDY:** [00:41:41] But I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship *Arabella* 331 years ago.

**MARK PETERSON:** [00:41:52] And I think once Kennedy did it and it worked its way from there into politics, the media journalists and the like, there was no turning back from that,

**JOHN F. KENNEDY:** [00:42:01] ...that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.

## **The American Exceptionalism Mythology - Loud & Clear - Air Date 7-5-19**

**GERALD HORNE:** [00:42:09] The idea of American exceptionalism is as old as the Europeans landing in America. John Winthrop and his sermon aboard the Arbella before the Puritans departed from the ship said that we shall be as a city upon the hill, that the eyes of the world will be upon us, that their colony, Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630, would set the moral example for all the backward Christians, in England especially, and that if they followed America's model, cause we were going to set up this model Christian community. And so from the very beginning is this notion that the world is going to look to what's set up here in America as the model for everybody else to follow if they want true redemption.

But then the notion evolves. It really is with the American revolution starting in 1775, the declaration of independence, July 4th, 1776. The victory in the revolutionary war, there was this celebration of July 4th and this developing notion of the United States being an extraordinary, a different kind of country.

We see this again in the 1830s and 1840s. It was expressed by some of the European visitors like Alexis de Tocqueville, but also many other Europeans who came to the United States during that time, they didn't talk about American exceptionalism, but they talked about the United States being exceptional, and they talked about the ways in which the United States was different.

We've got positive expressions of this in the statements made by Abraham Lincoln, for example, in the, the Gettysburg address. He talks about the America as a nation conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. And he says that America's mission is to ensure that government of the people by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. So there, while, as you mentioned in the introduction, it's often used, the concept of American exceptionalism, to say that America is above other countries in a way that allows the United States to act as a rogue power, that's not the only version that there has been. There's also been positive visions of the United States as a beacon of democracy and a beacon of freedom.

The interesting twist that occurs is really later. The first real use of the term American exceptionalism is by none other than Joseph Stalin. And this was in the late 1920s when there was factional fighting within the American Communist Party and the Jay Lovestone faction argued that the United States is different from the rest the world. Whereas Marx's laws applied to the rest of the world, the working class in the United States was not revolutionary. Capitalism was not about to collapse in the United States. And so the kind of third period rhetoric that we see in the communist movement internationally, that was embraced by Joseph Stalin, was denied by the leaders of the American Communist Party and Stalin denounced them for embracing American exceptionalism.

And then with the advent of the Great Depression, Stalin was effectively proved right, at least within the contours of that debate at that point. But then the notion of American exceptionalism re-emerges after world war two. And then it's picked up by historians, sociologist, American studies scholars, and they're trying to figure out what makes the United States different. And what they point to is America's lack of a feudal tradition. It really gets back to the question. There's Sombart question, Werner Sombart question, why no socialism in the United States? Why when the Europeans have great labor parties, great socialist parties, great communist parties that wasn't the case in the United States.

So people started to look at America's traditions. One of the answers to that was provided in 1893 by Frederick Jackson Turner, a leading historian of the day. And Turner points to America's frontiers, it's called the frontier thesis. And Turner says, what makes the United States unique is that we have this frontier tradition and Turner argues that America's great democratic values were honed on the frontier at that pioneering spirit and made America different.

His concern was that according to the 1890 census, the frontier had closed. So the question was where the new frontier is going to come from. That's part of the thinking that guides the United States to become an empire and the more traditional sense with the Spanish American war and the repression of the Filipinos in 1898, 1899, and the next few years.

So the history is somewhat convoluted, as you can see, but after World War II, it gets tied in to the discussion of the cold war and to U S policy in the cold war. And it becomes an ideological element that undergirds the U.S. position in the cold war against the Soviet union. So it's tied to now free markets, it's tied to social mobility, it's tied to certain freedoms. And the way that that evolves is that, increasingly, the idea of American exceptionalism is the idea that the United States is different from all other countries. While all of the countries are motivated by a desire for power, by economic greed, by territorial aggrandizement, the United States is unique because the United States is motivated by the desire to spread freedom and democracy around the world, that the Americans are the only ones who are not motivated by what the rest of the world is motivated by. We only want to make the world better, and that makes the United States unique. It's in many ways.

