

## Columbus statue comments

Jeanne D'Angelo <[REDACTED]>

Thu 7/23/2020 11:03 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Below is the amended testimony I presented to the Arts Commission regarding the Columbus statue, which I would also like to present to the Historical commission. Thank you for taking comment and public consideration on this issue:

It's important to me to give comment in support of removing this statue as someone whose family history has its roots in the Philadelphian Italian American community. I am very aware that the loudest voices in support of the statue and what it represents come from this community and for this reason I feel it's imperative to counter the way people have weaponized this identity.

First I want to recognize the ongoing work of Indigenous people to make America reckon with the violence of our colonial history and present, which includes an honest appraisal of figures like Columbus. I also want to recognize the demands of the Black Philly Radical Collective which I encourage everyone to read in full, and which includes a demand to remove all existing monuments to state violence against Black, Indigenous and Brown people.

This statue glorifies someone who took part in genocide, who enslaved human beings, and ultimately it is meant to uphold a certain mythology about the goodness of the American colonial project. People will argue that it is somehow educational, but what it has been historically and presently is a tool of miseducation because it is a symbol of veneration by design and tied to a very specific project of national historical whitewashing. The results of this miseducation are seen every day in how our country refuses to reckon with the violence we have committed against people who were enslaved and colonized as well as their descendants historically, presently and on a systematic level.

It is also seen in the violence of white people defending this statue for days in a drunken mob in my neighborhood in a way that made their neighbors feel unsafe and unwelcome with the ongoing complicity of local police. It is also seen in the statements of complete historical mistruth that two city employees, Robert Petrone (whose talking points I suspect many speakers today were reciting), and Councilman Mark Squilla have made publicly, in which they attempted to cast Columbus as the victim of a smear campaign and also laughably and offensively as the "first civil rights hero". This is counter to every historical consensus on who Columbus was and what he did, as well as how he was received even in his own time. Many speakers in support of this statue and Columbus as a person have invested much time and energy into projects of historical revisionism that distort the historical record beyond belief in a way that undermines the very purpose of engaging critically with history for the purpose of understanding the present.

I want to say that I recognize my community, as much as it is vocal and public, has been very active in keeping this harmful narrative alive, and that this has been to the detriment of our neighbors and our collective ability to understand and contextualize our own history. We have an opportunity to listen and build community with the people we share this city with and it's imperative we do so now and begin to make amends for the harm done. We can find a new way to celebrate identity that is rooted in solidarity with others especially those facing oppression. I also encourage everyone to link the symbolic to the material and to keep being active in engaging with and pushing back against racist institutions and systems in Philadelphia.

To people concerned about the value of this statue as simply a piece of art on display, I want to say as an artist and someone with some perspective on art history, that only a miniscule fraction of the art made by human hands is on display anywhere, much less in a public park for decades. There is no reason to be particularly precious about this piece which will now potentially share space in storage with millions upon millions of works more engaging and culturally unique and important than itself. Reading a bit about the statue's history, creation, sculptor and context I feel very certain that it is not artistically significant in any way that legitimizes the pain it causes, or the violence its supporters bring to my neighborhood.

Please remove this statue from public view and please be open to real community input, especially from those harmed, about any public art projects going forward in this space.

Thank you,  
Jeanne D'Angelo

## Urgent: Public Testimony from Italian Americans re: Columbus

samantha pinto <[REDACTED]>

Thu 7/23/2020 4:55 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

Cc: [REDACTED]

📎 1 attachments (12 KB)

Open Letter\_Op Ed.docx;

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To whom it may concern,

I wish to submit the following Open Letter from Philly Italian Americans and our allies supporting the removal of the Columbus Statue from Marconi Plaza, as well as the removal of all monuments to state violence. Over 100 individuals have endorsed this letter, and the individuals listed consented to having their names listed publicly. We hope to enter this into the public record.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with further questions. Thank you for your time and for the work that you do.

Best regards,

--

Samantha Pinto

[REDACTED]  
B.A. Italian Studies, [REDACTED]

*"Overcoming our sense of powerlessness is indispensable for creative work." -- Silvia Federici*

July 23, 2020

## Open Letter From Philadelphia Italians and Allies In Support of Removing the Columbus Statue

Written Samantha Pinto and Jeanne D'Angelo, in collaboration with the forthcoming Philly Radical Italian Network.

