



Italian
Sons and Daughters
of America

We are Italian America.

October 28, 2016

Dear Councilman Buscaino:

I am writing on behalf of the Order Italian Sons and Daughters of America, one of the Italian American community's largest national fraternal associations, to express our membership's feelings concerning your consideration of a motion to create Indigenous Peoples Day in the City of Los Angeles, and its possible impact on the celebration of Columbus Day.

The celebration of Columbus Day in America began as early as 1866, in New York City, and shortly thereafter in San Francisco, when Italian immigrants began to publically display their pride in their heritage, in part to assert a sense of dignity and self-esteem, during a time when they were subjected to uncompromising bias and prejudice. As the Italian American population increased, Columbus Day festivities grew significantly, with a myriad of parades and events being held throughout the country, which continue to this day.

Columbus Day allows Italian Americans to collectively celebrate their culture, heritage and traditions by acknowledging the sacrifices, accomplishments and contributions that their parents, grandparents and great grandparents have made to our country. Columbus Day has aptly been characterized as Italian American heritage day.

In recent years efforts have intensified by a portion of the Native American community to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. These efforts have led to a great deal of tension and animosity among those promoting the change and the Italian American community, a situation that is not healthy for either community, nor for our country as a whole.

In an effort to address this issue in an unemotional manner, I respectfully present the following thoughts for your consideration.

As a premise to this issue, it should be clearly noted that Columbus Day is not a day set aside to honor an individual, but rather it is a day set aside to honor and recognize a monumental historic event that began the process of over 500 years of worldwide immigration to America by people seeking a better life for their families. In reality, it is not only a day for Italian Americans, but for all people of every race and ethnicity, to collectively celebrate the contributions each group has made to our country.

The primary reasons advocated for the elimination of Columbus Day, relate to certain actions on the part of Columbus which are regarded as offensive by today's standards. This calls into question the entire thought process of attempting to judge a historical figure by measuring his or her actions based upon contemporary values and standards. This is a standard that few, if any, historical figures can meet. Should this discussion next proceed to the elimination of President's Day because Washington and Jefferson were slave owners? Conflicts



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in values from one point in history to another, should not be a basis to attempt to either ignore or rewrite historical events.

Italian Americans most certainly support the designation of a day to honor the contributions Native Americans have made to our country. To establish Indigenous Peoples Day is a positive and constructive gesture of recognition that is justly warranted. To do so at the expense of the Italian American community, by eliminating Columbus Day, is a negative, confrontational gesture which breeds division and ill will.

California, and Los Angeles in particular, have developed a national reputation for advocating progressive approaches to resolving problems. For Los Angeles to simply follow the misguided efforts of Seattle and other cities, belies that reputation.

Los Angeles can provide some national leadership with respect to this issue by maintaining Columbus Day on the day it is designated as a national holiday, and establishing a separate day to honor Native Americans. As an example, the Friday following Thanksgiving would appear to be an appropriate day to consider for the designation of Indigenous Peoples Day.

In conclusion, all we ask is that those who advocate on behalf of Native Americans, do not do so in a manner which undermines the celebration of Italian American heritage in our country. The elimination of Columbus Day in Los Angeles would clearly do so.

I thank you for your attention and consideration relating to this very sensitive issue.

Very truly yours,

Basil M. Russo

National President