

DIVERSITY

Give Columbus Day back to Italian Americans

For many Americans, the cultural contributions of Italians consist of great food, music and an endless supply of Mafia movies. But Italians and Italian Americans are much more than that.



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Columnist

As a Black man, I have great affection and respect for the Italian people. Blacks share genetic ancestry with southern Italians. In 711 A.D., the Moors from northern Africa conquered southern Italy and Sicily, altering the region's cultural landscape and racial makeup forever. Blacks and Italians are virtually distant cousins.

My feelings of kinship with Italians goes beyond our common ancestors. It's because of the struggles Italians faced in America, and the lengths they went to in order to succeed and realize their own version of the American dream. Many Italians fled feudal systems and fascism in the early and mid 20th century in search of a better life

for their families. The wave of Italian immigrants to the United States peaked in the early 20th century. In America, they were met with lynchings, prejudice and segregation, the confinement to ghettos in cities like New York and Boston and the realization that they were not considered white.

During World War II, many Italian Americans were sent to internment camps, along with Japanese citizens, and many more were considered "enemy aliens" and subject to curfews, FBI surveillance and property confiscation. Italian Americans faced severe discrimination, making it impossible for them to mix with Irish or other white Americans. The Italians, rather than try to integrate with a society that openly hated them, set about creating their own institutions, from churches like St. Leonard's to shops, restaurants, grocery stores, apparel manufacturers



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SYMBOL OF PRIDE: The statue of Christopher Columbus at Christopher Columbus Park, seen here in 2015, was decapitated and vandalized.

and construction companies. In addition, they policed their own neighborhoods and made family the foundation of society.

Later, they entered politics and elected Italians like Alfred E. Vellucci as mayor of Cambridge and Tom Menino as mayor of

Boston. The Italians liberated themselves from the control of those who wanted to oppress them by becoming self-sufficient. Those courageous immigrants sacrificed so much so that future generations could enjoy life without restriction in the

land of unlimited potential.

Throughout their hardships, Italians drew strength from their Catholic beliefs and family. However, they were also inspired by the famous Italian explorer Christopher Columbus. To the point that they successfully lobbied to get Columbus Day recognized as a national holiday in 1937. Italians in Boston's North End pooled their resources to build a Columbus statue with their ancestors' names etched on the pedestal on which the statue stood to honor them.

Sadly, cancel culture has made Columbus Day one of its main targets. In 2021, the non-elected acting Mayor of Boston, Kim Janey, altered Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day in order to curry favor among the woke mob for a mayoral election she lost. Even though November is Native American Heritage Month and Nov. 25 is Native American Heritage Day, African Americans celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day and

Juneteenth, the Irish celebrate St. Patrick's Day, and Americans of all stripes celebrate July 4th.

Boston's Italians got one day — now taken away — and their Columbus statue was vandalized and decapitated. How is that equity and diversity? Mayor Michelle Wu should reverse course on Janey's move, which would help restore her connection with the North End. However, that seems unlikely.

Howard Zinn's hyperbolic historical narratives are a major source of the recent uptick in hostility toward Christopher Columbus. Painting an impoverished explorer as a harbinger of disease, genocide and slavery in the New World is selective nonsense.

Italian Americans have a right to celebrate Columbus Day.

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