

PROTECTING OUR HERITAGE



Recent attempts by the Native Americans in California during the past year to eliminate Columbus Day have resulted in Columbus Day being replaced in San Francisco and Los Angeles with Indigenous Peoples Day. This despite the resistance of the Italian-American communities in those cities. In Sacramento, a similar attempt by native Americans was stopped after the Italian community mobilized in opposition. **After negotiations with the Sacramento City Council and Native Americans, the City declared the second Monday in October (Columbus day observed) as Italian-American Day.** Sacramento does not recognize Columbus Day but Italian-Americans protected the date for their own traditional celebrations.

Celebrations of Columbus Day are part of the national heritage of Italian-Americans. It is both a symbol of our national identity and unity as Italian-Americans. Columbus has long been a symbol of America and Italian-Americans worked hard to gain recognition of Columbus Day as a holiday and adopted it as their own. Now those gains by earlier generations of Italian-Americans are threatened. The holiday was actually created as an American holiday to unify Americans with a patriotic holiday celebrating America. It is an American holiday...if Americans keep it.

The movement to discredit and tear down Columbus is part of a larger campaign by forces attempting to chip away at the unity of America. Indigenous Peoples day is a day of protest against the white European settlement of lands occupied by Indigenous peoples around the world. Hardly a day most Americans can celebrate. Native Americans, seeking to replace Columbus Day with their own Day are on a collision course with Italian-Americans across the nation where the battle is being waged. And most Americans are unaware of the hostile forces seeking to take The Great Navigator down.

The recent attack on the Statue of Columbus in the California State Capitol Rotunda illustrates the unappeasable ire of the forces arrayed against Columbus the man, Columbus Day the symbol and against Italian-Americans who stand in the way. In San Jose, CA, the Columbus statue was removed against the will of the Italian community. There are 1.5 million Italian-Americans in California, 18 million nationwide.

Recently, California Casino Native American tribes sought legislation at the State level to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day, a coordinated statewide campaign by the organized Italian-American community along with the support of Italian-American legislators blocked the attempt after a bitter battle. So, for now, Columbus Day remains a California state holiday as well as a Federal holiday and it is celebrated on the Second Monday in October across the land, just not where native Americans have convinced politicians to replace it with their own Day of Protest.

Italian-Americans were not ready for this struggle with native Americans and their allies. Italian-Americans have many organizations across the country wherever Italian Americans settled, but they are not designed to take on the organized campaign against them. Fortunately, Italian-Americans have able leaders and have risen to the occasion in many communities to stand up for themselves and in the process, standing up for other Americans.

This bruising ethnic conflict is another painful episode in the Italian-American experience and will likely continue until Italian-Americans are able to organize effectively and convince political leaders to respect them as a people or until other Americans join us to protect their heritage. At least we are finally waking up to what is at stake; our heritage and identity as a people. And what we have learned is that where we have strong Italian-American organizations we are able to take a stand and prevail. Good reason for every Italian-American to support our Italian organizations in their defense of Italian America. **You can help keep our Italian American heritage alive and support the Italian American community by Joining or Making a Donation to The Italian Cultural Society. Use the form below to make a donation.**

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