Dear Philadelphia Historical Commission,

For too long, mainstream Italian-American organizations have claimed to speak for everyone in our community, framing critiques of figures like Columbus as attacks on all Italian-Americans. These organizations ignore those who work in solidarity with Black liberation and Indigenous self-determination movements as well as the racial and ideological diversity of the people who make up the Italian diaspora. Many of us support the removal of all public monuments devoted to symbols of white supremacy and violence, like Christopher Columbus and Frank Rizzo. These conversations have been reignited by the recent protests in Philadelphia in response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as well as nation-wide calls for the removal of Confederate statues. The response to the protests and the potential removal of racist monuments among some Philadelphians from our extended *famiglia* has been disturbing.

In the initial days following the protests, groups of armed white vigilantes began “protecting” neighborhoods and businesses throughout the city. [The Italian Market chose to hire private security to protect the Rizzo mural on 9th Street](#). On June 14th, a social media rumor spread that protestors were plotting to remove the Columbus Statue at Marconi Plaza. A group of white vigilantes-- majoritively but not exclusively Italian-- descended upon the South Philadelphia park where they threatened and assaulted counter-protestors and journalists in plain view of the police. For almost two weeks, crowds continued to gather at Marconi to “defend” the Columbus Statue.

While many claim that Columbus Day was created to honor our community as a concession for anti-Italian discrimination in the U.S., the fascist underpinnings of the holiday are often ignored. In 1892, President Benjamin Harris made a proclamation encouraging Americans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus's expedition. Some interpret this move as an olive branch to Italian-American communities after the [lynching of 11 Sicilians in New Orleans](#) one year prior. In the 1920's and 30's, the Fascist Party in Italy courted Italian immigrant communities abroad, which they considered “colonies” of the Italian state. The Fascists and their sympathizers in the U.S., such as media magnate Generoso Pope and The Order of the Sons of Italy, whose leadership helped organize the first [U.S. Fascist convention in Philadelphia](#), as well as the Catholic Knights of Columbus, lobbied to make Columbus day a national holiday. Eventually, FDR declared it as such in 1937. While the elites of Italian American communities, often known as *prominenti*, have adopted a narrative that glorifies settler colonialism and genocide of indigenous peoples, they do not speak for all of us.

Similarly, some decry the removal of the Frank Rizzo statue in Thomas Paine Plaza and the Italian Market mural as an attack on the Italian-American community. We disagree. Rizzo was one of the architects of racist policing in Philadelphia. As Police Commissioner from 1967 to 1970 and Philadelphia Mayor from 1971 to 1980, [his legacy is one of terror for Black, Brown](#)

[and LGBTQ Philadelphians](#). Today, too many white Philadelphians choose to imagine that in this period people felt “safe” in our city.

This culture can still be seen today, most recently in the protests where [police beat protestors over the head with batons](#), pulled down peoples’ masks to mace them in the face, and tear gassed protestors on I-676 and a [whole neighborhood on 52nd St](#). There are also decades of similar acts, unfilmed and unseen, of intimidation, surveillance, policing and incarceration committed against Black Philadelphians.

For too long Italian Americans have been some of the loudest cheerleaders for this brand of racist policing against our Black, Brown, Indigenous and non-white Immigrant neighbors. We have been eager participants in American white supremacist culture, in order to access the security and rewards of whiteness in America. This is a betrayal of our own histories. Our ancestors brought with them radical traditions of struggle and recognized the inherent inhumanity of racism, often enthusiastically joining the fight against it. We have a duty to reject any attempts to use our culture as a weapon against oppressed people everywhere. We need to mobilize our community to support movements for justice.

We affirm and uplift [all the demands of Black radical organizers](#) including their demand to remove all monuments related to state violence against Black, Indigenous, and Brown Philadelphians. Because of our community's part in the installation and preservation of some of the worst of these monuments, we unequivocally support the work of Black activists, such as Philly R.E.A.L. Justice and Black Lives Matter Philadelphia to remove monuments to Rizzo. Likewise, we support the work of groups like [Indigenous 215 who have advocated for monuments to Christopher Columbus to be removed as well](#). We are committed to the fight to do so.

