

I have always had a strong sense of my Italian identity thanks to my mother; a poor immigrant from Italy who came to America to live the American dream, and from my father a second generation Italian American fascinated by Italian culture and the Italian American story. I as many Italian Americans have always considered ourselves first and foremost patriotic Americans who love their country, and second as Italians who love their cultural traditions. Through out my education in California; I never once learned about the history of my people in America, nor about their vast contributions to American Society or their important contributions in the State of California. At school I never was told that I could be anything but white, and was told that diversity in education is inherently non-white. I never felt empowered in my education, while others have. I have never felt important to be who I am, in fact I have felt quite the opposite throughout my education which transcended into society.

*"Why do we have to learn about them, when they don't have to learn about us?"*

*"Why do we have to respect them, when they don't have to respect us?"*

That quote is from an Italian American first grader. A sentiment I as well felt while learning heavily about Native American history, and never about my own.

In elementary school, when I would proudly proclaim that I was 100% Italian or that my father and mother ran an Italian Cultural Society here in Sacramento. I would have to say that 99% of the time the response from parents, kids, and teachers alike were: "Oh, so your family is in the Mafia!" "Your father is a Mob boss!". As a child I could never live down the stereotypes of my people, and because of these stereotypes and bad representations of our people, seemingly all of the contributions made by the Italian immigrants and their families have been washed away.

A false history has been taught when the suffering and contributions of other groups are taught and recognized in education and society, and where mine are deemed unimportant and sent to the back of the bus. Through this representation of history, most people are naïve to the facts and have therefore not been fully educated. It is an injustice to every person and disadvantages those with Italian heritage. Many of the claims made about Columbus are greatly exaggerated and false.

There was one saving grace for me as a child growing up in Sacramento, there was one time during the year where I could raise my hand in class and have my voice be heard. There was one day a year where I felt proud of my heritage. One day a year where I felt proud to be an Italian American. That day was Columbus Day, the one time a year I could explain to people the importance of being a nation of immigrants and that the very first immigrant who made this all possible was one of my own people. The one time where I could ask if any one knew who America was named after. Only once; in my K-12 education did someone in the class room actually know America was named after an Italian, but forgot the name was Amerigo Vespucci; that was my 10th grade American history teacher. Great!

Columbus day has always been to the Italian American community a day where we could celebrate being Italian and be proud of the vast contributions our people have made to this wonderful country. From being the largest ethnic group to fight in WWII; even invading our home land and parents home land to fight for America and the values of this country, to helping build the agricultural, wine, banking, and fishing industries here in California.

You must recognize the impact of your decisions made here in the State Capital; where the state government conducts its business, and where California's Congressmen, Senators, and Governor create legislation and law. If they choose to recognize another group on Columbus Day instead of Italians, because you the Sacramento City Council chooses to recognize another history and people on the only day where my people get any representation. Columbus day and Italian contributions will inevitably be forgotten by the rest of California.

If the solidarity of Columbus Day is lost here, so will be my ability to celebrate being Italian American. Lost will be my voice, my children's voices, and grandchildren's voices. Lost will be my one day a year to feel pride and express the validity of having that pride. Lost will be my freedom of expression in my home town and home state.

If this counsel chooses to recognize Indigenous Peoples day on Columbus Day; for any purpose or the ones voiced by the Native American community; they choose to vilify yet another Italian in America. They choose to associate my day of celebration and pride instead with yet another demonization of my people in American history. This counsel will tell all Italian Americans in this community that their celebration on Columbus day will be associated with Celebrating a villain; guilt by association, yet again marginalizing my people and their contributions.

I urge the City Council to cease action and deliberation to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day on Columbus Day. I urge the City Council to instead facilitate and promote a greater understanding of the Italian American experience and history in the public schools and in city activities.

Sincerely,

Marco Giacomo Cerruti