I mean, it's a wonderful notion if it were true, the problem is much too often. It's just the opposite, that we're in bed with the worst elements, that we're supporting militaristic policies. Samuel Huntington, who in many ways was an advocate of American exceptionalism, did make the insightful comment, he said the West won the world not by the superiority of it's ideas or values or religion, but by the superiority of it organized violence, the application of organized violence. Westerners often forget that fact, non Westerners never do.

## **Columbus redux! - Let's Talk Native - Air Date 7-17-19**

**JOHN KANE - HOST, LET'S TALK NATIVE:** [00:49:16] It's ironic the debate that is raging on now about immigration. It's also ironic to listen to somebody like the President of United States refer to the four women in Congress who were taking a stand against, frankly, the rest of the Democratic Party, but also Trump, and saying that they must hate the United States. And if they hate it so much, they can go back to the crappy countries that they come from.

Now, all three of these women are American citizens, in fact, all four of them I mean, three of them were born in the United States, but that seems to get lost in all this stuff.

But the irony is, the reason there are so many White people here is because they hated the countries that they lived in. They left Europe, a Europe that was in shambles, that's why they left. They left because they had made a mess of Europe. Europe was disease infested. Europe was crime infested. Europe is where freedom didn't exist. So to hear somebody say, well, if you hate this country so much, leave it. That's what you did. You hated your country so much that you left it. You didn't try to fix the countries that you left. You came here because this was new land that you could screw up. That's the bottom line. This was a new place that you could, not only claim it, but you could rape the land, the people, the environment, all of the creation here, that's what they did.

And so then when you look at the immigration battle that rages are now, and these kids, these families that are trying to seek asylum in the United States, the very thing that Trump says to these four women, if you don't like it leave, well, that's what these people are doing. They don't like what their countries have become. And part of the reason they don't like that, what their countries have become is because of the appetite for drugs that the United States has. So they're trying to leave countries that have brutal dictators, oftentimes dictators that have been propped up and supported by the United States. So they know that if they come to this land, they're going to have a better opportunity, so that's what they're trying to do.

But it's ironic to listen to the President of United States, tell people, if you don't like it, leave, which is exactly what Europeans were doing for hundreds of years. And early on, including under a British rule, there was a much different view about White people coming from Europe than anybody else coming into the colonies, even before they were they were independent colonies.

And of course the United States, they had a White preference too. And the people who were persecuted the most were the people of color, Chinese, the Indigenous people here, people from South America, Black people. They were either enslaved or nearly enslaved, and it was always a preference.

Now, I'm not saying the Irishmen weren't persecuted or Italians weren't persecuted or Jews were persecuted, they were, but you know what they were able to do at some point, they were able to assert their Whiteness enough to say I'm White so I should enjoy some of that White privilege. So eventually, even the persecuted immigrants that would come from Europe, would gain a certain privilege that came with their Whiteness, but not Black people, not Brown people, not Asian people. They would continue to be persecuted.

And that's the legacy that begins with the first White man to see Brown people in this hemisphere.

## **Why The Right Is So Dishonest About American History - Cracked (Some More News) - Air Date 11-21-17**

**CODY JOHNSTON - HOST, SOME MORE NEWS:** [00:52:49] Here's some old news, the civil war was caused by slavery. And here's some news, the president, the chief of staff, press

secretary, and a large portion of the population. seem to think it wasn't. We as a nation are having a crisis of both fake news and fake history, relitigating the Civil War, defending Christopher Columbus, downplaying the genocide of Native Americans and taking of their lands, and it's bizarre. And Thanksgiving is coming up. So, we thought it would be a good opportunity to get into our country's history of war racism, genocide and [expletive deleted] football.