In this moment of collective grief, rage, and action we look to our ancestors - peasants, workers, immigrants, rebels, partisans, and labor organizers - for guidance on how to fight for justice. These are our heroes, not the *prominenti* who claim monsters like Columbus and Rizzo as figures who represent the best of Italian Americans. We encourage our *paesani* to learn the history of Italian radicalism, in both Italy and in the Italian Diaspora, and to join contemporary struggles for liberation.

As of July 23, 2020 103 individuals have signed on to this letter. The below signatories have consented to have their names listed publicly:

Kelsey DeCerchio  
Caitlin Sheeder-borrelli  
james Gesualdi  
Samantha Pinto  
Bryce W Bayer  
Melissa M Mandell  
Melissa A. Fabello, PhD  
Vincent Crapello  
Jordyn Occhipinti  
Carmella Tress  
Torren Melone  
Shawna Lawlor  
Oli Gusmano

Josh Baker  
Anjelica Vezzosi  
Nic Tenaglia  
Jeanne D'Angelo  
Rina Mascitti  
Gina Renzi  
Giulia deProphetis  
Heather Leavell  
Jonathan DeVirgilis  
Dena Ferrara Driscoll  
Daniel Piombino  
Cynthia Pinto  
Adryan Corcione  
Roman Imperatore  
Mae Massacci  
Ted Passon  
Bridget Fritz  
Raphaella Huff  
Lucy Denegre  
Mary Ferrigno  
Gabriella Addice  
Mary Rose Cunningly  
Nate Runco  
Maxwell Cicero  
Jenelle Parks  
Sarah Sidoti  
Tatiana Buonassisi  
Christine Larsen  
Eric Lisausky  
Tommi Avicolli Mecca  
JLT Sheppard  
Jackson Kusiak  
Lauren Michele  
Paul Peracchia  
Destinie Campanella  
Vienna Enos  
Avery Dagostino  
Cristin Maiolino  
Eric Vitale  
Nicholas Archer  
Juliana Perciavalle  
Emily Shown  
Kate Hayes-Huer  
Francesca Lally  
Stephanie Altimari  
Elizabeth Bertolazzi  
Stephen Cerulli  
James Gitto  
Michael Tucci  
Michael Pinto  
Dave Scarpello

Lucia Cavalier  
Kelly Swain  
Lisa Marie Benigni  
Francesca Fiamingo  
Francis Cratil  
Julia DeChristoforo  
Angelo Pellegrini  
Emily Ratto  
Kelly Nichols  
Flora Cardoni  
Alexander Lola  
Francesca Lo Basso  
Perry Genovesi  
Angelo Colavita  
Cara Lahr  
Angelo Colavita  
Samantha Mayer  
Zachary Silvia  
Alyssa Cannizzaro  
Timothy Huff Olivetto  
John Santoro  
Mario Dattilo  
Edward Ruggero

## Re Removal of Colombia statue

Jennifer Diabo <[REDACTED]>

Thu 7/23/2020 11:50 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Dear Historical Commission,

It is time to do the right thing and remove the Columbus statue from Philadelphia. Place it somewhere in its proper context where it can be seen, and visitors can learn the truth about Columbus, and the atrocities that he committed.

It should be a historical artifact that depicts and represents genocide, nothing more.

As an Indigenous woman now living in the Philadelphia area, I am highly traumatized by this statue. It should not be displayed publicly as a monument or dedication to a man who was a known rapist and murderer. This is not the history the children of America should learn. My children should not have to be exposed to this treacherous murderer. It is time to remove this statue that represents slavery, genocide, and injustice. As a nation, we can only move forward as a whole when we respect one other. I would not expect a statue of Hitler to be erected in present day Germany no more than I would support a statue of Colombus to stand publicly in America. This Colombus statue causes so much pain and trauma to Black and Native people. Our children deserve better. They deserve a future free of these constant reminders of our painful and unjust past.

Please, I implore you to do the right thing and remove this statue. Thank you.

Dr Jennifer Diabo  
Indigenous 215  
Mohawk Nation of Kahnawake

Sent from my iPhone



## My thoughts in support of the removal of the Christopher Columbus Statue at Marconi Plaza.

Charles Sarkioglu <[REDACTED]>

Fri 7/24/2020 9:17 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Dear Commissioners,

Although I once held a perspective of admiration and respect reflecting the version of American history taught in elementary school, further education of evidential history has fostered personal enlightenment to the understanding that memorials and holidays honoring Christopher Columbus are highly inappropriate for public display.

