

Christopher Columbus Statue on Marconi Plaza
Review of Public Survey Submissions



Photo: City of Philadelphia

Survey analysis conducted by Julie Goodman, Associate Professor, Drexel University
Report prepared for the City of Philadelphia

October 2020

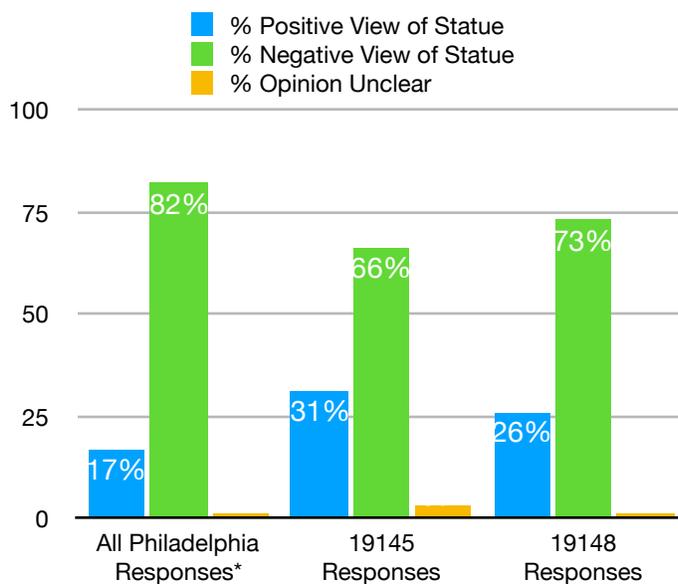
Introduction

From June 24 - July 21, 2020, the city of Philadelphia fielded a public survey to gauge opinions about the Christopher Columbus statue located on Marconi Plaza. In the wake of the city's decision to remove the statue, officials sought to understand how Philadelphians feel about Christopher Columbus, the statue, and Marconi Plaza. Respondents were asked four open-ended questions about their opinions on these subjects, as well as demographic information including age, race, gender, and ZIP code. Responses from all Philadelphia ZIP codes, with a special focus on ZIP codes 19145 and 19148, the neighborhoods nearest to Marconi Plaza, are included in this analysis of 9,656 survey responses.

Responses to the open-ended questions were coded to identify emergent themes. These themes, and their frequency, are presented in the Survey Results narrative. Demographically, whites, males, and residents of ZIP codes 19145 and 19148 are over-represented compared to the total Philadelphia population, while minorities and residents of other Philadelphia ZIP codes are under-represented. Additional detail regarding methodology and the demographics of survey respondents can be found at the end of this report. A copy of the survey questionnaire is also included.

Survey Results

OPINIONS REGARDING THE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS STATUE ON MARCONI PLAZA



* Includes responses from 19145, 19148, and all other Philadelphia ZIP codes

In reviewing answers to the survey's first and second open-ended questions, "What does the statue of Christopher Columbus in Marconi Plaza mean to you?" and "How does the statue of Christopher Columbus represent Philadelphia's or America's past, present, and future?" a number of themes emerged.

Generally, the survey respondents fall into two distinct opinion categories — those who feel positively about the statue and what it represents, and those who feel negatively. Positive themes included responses expressing ideas of exploration, American history, and Italian-American culture and pride of neighborhood, while negative themes included responses expressing ideas of false history, racism and oppression, and genocide.

From the survey results, it is clear that positive sentiment about the statue is stronger in the neighborhoods near the statue than in the city as a whole. However, positive sentiment is a minority view even in ZIP codes 19145 and 19148, the two neighborhoods closest to Marconi Plaza. Responses to these questions were further assessed to learn more about what people

feel the statue represents. The following table further describes these themes, along with examples taken from survey responses.

Table 1. Thematic Responses: What does the statue of Christopher Columbus in Marconi Plaza mean to you? How does the statue of Christopher Columbus represent Philadelphia’s or America’s past, present, and future?