But first, we have to back up, because, in 2017, We need to relitigate all of documented history in order to discuss simple topics. For example, whenever a Columbus Day rolls around, many point out that Christopher Columbus was actually an idiot and dum-dum who didn't actually discover America or prove the earth was round, thought the planet was smaller than everyone else said it was, turned out to be wrong, then abused and enslaved the natives for the purposes of acquiring gold from their land. And those are just the facts. And that should be the end of it, you'd think. Okay?

Christopher Columbus was a savage man who didn't discover North America, didn't prove the earth was round, did enslave and brutalize the nice people he found. There are journal entries literally from him describing the natives being kind and bringing him things, having no knowledge of guns, so they would be easy to enslave. And then he went back to Spain to get more ships to load up with slaves, and then brutally forced others to mine for gold. On his face and in his skull, Christopher Columbus isn't it worth taking a whole day to celebrate, and that's it. We're done?

Apparently not, because every Columbus Day, the right tends to point out other general sort of half-truths about, generally, Native Americans or history in general, to dismiss the idea that [expletive deleted] Christopher Columbus in videos called, Thanksgiving: a Politically Incorrect Guide, which is a weird way to spell historically. Instead of talking about Christopher Columbus

of Columbus Day fame's actions in the 1490s, we hear things like, So, you think Native Americans were peaceful until Columbus showed up? Tell me again about scalping and cannibalism.

Okay, come with me on a world of the imagination. Use your, use your imager because, sorry, I thought we were talking about Christopher Columbus of Columbus Day fame and his actions around 1492, but okay, okay, okay, fine! Various Native Americans scalped their enemies from before 1492 to after 1492, and colonials offered bounties for scalps in the 1600's. But to be fair, at first, the bounties were for heads. In 1756, Pennsylvania passed the Scalp Act for scalps. Confederate guerillas scalped Union soldiers in the Civil War. Oh, right, the Civil War. We'll talk about that.

But anyway, some tribes participated in cannibalism of their fallen enemies, and other tribes thought it was a real gross no-no. But again, what does that have to do with Columbus Day? Don't know, but hey, aside from Native Americans being brutally violent, the most brutally violent of everybody from anywhere, they were also technologically regressive and didn't even use the wheel Happy#ColumbusDay.

Well, first of all, regressive means they were becoming less advanced, not that they weren't as advanced as others. So nice try, wordwise. But some of them did invent a wheel. They just didn't use them for hauling because they hadn't domesticated draft animals, yet. And also,



Europeans didn't invent the wheel; Sumerians did, and then the concept spread across the continents over the next thousands of years. There's this idea of Native American savagery and settler superiority that perhaps can be best summed up by a video from Ben Shapiro's website, The Daily Wire. The video has since been removed, but it depicted the Native Americans as all violent savages and cannibals until Christopher Columbus arrived and kindly introduced them to eating utensils, which they already had, taught them how to build things, taught them how to cultivate corn, which is the opposite of what happened.

So, we should celebrate Columbus Day because Native Americans contributed nothing. Like for example, the cultivation of corn, the industry of which made \$63 billion in 2014. Shapiro claimed the video is satire, which, no, unless you were making fun of what you actually think about Columbus Day, because it's just a slight exaggeration of what these arguments always are.

After removing the satire video, Ben clarified that Columbus Day is worth celebrating despite some awful wrongs. Western civilization's cultivation of the Americas is a historical good, which is literally unknowable. It's the civil 'facts don't care about your feelings' of Ayn Rand's any White person who brought the element of civilization had the right to take over this continent. It's the not explicitly a racist version of Richard Spencer's:

I didn't ever for a second consider that if they were able to stay in the countries where they were born and lived and weren't forcibly removed, that those continents might be in a better state, now?