Removal of the Christopher Columbus statue offers Philadelphia a unique opportunity to demonstrate willingness to embrace progress on a national level. By acknowledging that the Columbus memorial is insensitive to particular members of our society who have been damaged by the genocide and exploits of which he engaged, we embrace the unity necessary to progress another step closer towards enlightenment, inclusion, and equality of all.

The relevance of the memorial remains questionable. Public view of Columbus memorials are inappropriate. A private indoor location should be carefully selected to house this memorial. Perhaps a private museum that exhibits horrible human exploits could be considered.

A memorial that offers an accurate depiction of historical events would be useful to educate the public and honor the indigenous people who have been damaged by past events. Education inevitably fosters compassion and leads to understanding and strengthens unity among members of our society.

Growing up in the neighborhood many of my childhood memories are from Marconi Plaza. It is quite upsetting to witness the public contention currently surrounding the Columbus monument. Hopefully, the commission is able to find a respectful resolution which focuses on a historical commemoration that is appropriate for public display.

I appreciate your taking the time to read my thoughts.

Best,  
Charlie Sarkioglu

## Final Point That Time Limitations Precluded

Robert Petrone <[REDACTED]>

Fri 7/24/2020 1:07 PM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

Cc: George Bochetto <[REDACTED]>; Matthew Minsky <[REDACTED]>; JODY DELLA BARBA <[REDACTED]>; Barbara Capozzi <[REDACTED]>

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Executive Director Farnham & members of the Historic Commission:

My final point which the time limit precluded was that if, as one commissioner said, you are looking for "alternatives to protecting the statue," that won't involve removal, I recommend the city **educating the public** about **Christopher Columbus as the first civil rights activist of the Americas**.

As a civil rights activist and attorney, I **volunteer** to conduct this educational program *pro bono*. I am willing to give presentations as often as **weekly**, if necessary, to educate the public about Columbus as the first civil rights activist of the Americas.

Education, **not** insurrection or demolition, is the alternative that will protect the statute, our history and the legacy of the first civil rights activist of the Americas, Christopher Columbus. We must not let ignorance drive public opinion OR the decision-making in this issue.

I **urge** you to contact me. I hereby offer to give my presentation to all of **you** so that you can see how this entire petition for *damnatio memoriae* is being driven by ignorance and bigotry by the detractors of Christopher Columbus, the first civil rights activist of the Americas.

Gratefully,  
Robert F. Petrone

[REDACTED]

# WILLIAMS COLLEGE, WILLIAMSTOWN, MA 01267

DEPARTMENT OF ART  
Spencer Art, 35 Driscoll Hall Drive  
Lawrence Hall, 15 Lawrence Hall Drive

Fax: [REDACTED]  
Fax: [REDACTED]

Mr Robert Thomas  
Philadelphia Historical Commission  
1515 Arch St.  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

re: Columbus Memorial, Marconi Plaza

July 24, 2020

Dear Mr Thomas, et al,

I ask you to deny the application to remove the Columbus Monument from Marconi Plaza. I have read the application carefully, and while it seems well-documented, it is alarmingly thin in content and research. It has much to say about Columbus and very little to say about the monument.

Philadelphia's statue of Columbus should not be lumped together with those that have recently been destroyed in Richmond, St. Paul, Boston, and Baltimore. They were of local importance, while Philadelphia's is of *national* significance. It is the first monumental expression of the Italian presence in the American population. While there were a few earlier Columbus memorials, none were celebrations of Italian identity. When it was unveiled at the Centennial Exposition in 1876, Italian immigration had just begun in earnest, and its Italian character was the focus of the dedication ceremony: it was, a speaker noted, "of Italian marble, modeled and carved in Italy by Italians, and gift of Italy to America." It is distressing that Mayor Kenney and his administration reserve for themselves the right to sweep away something that was essentially given by Italy to this country at its one-hundredth birthday party. (Will he contact the Italian embassy and offer to return the statue?)