General Position	Theme	Types of Responses	Example Response 1	Example Response 2
Negative Feelings about the Statue and What it Represents	False History	imperialism, stealing from indigenous peoples, white supremacy, slavery, false narratives, “bad” history, tyranny, colonialism	A celebration of thievery, death and destruction of people you want to feel less than yourself. It’s a reminder that savagery is celebrated and history can be rewritten as long as you win.	A constant reminder of this country's horrifying past, especially those who are indigenous of heritage and those whose ancestors were enslaved and forced to build this country.
	Racism and Oppression	racism, oppression, division, shame	As an Italian-American, it means shame. Shame that *this* is the man we choose to represent us. Shame that we are perpetuating a white supremacist lie that erases indigenous history and pain. Shame that we keep clinging to this monster as a "Look at what Italians have done for the world" when there are so many other far more deserving candidates for veneration.	For me it represents oppression, the slaughter of Native Americans, and hate.
	Genocide	genocide, murder, rape, slaughter, brutality, anger, violence	A glaring representation of anger and violence.	Christopher Columbus is a rapist and a murderer. He symbolizes colonialism, European conquest, and violence.

General Position	Theme	Types of Responses	Example Response 1	Example Response 2
<p>Positive Feelings about the Statue and What it Represents</p>	<p>Exploration</p>	<p>discovery, exploration, freedom, overcoming persecution and adversity</p>	<p>My grandmother escaped fascist oppression and Columbus, an Italian, put freedom in the map. As a kid we would walk past this statue every day and my grandmother would tell me about the old country and why she escaped. Every day she would send that statue a kiss.</p>	<p>Christopher Columbus was a Genoese explorer who sailed under the Spanish flag. He set out to find the East and unexpectedly founded the Western Hemisphere. When he sailed unto unknown waters it was extremely dangerous. I know that others were here before but they never told the rest of the world of their discoveries. He announced his discoveries and brought back to Europe many foods which Europe had never seen. Because of his introduction of such foods as the potato, corn, tomato, chocolate, vanilla, etc. he helped to feed a starving continent.</p>
	<p>American History</p>	<p>“good” history, positive immigrant experiences, founding of America</p>	<p>His statue is a reminder of new beginnings. He was a devout Christian and the greatest navigator of his time. Without his ambitious vision, western Civilization would not exist.</p>	<p>An important turning point in history, one that contributed to the United States we see today. Exploration, trade, discovery, vision, perseverance, determination.</p>
	<p>Italian-American Culture and Pride of Neighborhood</p>	<p>pride, Italian American culture, perseverance</p>	<p>It represents Italian Heritage in the city of Philadelphia. Being Italian and resident myself and having enjoyed and participated in the Christopher Columbus celebrations on Columbus Day I feel removing the statue from the city is wiping away our Italian Heritage.</p>	<p>He is the only Italian statue we have left. I am Italian and proud of it. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Christopher Columbus. I enjoy looking at that landmark and when my family comes in from out of state we always go see him. That statue has been there since I can remember. It means something to us locals.</p>

Many responses to this question indicated that the statue had no personal meaning to the respondent but clearly impacted others (positively or negatively), as well as general public safety, which affected their position on its meaning. One respondent said, "As of today there is

a dangerous theme for that statue — meaning the folks protesting for and against removal. It will continue as long as it is there. It a danger to the community.” Another said, “It used to mean nothing to me. Now it represents the site where violent bigots defended a stupid statue rather than stand up for human lives. It represents racism to me now.”

Others noted that the statue reflects necessary concerns for society to address. This was expressed by one respondent as, “It’s an insensitive reminder that our country does not honestly remember or discuss our history.” Another said that the statue means:

Literally nothing. No one in the neighborhood gave notice to it until now. But given pause to think about who Christopher Columbus actually is, you begin to realize in the context of 2020 and civil rights movements, he wasn’t a great person and not someone anyone should be glorifying.

In addition to people’s personal, individual feelings about the statue’s meaning (or their lack thereof), responses to this question also spoke to the idea that the statue represents the city’s endorsement of its meaning to other people (positively or negatively). One respondent noted:

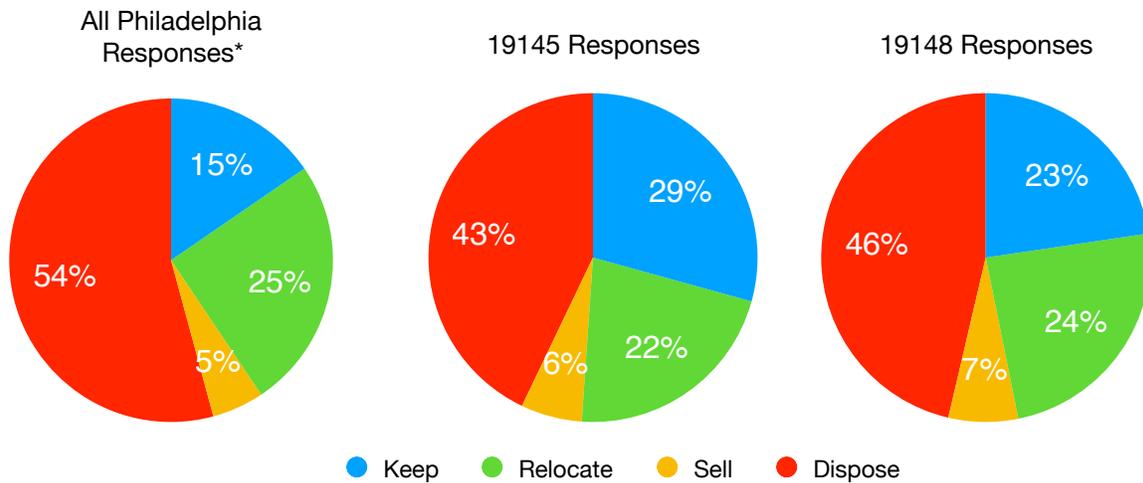
As statues are meant to, the statue of Columbus celebrates a man who brought colonialism, domination, disease, and enslavement to indigenous peoples who were already living in the Americas. Removing the statue doesn’t right the wrongs of the past, it doesn’t fix systemic racism, and it doesn’t erase history. Removing the statue does say that we no longer choose to celebrate those values - values that believe the lives of some people are worth more than the lives of others. Philadelphia needs to live up to the name of the city of brotherly love and remove public symbols of oppression.

Others agreed that while the statue represents different things to different people, the idea of removing it does not resolve all of the issues it represents. Along these lines, one respondent said the statue symbolizes, “Pride in America and heritage, celebration of a free land. History and context... we cannot erase our past, attacking this symbol will not solve our current perception of racism.”

Respondents with a positive view of the statue and Columbus' representation add that the original reasons for the statue's development were well-founded, to represent a marginalized immigrant community, its accomplishments, and its value. Those who feel negatively about what Columbus represents also noted that Columbus' story is not part of the Philadelphia story, as he did not visit the city. There is some recognition on both sides that the statue is rooted in violence, though this violence is viewed differently. Those who feel positively about Columbus' representation see the statue as a recognition of an immigrant, minority population overcoming racially-motivated violence (the 1891 lynching of Italian Americans in New Orleans, LA), whereas those who feel negatively about Columbus' representation see the statue reflecting both Columbus' violent acts and the recent civil unrest occurring at Marconi Plaza.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS STATUE

The third question on the survey, “Is there a private location—indoors or outdoors—that would be suitable for the statue?” asked respondents to consider the statue’s future. Responses from all Philadelphia ZIP codes were reviewed to understand public opinion on this question. Four themes arose in response, including keeping the statue on Marconi Plaza, relocating the statue to a museum or educational organization, selling the statue to a private owner, and disposing of the statue. These themes, and their frequency among survey responses, are presented in the charts and table below.



* Includes responses from 19145, 19148, and all other Philadelphia ZIP codes

Similar to the responses to the first two survey questions, it is clear that the interest in keeping the statue in its present location is stronger in ZIP codes 19145 and 19148, the neighborhoods nearest to Marconi Plaza, than in the city as a whole, though this sentiment is a minority view even in the neighborhoods closest to the Plaza. The four themes that emerged in response to this question are described in the following table, along with examples taken from survey responses.

Table 2. Thematic Responses: Is there a private location—indoors or outdoors—that would be suitable for the statue?

Theme	Type of Responses	Example Response 1	Example Response 2
Keep the Statue on Marconi Plaza	Keep the statue where it is, it was a gift to the local Italian American community, removal sets a dangerous precedent	Keep the statue where it is, in South Philadelphia, a large population of Italian immigrants’ sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, etc. live here. It was paid for by their families.	I feel that all statues should remain where they are, not just in Philadelphia but all states. As the saying goes, “Out of sight out of mind,” learn from the past so we learn to not repeat the same things. There are bad things in all aspects of life.

