



**Congressional  
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

---

# Columbus Day: Fact Sheet

**Audrey Celeste Crane-Hirsch**

Reference Librarian

October 6, 2015

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

R44218

## Introduction

Columbus Day is a federal holiday commemorating Christopher Columbus's historic voyage landing in the Americas on October 12, 1492. It has also become a time to honor Italian American heritage.

This guide is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Columbus Day celebrations. It contains biographical information on Christopher Columbus and background on the holiday. It provides links to sample speeches marking the observance of Columbus Day from the *Congressional Record* and to official proclamations issued by the White House. It also contains links to selected historical resources on Columbus Day and the Italian American experience.

## History and Legislation

Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer, born in Genoa. With funding from the Spanish crown, he led a three-ship expedition that set out from Palos, Spain, on August 3, 1492. Ten weeks later, on October 12, 1492, the expedition sighted land. The next day, Columbus and his crew set foot on an island in the Bahamas.

Three hundred years later, the United States recorded its first unofficial Columbus Day celebration on October 12, 1792, in New York City. The Tammany Society, also known as the Columbian Order, organized the celebration, which included the unveiling of a 14-foot obelisk dedicated to Columbus and his achievements.”

On October 12, 1892, the United States celebrated its first official Columbus Day holiday, 100 years later. That year, President Benjamin Harrison issued a proclamation describing Columbus as “the pioneer of progress and enlightenment, recommending to the people the observance in all their localities of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of America.” The following year, the Chicago’s World’s Fair, also known as the World’s Columbian Exposition, opened in the summer of 1893 to celebrate Columbus’s discovery of the New World 400 years earlier.

On April 30, 1934, Congress requested the President to proclaim “October 12 of each year as Columbus Day, inviting the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches, or other suitable places, with appropriate ceremonies expressive of the public sentiment befitting the anniversary of the discovery of America.” H.J. Res. 10, 73d Cong., 48 Stat. 657.

In 1968, Congress established Monday observances for several federal holidays and prescribed “Columbus Day, the second Monday in October” as a legal public holiday. P.L. 90-363, 82 Stat. 250.

## CRS Report

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

## Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Unlike some federal holidays in which it is common for Members of Congress to make floor statements or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record*, Columbus Day has not received much floor attention in recent years. Here are examples of a few older floor statements:

Delegate Gregorio Sablan, “Supporting,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 155 (October 13, 2009), p. H11191

Senator Bill Frist, “Statement in Honor of Columbus Day,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 150 (October 11, 2004), p. S11333

Representative David Bonior, “Statement in Honor of Columbus Day and Italian American Heritage Month,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 147 (October 11, 2001), p. E1854

## Presidential Proclamations

Some recent proclamations commemorating Columbus Day from the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* include the following:

Columbus Day, 2014 Presidential Proclamation—President Barack Obama, October 10, 2014

Columbus Day, 2013 Presidential Proclamation—President Barack Obama, October 11, 2013

Columbus Day, 2012 Presidential Proclamation—President Barack Obama, October 5, 2012

Columbus Day, 2011 Presidential Proclamation—President Barack Obama, October 7, 2011

Columbus Day, 2010 Presidential Proclamation—President Barack Obama, October 8, 2010

Earlier presidential proclamations are available through the Federal Digital System (FDsys) on the Government Publishing Office website.

## Historical Resources

The following historical resources explore Columbus Day and the Italian American experience.

Today in History: October 12, Library of Congress American Memory

Italian Immigration, Library of Congress: history of Italian American immigration and culture beginning with the arrival of Christopher Columbus

The Italian Americans (PBS): series that explores the Italian American experience; several clips are freely available on the site

Milestones of the American Experience, National Italian American Foundation

## Author Contact Information

Audrey Celeste Crane-Hirsch  
Reference Librarian  
acranehirsch@crs.loc.gov, 7-8826