To bring an application to the Historical Commission requires that one do one's homework. This means serious research into historical, aesthetic, and social significance of the object in question. This has not been done. The applicants have not even made an effort to identify the designer of the memorial ("Prof. Salla of Florence," as a newspaper search would have told them), and to determine his importance. Moreover, they refer repeatedly to the Columbus *Statue* when it should properly be called the Columbus *Monument*. The twelve-foot pedestal was an integral part of the composition, with its inscription, the parallel coats-of-arms of

the United States, and the relief sculpture panel showing the landing of Columbus. Statue and base form an aesthetic unity, and one needs all the parts to understand its meaning, which is not a simpleminded veneration of Columbus but an allegory of five centuries of Italian-American history. The pedestal is not an incidental afterthought, from which the statue can be separated. It's the difference between taking a man out of his shoes and cutting off his feet.

The Historical Commission ought not to approve an application so heavy in political consideration and so flimsy in historical content.

Cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Michael J Lewis  
Faison-Pierson-Stoddard Professor of Art

## Submission for Columbus Hearing

Joseph Rollo <[REDACTED]>

Fri 7/24/2020 10:59 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>; Jon Farnham <Jon.Farnham@phila.gov>

 1 attachments (18 KB)

Columbus statue speech.docx;

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Please make this attachment part of the record.

Joseph M. Rollo, Esquire

***Joseph M. Rollo & Associates, P.C.***

[REDACTED]  
Philadelphia, PA [REDACTED]

Tel: [REDACTED]

Fax: [REDACTED]

Mr. Chairman, Members of the historical commission

My name is Joseph (Giuseppe) Rollo. I came to the US from Italy on July 14, 1976. I am proud and honored to call Philadelphia, where my wife and children were born and where I have been practicing law since 1983, my home.

I am somewhat discouraged by the comments of most of the individual members who appear to be already focused on the process of preservation of the statue, once removed. I hope that the decision to remove it is not already a fait accompli and I wish that this commission is still able to keep an open mind with respect to the fundamental issue as to whether it should be removed at all. I don't understand why the historical commission does not want to hear about the historical reasons for its removal which is the heart of the issue. Anything other than this would make a mockery of these proceedings.

At the outset, I would like to invite the members of this commission to consider the strong possibility that, although there may be a legal and jurisdictional right to hear and rule on the issue at hand, there may not be a MORAL one. The weak, pretextual and disingenuous reasons set forth by the City and the proponents of the removal of the statue, are simply asking you to engage in an exercise of **historical revisionism**. You are being asked, in fact, to re-interpret an historical record and past events, not in the social and moral context of their time, but according to contemporary values, stimuli and sensibilities. I respectfully submit to you that, to do so, represents an unjustified and unjustifiable act of **Arrogance**. Yes, arrogance, because in order to do so, we have to be sure and profoundly convinced, that we have now achieved a maximum level of morality and undisputable righteousness that permit us to sit in judgement of all those historical figures who we can now condemn and place into oblivion because of their character flaws. As Prof. Bullaro of the City University of New York has recently stated "while a practice may have been acceptable in its time ,at a later

point in history it may retroactively be deemed to have been immoral or unacceptable in some other way.

An example: the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations, their wealth and their empires, were built on slavery. Not the racialized slavery of the American South, but slavery that was almost exclusively the result of military conquest, regardless of the racial identity of the enslaved. This system was not questioned in its time, it was accepted as 'normal'. Yet by today's standard it is was a brutal and immoral system that we abhor. The past is full of ugly incidents and mistaken ideologies." Should we then obliterate the Parthenon; the Coliseum and the Pyramids? The record of this hearing and the hearing held before the Art Commission contains plenty of evidence in favor and against Columbus' moral attributes. Who are we to decide who is right and who is wrong. Yes, Accusations have been made against him, but most if not all, have been debunked. Do we feel comfortable to say that we are today in a position to clearly see and judge what happened over 500 years ago? As a pundit declared on the occasion of the quincentennial in 1992, "*those who condemn Columbus ignore history's complexity*". Most importantly, while some statues of generals from the South were erected to commemorate solely their military genius and prowess, they were fighting for a cause that, everybody agrees or should agree, was on the wrong side of history. Columbus is not remembered in history for his moral attributes or a virtuous life, but rather for the vision, intuition, foresight and courage to set sails against the unknown on a one-way trip, not knowing when or whether he would ever return. It would be as if an astronaut during a moon landing ventured to visit the dark side of the moon and came back to tell us. The fact that it later becomes known that he is not a morally upstanding person, does not and should not diminish his courage or accomplishment as an astronaut.

I have heard testimony that Amerigo Vespucci was a slave trader. Are we prepared to consider the possibility to rename America which took its name from him?