I seriously doubt that. The video lists off all of the things White people did after Christopher Columbus discovered America, like written language, mathematics and philosophy and, broadly, books, despite the Native Americans' written languages and their almanacs, which were invented thousands of years before Europeans invented almanacs. Other post-Columbus contributions are medicine, even though Native Americans invented the syringe and had medicine and had anesthetics, which the West didn't have until the mid 18th century. They contributed — not scalping, which we've already covered — and football, which we'll cover. But also, Native Americans invented lacrosse, and they say horses as if there were horses in North America. There weren't. So, when all is said and done: a little in column A, a little in column Racist. Also, if we're really talking influence and innovation that contributed to the historical good, the American government was heavily based off of the Iroquois Confederacy. In 1988, the US Senate acknowledged the Confederation of the original 13 colonies into one republic was influenced by the Iroquois Confederacy as were many of the democratic principles, which were incorporated into the Constitution, itself.

So, instead of debunking the myth that settlers from the Mayflower gave the natives diseased blankets while ignoring the fact that colonial officers in the 1700's literally wrote about giving diseased blankets to natives for the desired effect of killing them, it would be so much easier to admit that Christopher Columbus [expletive deleted] sucked and that celebrating him is like the aliens in Independence Day arriving in a planet with lesser technology and some better technology and various factions with some uncivilized and brutal behavior giving 90% of us a deadly cold, partly by accident and then mostly on purpose, slaughtering most of the rest of us, and then celebrating goo-tentacled Mothership Day instead of Human Day to remember and pay respect to the victims and cultures and civilizations lost to their terrible atrocities.

Maybe it's just more respectful and historically and intellectually honest to just call Columbus Day Indigenous People's Day, to actually educate about our history. . .

How! Trigger warning

. . . and be honest about the gray areas. Then, maybe alt-right journalists with White House press passes like gateway pundits Lucy Wintrich or Petticoat Junction Tobey Maguire's cameo as Harry Potter in Twilight. Maybe he'll pause and think before tweeting pictures of a family giving the finger to Mount Rushmore while complaining about all these immigrants coming into our country, taking our stuff, and then insulting our history, only to hopefully at some point realize that, Oh, those are Native Americans flipping off Mount Rushmore, a Lakota mountain called Six Grandfathers renamed after a lawyer from New York and then carved with figures representing, among other things, the taking of native lands and depletion of the Native people. I'm not going to say this was racist, but it did have to do with the something of their skin. Can we get the President to weigh in on this?

**DONALD TRUMP:** [01:00:31] They don't look like Indians to me.

**CODY JOHNSTON - HOST, SOME MORE NEWS:** [01:00:33] Good quote from the President. And it took us way too long to arrive at Columbus sucks, and all of your arguments against that have nothing to do with him and are also pretty inaccurate and disingenuous.

So hey, Happy Disingenuous People's Day!

## Summary

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:00:48] We've just heard clips today, starting with the Native Opinion Podcast, listing five ideas to keep in mind each time the annual celebration of Christopher Columbus comes around. Vox did an explainer on why we started celebrating Columbus Day. Let's Talk Native told a bit of the history of Columbus through his own words. We heard Dr. Roger Ray from his latest Progressive Faith Sermon about how the myths we tell ourselves shape the society we become. The Katie Halper Show spoke with Jon Schwartz about the centrality of colonialism in the world we live in today. BackStory corrected the origin story of America as a "city on a hill." Loud & Clear explored the idea of American exceptionalism and the realities that that phrase tends to help hide.

All of that was available to everyone, but members also heard some bonus content that everyone else missed out on. We heard another clip from Let's Talk Native, explaining the irony of the idea that if a person doesn't like America, then they should just leave, it being a fact that America is full of white people of European descent for having done exactly that in their countries of origin. And finally, Some More News from Cracked explained why the right is so disingenuous about history rather than just accepting the facts and responding accordingly.

