

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OCTOBER 11, 1976

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT A
WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY
HONORING CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

UNION STATION

1:42 P.M. EDT

Bonnie, Reverend Clergy, Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Minister, Senator Domenici, Governor Lee, Mr. Mayor, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Almost 500 years ago, a bold Italian mariner dared to challenge the unknown. Each October, we set aside a day to honor his memory. But Columbus Day, in our Bicentennial Year, reminds us that the courage of 1776 was preceded by the courage of 1492.

Much has changed in the five centuries since Columbus ventured into the Atlantic Ocean in command of three small ships, flying the flag of Spain. In an age of computers, laser beams and space probes of Mars, it is hard for us to appreciate the awesome dangers Columbus faced -- a wide and treacherous ocean, fickle winds, and unreliable equipment.

Columbus knew full well that his daring adventure could easily end in total disaster. Yet, in spite of the enormous risk, he went forward, not just once, but four times. In doing so, he not only discovered a new world, but blazed a nautical trail for generations of Europeans to follow.

Today, the thread of many cultures and many nations are woven into the American fabric, which reminds me of a story many times told to me by a Sunday School teacher in my early youth. He used to talk about the beauty of Joseph's coat -- the many colors -- the beauty of Joseph's coat and its many colors. I believe that the beauty and strength of America is its diversity, just like the beauty of Joseph's coat is its beauty.

I salute the Italian-American Bicentennial Commission, and the Knights of Columbus of the metropolitan area for cosponsoring this wonderful occasion on this gorgeous day. Columbus Day is not just a celebration for Americans of Italian or Hispanic heritage, but a truly national tribute by all Americans.

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Over the years, millions of immigrants have come to America from every corner of the globe. Many millions have been sons and daughters of Italy following the course of Columbus. Like Columbus, they crossed an ocean to pursue a dream. Like Columbus, they took great risks. Their greatest reward was the fine careers of their children and grandchildren who have risen to the highest levels of achievement and respect in this great country.

Today, the problems we face in building a better world can be just as difficult as the ones Columbus overcame in finding a new one. The people of the old world still look to the new world as the champion of freedom, the champion of human rights. America has been their hope and their health, and we will never let them down.

Our goal of peace with freedom requires every bit as much courage, faith and endurance, and as much toil, for Americans today as Columbus demanded of his wonderful crew.

We can build a better world. We can do it by working to preserve our neighborhoods and the influence of the family on American life. We can do it by ensuring a decent education and equal opportunity for every American. We can do it by working to give our children the very best legacy -- continued peace with freedom throughout the world.

Today, we honor the bravery, the imagination, the initiative of Christopher Columbus by laying the wreath. We can honor him every day of the year by being just as brave, just as imaginative and showing as much initiative in facing the challenges before us.

We seek not a new trade route or a new continent, but a new world of freedom, equality and lasting peace among nations. Over the years, America has made great strides toward that goal. As Columbus, himself, might have thought, we have come too far to turn back now. The course has been set.

Our mission to achieve the American dream here at home, but also worldwide, will be achieved.

Thank you very much.

END

(AT 1:48 P.M. EDT)