Let's face it. This renewed resolve to remove the statue has gained momentum, here as in many other cities in the US, as a result of the recent protests throughout the country, following the death of George Floyd which has once again sharpened the debate over the violation of basic human rights and lingering forms of racism in our society. I would submit however that focusing on the removal of a 144 year old statue actually distracts, dilutes and almost trivializes the need for urgent political discourse and measures to address those very serious issues. In fact, we can all agree that the existence of this statue, as well as the other Columbus statues, throughout the country has not, historically, been an obstacle to social protests nor have they delayed or otherwise impeded the passage of important civil rights legislation.

So what is now that brings this issue to the forefront of our most immediate concerns? We know that that while some local residents reacted strongly to the protesters shouting for its removal, the overwhelming majority of supporters of the statue were quietly, just standing around it in a show of support. I know it because I myself was there for hours. **The threat of continuing violence and the inevitability of it is a red-herring and a pretext. The City has conveniently left out the substantial provocations and the threats to summarily take the statue down as it was one in other cities which preceded the neighborhood reaction.**

I submit to you that the real engine behind this, is the City's regrettable resolve to bow and heed to pressures of modern political correctness, vehemently advocated by few, which tends in turn, to weaken and discourage a more inclusive civic discourse of all the City's neighborhoods. This approach is very shortsighted and it may cause long term damage to the City as a whole. This is not to say that change is never necessary or that it should never be welcomed, but it should be brought about with caution and prudence, making sure that we do not fall down the slippery slope by taking moralizing to its extreme. As it was recently stated, *if we do that, who from our history books can be spared from the towering judgment of today's self-righteous demigods?*



*Surely none of the founding fathers who were slave-owners, nor Teddy Roosevelt for his bigoted views of American Indians, nor Franklin Roosevelt for his decision to intern the Japanese-Americans. And why not forsake the great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln for expressing his view on several occasions that whites were superior to blacks?*

Moreover, given the changing of sensibilities and perceptions with the passage of time, if we discard history so easily and effortlessly, aren't we giving license and permission to our future generations to engage in the same revisionism against us and again, unravel and remove what we intended to be permanent today? Do we feel comfortable with this approach? Our city is famous, it has acquired a personality and it is visited by national and international tourists, because of its history and its statues. Do we not owe to ourselves a greater level of caution, prudence and judicious deliberations and decision making before eviscerating its heart and soul?

In conclusion, Let's ponder the following: (1) are we sure that the existence of a statue is necessarily a celebration of what it stands for? (2) given the split among historians, is it not possible that the continued existence of the Columbus statue could mean a reminder of a proud heritage for an Italian and a symbol of oppression and violence for someone else? (3) Isn't the hatred that it evokes in those demanding that it be taken down the same hatred that is attributed the historical figure? Perhaps they should cancel each other out!

By way of seconding Mr. Bocchetto's request, Maybe we can find a solution by getting creative and attempting to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable positions. We could allow the statue to stand where it is but affix appropriate permanent signage at its base, which explains to the viewing public the dual split in the historical interpretation?! It would be an opportunity to inform and of serve to the citizens of Philadelphia and its visitors.

We would end up with a tie and there would be no victors or losers.

Thank you for your time.

## Columbus statue statement

Gina Renzi <[REDACTED]>

Fri 7/24/2020 9:14 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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Hello

My name is Gina Renzi and I am in favor of removing the Columbus statue from Marconi Plaza. I am the Executive Director of The Rotunda, a vibrant arts and culture community venue in West Philadelphia, and I am also the Director of the 40th Street Artist-in-Residence Program, which grants free studio and exhibition opportunities to emerging visual artists. I have worked in community arts and public events my entire career.

I was born and raised in South Philadelphia and grew up in the 19148 zip code in the house that my parents still live in today. I am immensely proud of my Italian heritage and the struggles that my family has overcome. My family has been in south Philly for five generations and we still have relatives back in Rome and Naples. I am just as Italian as speakers of Italian descent who may not agree with me.

None of my pride or history would be erased by removing the Columbus statue. As an Italian American who attended Catholic school in South Philly for 12 years and still has extremely close ties to the neighborhood, I can see why so many of my fellow Italian Americans venerate Columbus. We grew up going to the Columbus Day Parades which were synonymous with Italian pride, there are Columbus statues and Knights of Columbus and similar monuments and groups all over the nation, and the installment of Columbus Day came as a response to the discrimination and vilification that Italians and Italian Americans were suffering from not so long ago. We know about the lynching of 11 Italians in New Orleans.