For non-members, those bonus clips are linked in the show notes and they're part of the transcript for today episodes, so you can still find them if you make the effort, but to hear that all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly into your podcast feed, sign up to support the show at [BestoftheLeft.com/Support](https://BestoftheLeft.com/Support) or request a financial hardship membership. Every request is granted, no questions asked.

And now we'll hear from you.

## In response to Craig from OH about the progressive myth - Dave from Olympia, WA

**VOICEMAILER: DAVE FROM OLYMPIA, WA:** [01:02:36] Hi, Jay, and hi Craig from Ohio, it's Dave from Olympia. Just listened to the Bernie Sanders episode and I loved Craig's thoughts about the collectivist idea, the myth, myth-building around the what he called the progressive myth of working together for all of us. And I have -- although there are myths around that, that's just the fact. That's just reality. And this has echoes of what Tim Wise had to say at the end of the episode, but that's just true. That's what makes us human, is working together.

I mean, from an evolutionary standpoint, we're terrible animals. We're slow. We have no, like, protection, even from the elements. We've got no hair. Our claws, are for crap. Our teeth aren't sharp. We figured out this walking upright thing, but that only gets you so far.

Our one thing, our one thing is being able to work together as a group to ensure survival of the species. We would be, you know, an evolutionary dead end, if it weren't for our ability to work together.

This delusion of the rugged individual pulling yourself up by your bootstraps isn't true. I mean, it's clearly not true. The rugged individuals surviving on their own without society, I mean, is dead. They just die. Those people don't survive without the society to support them.

So that's just the fact that the myth that holds up that delusion has a lot of cultural touchstones, you know, the idea of the self-made man, the rugged individual: like, though so you just say those words and they resonate with many Americans. They have meaning beyond meaning.

And so a myth that supports that fact, that progressive fact that we work together for the betterment of everyone, are things like the biblical story of Cain and Abel; you know, are you your brother's keeper? Yes. "Yes you are" is the point of that story. And the fact that we've forgotten the point of that story and replaced it with another myth, I guess just tells you that myths can be rewritten and rebuilt, and that we can reconstruct the myth that our country resonates with.

So, good thoughts! Enjoyed the conversation. Again, thank you, Craig. And thank you, Jay. Love you. Stay awesome.

## Conservative blindspot on climate - Craig from Ohio

**VOICEMAILER: CRAIG FROM OHIO:** [01:05:18] Hey Jay!, it's Craig from Ohio, and I thought I would call to follow up on my last call and on your pointing out that conservatives seem to have a greater focus on foreign affairs, foreign policy than, those of us on the left do. And I'm sure that's, in general, true I follow a wide array of sources on the left side of the spectrum and it is true, there's definitely a heavy influence on domestic affairs, domestic

politics. But there was one area that I thought really stood out that doesn't fit into that frame, and it has to do with, well, let me tell you, how I first thought about this and then I'll get to what it is I'm referring to.

I'm a good friend of mine is a Republican. I've been friends with him for a long time, before he was a Republican, but nowadays he's sort of my sounding board for what conservatives are thinking. And one area that he has a huge blind spot on is climate change. So whenever we have conversations about politics or whatever, I'll at some point say, well, what about this latest news in what's happening with the changing global climate, and he really is clueless about it. I mean, he hasn't heard about the latest study. He hasn't heard about the latest storm that's hit Asia or Africa or drought or the fires in Siberia, just clueless. And I'm sure it's in part because he doesn't, his news, his sources don't emphasize that. Well, someone like me who does follow climate news, pretty voraciously whenever I can hear anything about it, I often hear of these tragedies that are occurring all around the globe. So that's a kind of foreign affairs and foreign policy that informs my own outlook and I'm sure yours and a lot of your audience, and it makes me motivated to think of the world as one unified, global community that is facing this massive threat.

So, I just I wanted to get to that point, that climate change is the area of foreign policy, foreign affairs, that those of us on the left are focused on, and that there's a huge blind spot for people on the right, who just seem completely clueless about the actual state of the global habitat.

