

Lewiston has its paid holidays backwards

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

The city of Lewiston closed its doors Monday to honor Christopher Columbus.

But the city keeps them open during Martin Luther King Day.

There's something wrong with those priorities.

Anytime, you have to go out of your way to share the Columbus Day tradition.

Although it's a federal holiday, only 23 states - Idaho, Montana and Utah among them - observe it. The rest - Nevada, Washington and Wyoming are in this group - do not.

So you're left with about 86 percent of American workers who dutifully show up at their jobs.

By contrast, more than a third of Americans celebrate Martin Luther King Day and Presidents Day.

What's the purpose of Columbus Day, anyway?

If it's to recognize the discovery of America, others beat Columbus to it - not the least of whom were the indigenous people who were here to greet him.

Columbus came to the New World for gold and souls, and left behind slavery and genocide.

Hence, Seattle and Minneapolis have transformed Columbus Day into Indigenous People's Day. South Dakota calls it Native American Day. In Hawaii, it's Discoverers' Day, in honor of Polynesian explorers.

Not only does Lewiston continue to honor a legacy of conquest and bloodshed, it turns its back to King's example.

Before he was gunned down in 1968 at age 39, the "apostle of non-violence" had become the eloquent voice of a movement that redeemed the promise of the Declaration of Independence and Appomattox.

He helped proclaim an end to segregation and Jim Crow and ushered in the emergence of national civil rights and voting rights laws.

Two decades after his death, Congress voted to observe the King holiday.

For years, Idaho refused to go along - even as it was acquiring an undeserved reputation as the home of the Aryan Nations.

By the early 1990s, Idaho's conservative Legislature only reluctantly voted to enact the King holiday - and just barely managed to avoid being the last of the states to take that step.

Twenty-three years later, Lewiston still drags its feet. The city offers its workers any number of reasons to take a day off.

On top of the six traditional holidays 90 percent of us observe, there are Presidents Day, Veterans Day, "Black Friday" (the day after Thanksgiving), Christmas Eve and a floater - any day of the employee's choosing, otherwise known as "Get Your Elk Day."

And Columbus Day.

But not the third Monday in January.

As far as anyone can tell, Caldwell in conservative Canyon County and Lewiston are Idaho's outliers in ignoring King Day.

Nobody is saying Lewiston's city employees need another holiday. They get 12 days now - whereas most of us have to settle for eight or even six.

But if Lewiston is going to give its workers something to celebrate, shouldn't it be the story of an American who struggled to expand the circle of liberty - rather than the perpetrator of enslavement?

Let them come to work the second Monday in October. If they want to gripe about the federal employers and bankers who are sleeping in, they'll have plenty of company. - M.T.