I get it. I do. But we can do better. I could go on about the atrocities committed at his hands and/or at the hands of the Spanish empire he sailed for, including the Spanish Inquisition, but I want to point out that Italian Americans, while not originally considered white in this country, while not considered educateable or worthy, have broken through. We ARE Americans. We HAVE civil rights. We are not persecuted by systemic racism. We may still experience prejudicial treatment from individuals but there are no laws, no policies, no local or national leaders who target our ethnicity specifically. Our president has not vilified us in his tweets as he has done with countless other ethnic and racial groups. We are NOT oppressed in any OFFICIAL way any longer. We're not! Let's build upon that while continuing to celebrate our rich culture. We can look to Philadelphia's former title of Workshop of the World and pull any number of hardworking Italian names from that history, or opera singers, or artists, or we can focus on neighborhood heroes of Italian descent, or we can even make a small attempt to right a wrong done to the people whose land we live on, namely the Lenni Lenape people, by erecting work that celebrates them. But any of these would be better than continuing to uplift and celebrate a man who never represented the values of Philadelphia in the first place and therefore has no place here. Let's take this opportunity to change the narrative on Italian icons.

Thank you.

Gina Renzi

## Columbus Statue statement — short!!!

Alejandro Morales <alejandrowrites@gmail.com>

Fri 7/24/2020 11:26 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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My name is Gabe Morales. I've lived in Philadelphia for 17 years and have been in the 19148 South Philly area code for two years. The vigilante mobs at Marconi Plaza, who used "neighborhood protection" as an excuse for threatening women and people of color with violence, should not have their abhorrent behavior in the public eye rewarded. Moreover, this monument to genocide has no place in our public spaces.

No one I have listened to in favor of keeping the statue has made a compelling case for Columbus as a historical figure worth looking up to. The people arguing for the preservation of the statue seem to know less about Columbus himself than those arguing for its removal. No one has produced evidence of Columbus making any significant contribution to this region or this nation.

Many if the arguments I've listened to in favor of keeping the statue have cited their Italian American identity in their support, but I believe that the contemporary Italian American community has much better to offer than Columbus. We as a city deserve better. We deserve better than lawyers who make threats the commission. We deserve better than to be intimidated and followed home by men with baseball bats. We deserve better than that statue.

## Proposed comments for hearing this morning

Christine Flowers <cflowers1961@gmail.com>

Fri 7/24/2020 9:42 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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To the commissioners:

My name is Christine Flowers, and I am currently participating at the hearing via teleconference. I hope to present these comments in person, via Zoom, but if there is not time for me on the list, I would ask that they be placed in the record

Thank you

Christine Flowers  
(215)681-3129

Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. **History** has stopped.

Fwd: Proposed comments for hearing this morning

Christine Flowers <cflowers1961@gmail.com>

Fri 7/24/2020 9:43 AM

To: preservation <preservation@Phila.gov>

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I apologize, this is the complete text of the comments

In his classic novel 1984, George Orwell wrote the following, often-quoted passage: “Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. **History** has stopped.”

As a high schooler, I was chilled by these words, but confident that in this democratic society, it was a simple fiction. Sadly, over the past couple of months, I have come to the realization that Orwell was issuing an apocryphal warning, and that we in this city, and across the nation, are set upon a course to ignore that warning.

The push to remove a statue which angers and offends some, but represents a symbol of pride for others, is exactly what Orwell was referencing when he wrote “History has stopped.” When you seek to erase, remove, amputate and eviscerate artifacts of a shared history, simply because one group is offended by its existence, you are doing what the thought tyrants have done, in order to keep their subjects under control. The fact that this is being done in a quasi-democratic manner, with an opportunity for the public to “weigh in” so to speak, does not change the nature of the act. To condition the acceptance of artwork on the sensibilities and sensitivities of

one section of the public that views and experiences that artwork promotes the erroneous idea that History has favorites, and that some groups with the loudest voices or most efficiently-expressed grievance can exercise a veto over others who do not have those gifts.

