

## **Committee to Preserve Wellesley's Italian American Heritage**

**Here are three, good fact-based reasons why you should vote NO on Question #1:**

### **REASON #1: Columbus Day is a symbol of Italian American Pride.**

Columbus Day honors and celebrates Italian American heritage and recognizes the struggles our immigrant ancestors faced with extreme racism in their journey for acceptance as Americans. Columbus Day to Italian Americans is like St. Patrick's Day is to Irish Americans. It's cultural, and it's personal.

The roots of Columbus Day go back to the 1891 lynching of 11 innocent Italian men by an angry mob in New Orleans - the largest known mass lynching in the United States. The first national observance of Columbus Day was in 1892 as a form of national atonement for this racist tragedy. After African Americans, Italian Americans were the next largest group to be lynched in the United States.

Columbus Day was established as a civil holiday by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1937. In 1968 - thanks to lobbying efforts by Italian Americans, Columbus Day became a federal holiday for all Americans to observe. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush established the month of October as National Italian American Heritage Month to coincide with the Columbus Day holiday on the second Monday in October.

**Columbus Day has always been about celebrating Italian American heritage, so we find Italian American Heritage Day to be an acceptable name for the second Monday in October. We support a change in name, but not a change in day. [Watch our presentation to the Annual Town Meeting on June 23, 2020 in the Learn More section of this website.](#)**

### **REASON #2: Indigenous Peoples are honored in the month of November in the United States.**

In 2009, President Barack Obama permanently established the Friday after Thanksgiving as National Native American Heritage Day, a civil holiday, to coincide with National Native American Month in November, established by President George H.W. Bush in 1990. Also, in 1994, the United Nations established August 9th as International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. There are many opportunities to honor Indigenous Peoples.

We support honoring our Indigenous brothers and sisters, but not at the expense of taking away a holiday from Wellesley's large Italian American community. It is divisive to elevate one group at the expense of another.

**We favor honoring our Indigenous People in the month of November. [Read "Plenty of holiday days to go around" in the Learn More section of this website.](#)**

### **REASON #3: Christopher Columbus was not a murderer, nor did he initiate the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Columbus Day is NOT a racist holiday.**

The revisionist opinion that Christopher Columbus was a racist, murderer, and enslaver was put forth in 1980 by Howard Zinn, a self-identified Marxist, and this is the view that is being taught in our schools. This view is untrue, and it is based on faulty research and taking quotes out of context.

Atrocities against the native people of Hispaniola were committed by the Spaniards Francisco Roldan and Nicolas de Ovando. Columbus, a brilliant navigator, was an ineffectual governor on Hispaniola. His friendly relations with the natives and his mild approach toward governance did not produce the desired gold for Spain. Nor was he able to control the actions of the greedy men who had come to the New World solely to enrich themselves. Columbus was removed from the governor's post based on false charges made against him to Francisco de Bobadilla. He was replaced by men who would use cruel and despicable measures against the natives.

In his *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552), Bartolomé de las Casas incorrectly lumped in Columbus with Roldan, Ovando, and Bobadilla when he described the atrocities committed against the natives on Hispaniola. De las Casas, a Hispaniola slave-owner and later a Catholic priest, did not overlap with Columbus in the New World, nor did he know him. There was a 33-year age difference between the two men. It should be noted that de las Casas - as a self-interested slaveholder - had lobbied for the importation of slaves from Africa, viewing Africans to be stronger than the natives of Hispaniola.

Columbus was absolved by the Spanish Crown of the false charges made against him in Bobadilla's report. He continued his explorations in the New World on behalf of the Spanish Crown. He should be remembered and honored for his courageous achievements in navigation, which opened the New World to European immigration, the eventual founding of the United States, and all of us being here today.

For accurate, fact-based information about Columbus, we recommend reading Stanford University Professor Carol Delaney's *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (2011) and *Debunking Howard Zinn* (2019) by Dr. Mary Grabar. Both books are well-researched scholarship based on historical facts and primary sources. The late Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980) is a flawed and inaccurate polemic. Don't rely on Zinn's book for the truth about Christopher Columbus or any aspect of American history, for that matter.

**Read these two pieces from the Learn More section of our website: [\(a\) Letter from Professor Carol Delaney to the Wellesley Select Board](#) and [\(b\) Open letter to the Wellesley community from historian and author Stephen Puleo](#).**