I think that also informs yours and Nate's discussion of myths and the myths that can form where we go from here. To me, there are two competing myths that are also going to be playing out in this world of climate threat. And I said the last time that the myth I prefer is the myths of progressivism, and I think the word that describes that even better is solidarity. And on the other side, we have the mythology of division, factionalism, racism, nationalism, xenophobia. Those are the two competing myths that I see that are playing out. I'm very concerned, very terrified that the progressive solidarity myth could lose to the far right wing fascist myth, and I think climate change is going to cause one of those two myths to eventually prevail.

So anyways, that's quite a bit, I will talk to you later.

## **Is 'kids in cages' really a conservative blindspot? - Larry from Minnesota**

**VOICEMAILER: LARRY FROM MINNESOTA:** [01:09:17] Hey, it's Larry in Minnesota. I didn't understand your Blindspot segment very well. When you said the first question about conservatives not understanding there are kids in cages, my thought was that they do understand and they're okay with it. So I'm not sure if that's a blindspot or not. Thanks for your show. Bye.

## Final comments on the blindspots from the right and left including the family separation policy, foreign policy and the climate emergency

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:09:44] Thanks for listening, everyone! And thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show. Thanks to the monosyllabic transcriptionist trio, Ben, Dan, and Ken for their volunteer work, helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets and activism segments. And thanks to all those who called into the voicemail line or wrote in their messages to be played as Voicedmails. If you'd like to leave a comment or question of your own to be played on the show, you can record a message at 202-999-3991. Or write me a message at [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com).

So let me respond to these voicemails in reverse order, starting with the last, from Larry, who was responding to our new "Check Your Blindspot" segment. And the first tiny correction I will make, which is sort of a pivotal one, is that I think he's responding to a comment Amanda, our contestant on the show, made. And I will refute that she said that conservatives don't understand kids being in cages. What she said was that conservatives like to ignore kids being in cages.

**AMANDA HOFFMAN - CONTESTANT, CHECK YOUR BLINDSPOT:** [01:10:57] This is definitely in the right's blindspot. They seem to like to ignore children being kept in cages.

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** [01:11:04] And now to explain more fully the premise of this game, which is a new segment, we're working out the bugs. Maybe we didn't explain it as well as we could. And maybe I'll explain it better in future instances.

But the premise of that game is that we're using the Ground News aggregator app. That's an advertiser for the show, and I'm talking about them now, but they're not paying me to talk about them now. So we use the Ground News aggregator app, which has a function called the Blindspot that actually displays, not metaphorical, not hypothetical, real world media comparison.

So the quiz with the Blindspot, a game show, is based on real world media sources actually talking about real news events. And the story that that question was part of was about Jeff Sessions and others in the administration being at the forefront of pushing the child separation policy regarding our immigration policy. And the literal fact was that right wing news organization were not covering that story. So that is, by definition, in their blindspot. That's why it's so important to clarify that it's not that they don't understand if they have heard about it. Then I agree with Larry. They heard vaguely long time ago that that was happening, but they maybe were convinced by the idea that, well, you know, it's, it's a deterrence idea, and so maybe that's what we should be doing. That may very well be the case for many people. But for that story in particular, a followup on that story, about the administration pushing for that specifically, when they later denied that they had. That story is being told in the sort of mainstream and left-leaning media and is not being covered in right wing media. That's why we say it's in their blindspot. It's not hypothetical. It's not

theoretical. It is literal. If you only read right wing news, you will not have seen that story because they didn't cover it.

And now on to Craig. I would say in response to Craig's thoughts on climate change, being in the blindspot of many conservatives, you are 100% on point.