When I spoke before the Arts Commission, I spoke about my pride in my heritage as the great granddaughter of Italian immigrants. I also spoke of my appreciation for those who have been persecuted, as many of the opponents of the statue argue the indigenous were by Columbus. My decades as an immigration attorney who has handled refugee and asylum cases for a large part of her practice guarantees that my sympathies lie with the oppressed. But those sympathies, and my heritage, are actually irrelevant before this commission, which has jurisdiction solely over the historical significance of the Columbus statue, and does not exist to validate my feelings, or those of the individuals who are offended by the artwork.

Your obligation, and in fact our societal obligation, is to take history as it comes to us, not as we would wish it would have been, kinder and more equitable based upon 21<sup>st</sup> century standards. We do not have a right to judge the past by current standards, and discard those characters and events which don't measure up to our enlightened beliefs. History exists, it has already been written, and for us to attempt to rewrite it by hiding it, removing it, silencing it and shaming those who seek to preserve it, is exactly the tragic and arrogant act that Orwell warned against.

Of all places, Philadelphia, the great city where the unchained mind and spirit was given life in a document at 5<sup>th</sup> and Market,

should not be complicit in such thought tyranny.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Christine Flowers** <[cflowers1961@gmail.com](mailto:cflowers1961@gmail.com)>

Date: Fri, Jul 24, 2020 at 9:41 AM

Subject: Proposed comments for hearing this morning

To: <[preservation@phila.gov](mailto:preservation@phila.gov)>

To the commissioners:

My name is Christine Flowers, and I am currently participating at the hearing via teleconference. I hope to present these comments in person, via Zoom, but if there is not time for me on the list, I would ask that they be placed in the record

Thank you

Christine Flowers  
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## CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RELATIONS  
The Curtis Center  
601 Walnut Street, Suite 300 South  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
Telephone (215) 686-4670  
Fax (215) 686-4684

SALLY BARAKA, ESQ.  
Chairperson

RUE LANDAU, ESQ.  
Executive Director

July 24, 2020

Historical Commission  
1515 Arch Street  
13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19102

### Re: Removal of Christopher Columbus Statue at Marconi Plaza

To the Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony on behalf of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, the City's civil rights agency.

There is a biblical story about a king who dreamt about a statue with a head of gold, a chest of silver, legs of bronze, but feet of baked clay. What did the dream mean? A statue of a hero with clay feet cannot stand and the society he represents will forever be divided. And that is the reality with the statute of Christopher Columbus in Marconi Plaza. It must be removed.

For generations, children across the country and in our City were taught the story of Columbus, the explorer who challenged the notion that the world was flat and went on to discover America. According to the legend, he encountered gullible native people with whom he traded trinkets for riches which made him a hero in his adopted country of Spain.

We no longer teach in our schools that Columbus "discovered" America. In fact, he never set foot here. Historians have confirmed that the core of that story is a myth, a legend, a lie. What Columbus discovered when he landed in Hispaniola, or what is now Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1492, were indigenous Taino people, who stood in the way of his quest for gold. Columbus was the first European to set foot on that land and as a result of his colonization efforts, in roughly 50 years, the Taino were decimated by warfare, slavery, and disease. His exploitation, torture, rape and ultimately genocide did not yield the bounty his supporters expected from his missions. The story of Columbus is filled with platitudes, falsehoods, and omissions. It is one that elevates imperialism, racism, and inhumanity over equality, justice, and compassion.

We are now, as American society, finally beginning to acknowledge the evils we have perpetrated against indigenous peoples who have, against all odds, managed to survive our attempts to destroy them. At this time in our nation's history, the statue is a clear and constant reminder of our country's dark history, a history that is perpetuated today through oppression, discrimination, and inequality of people of color.



Leaving Columbus's statute in place would signify shirking our responsibility to rectify these past injustices.

We recognize that many Italian Americans view Christopher Columbus as a symbol of Italian pride. To many, he stands in contrast to the terrible treatment and prejudice that Italian immigrants experienced when they arrived in America and to the denigration that still persists in stereotypes perpetuated by mass media.

It is important that we celebrate the contributions of Italian Americans to our nation's and our City's economic, social, and political lives. Let's join together to honor and publically commemorate Italian Americans, particularly Philadelphians, whose actions exemplify the best expressions of our common humanity. Take down the statue and replace it with a real hero.

Sincerely,



Rue Landau  
Executive Director



Sally Baraka  
Chairperson