That is actually maybe the number one issue that you can point to that really, really consistently falls in the blindspot of right-wing media outlets. They do not cover it. And so people who only follow right-wing media do not know anything about climate change. And I mean, you can say it's their fault for not expanding their media horizons, and I'd certainly agree with that. But if they think like, I'm following all these right wing news stories and news outlets. So. I should be getting a whole variety of stories, sort of a range of perspectives. And 'cause I would kind of make that argument with Best of the Left. I say like, look, I listen to dozens of different left-wing sites and we cover a whole variety of news stories and get all these different perspectives, all from the left. But obviously the left is going to have it to blind spots. Craig was referring, I think, to a conversation we were having just with the members about how one of the blindspots that the left has is foreign policy. We just don't talk about it that much. We really focus a lot more on domestic policy, social issues, human rights issues, things like healthcare and racial justice and all of those sorts of things. We really do focus more on that. And my argument is that, or my theory, is that as anti-imperialist leftists, we don't pay that much attention to international news because we don't see it as something that we want to take action on.

As anti-imperialists, we think that's their business. We don't want to get involved. Whereas the right-wing as pro-imperialist, I would argue, see international news as chess moves happening that America may want to get involved in. What's happening across the world that we may need to influence. What's happening that we may need to take action on to secure our interests around the world. If you're in an imperialist mindset, then the whole world becomes your domestic policy domain. The whole world is relevant to the United States because we need to have our fingers in everyone else's pies. If you're on the left and you just don't think that, we tend to not follow that international news. But the reason why we follow climate news, not because it's international and we therefore, in this one instance have an interest in international stories because they're international; we have an interest in climate change because they align with our social justice perspective. And sort of ironically, our social justice perspective and focus is why we focus so much domestically. It's the refutation to that old idea that the ridiculous counter-argument that that'll come from the right, saying that people in America, if you're a woman or gay, that you shouldn't be complaining because you at least live in America. I mean, we may be discriminating against you, but at least we're not stoning you to death in our public squares. Right? That's sort of their example about why people who are oppressed in America should shut up because you're not as oppressed as people in other countries might be. And the response to that is, yeah, well, we're going to focus on our domestic policy and trying to perfect our social justice initiatives in our country, because this is where we have the most influence. We may not have the influence necessary to prevent public stonings across the world, but we do have the influence in our country, to relieve oppressed people from the bias and discrimination that they experience in our country, even if it's less of an oppression than elsewhere.

And so it's our social justice perspective and focus that makes us care about climate change. And because climate change is international, we then naturally gravitate to climate change

stories that are international and we'll follow stories about how other countries are being impacted by climate change, even though we would completely ignore political stories happening across the world: regime changes, the domestic policies happening across the world. But the left just doesn't see as our realm to care about or be involved with -- maybe to care about, I mean, I guess if a policy is happening somewhere around the world and there's a human rights violation, that is exactly the kind of story the left will pay attention to.

I mean, if you've heard anything about China in the last couple of years, it's probably been about the Uighurs. Am I right? Either that or the protests in Hong Kong. Once again, the stories that align with a social justice narrative are exactly the kinds of stories that the left will pay attention to.

Whereas the right may pay more attention to the sort of geopolitical chess game that's happening, and moves that China is making to strike international trade deals with Europe, or things that China is doing that. Americans would generally see as bad that the right wing would want to highlight in order to demonize China. I mean, maybe justifiably in many cases, but to highlight the negatives about China, to rile up anti-Chinese sentiment in the US. That is exactly what is going to happen in right-wing media and not at all happen or very little will happen in left-wing media. But when it intersects with the things, we really do care about -- social justice and whatnot -- then that's when we get those international stories.

So nothing Craig said was wrong. I certainly wasn't correcting or rebutting. Just sort of expanding on that idea of why climate change would be one of the few international stories that the left picks up on. As for why the right wing doesn't pay attention to climate change, I think that's pretty obvious.

As always keep the comments coming in at either (202) 999-3991, or by emailing me at [jay@BestoftheLeft.com](mailto:jay@BestoftheLeft.com).

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