Theme	Type of Responses	Example Response 1	Example Response 2
Relocate the Statue to a Museum or Educational Organization	Move the statue to a site where it can be fully contextualized, offer viewers a choice to see it or not	A museum of history is always a great place for a statue of an individual person. People can chose to go vs. it being in a public place.	If presented in the proper historical context, I feel that the statue could be preserved in a museum.
Sell the Statue to a Private Owner	Sell the statue and use the proceeds for community investment, keep the statue out of public spaces	Maybe the City can sell it to a private collector to make some money.	I would like to see the city sell it to a private collector and use the money to create something else at the site.
Dispose of the Statue	Do not keep or display the statue, reuse or recycle its materials for another purpose	The statue should be destroyed.	There is no suitable location for this statute and what it represents. It needs to be removed and disposed of.

Though the largest group of survey respondents felt that the statue should be disposed of, multiple local, national, and international museums, historic, and educational sites were named in survey responses suggesting the statue be relocated to a place where its full context and history can be explored and displayed, and where the public can choose whether or not to view it. Other survey respondents suggested selling the statue to a private collector or site and using the proceeds to support other community investments and initiatives, including funding for the arts, parks, schools, and neighborhood development.

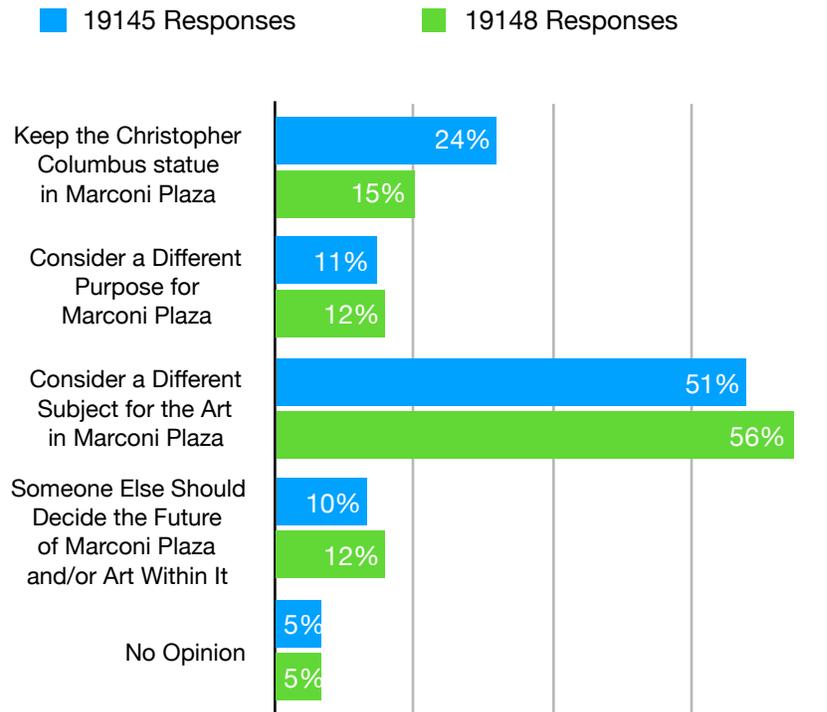
Some respondents noted that the controversy over the Columbus statue is recent, and linked to other social justice movements. Many of those respondents also stated that the statue has had a peaceful history at Marconi Plaza. Among those concerned about the statue’s removal, the question, “Where does this end?” was raised, expressing concern that this statue’s removal sets a dangerous precedent for the removal of other statues. This argument is rooted in two ideas. The first is that every person’s history likely contains both positively- and negatively-viewed actions, and society’s view of those actions changes over time. The second is the value of observing and exploring both the positive and negative aspects of our history.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF MARCONI PLAZA

In the survey’s fourth and final open-ended question, “Given the chance to re-envision public art for Marconi Plaza today that would unite Philadelphians, what would you imagine?” respondents were also asked about the future of the statue’s current location. Answers to this open-ended question were coded only for respondents from ZIP codes 19145 and 19148 (the near neighbors of Marconi Plaza).

Responses from those who feel positively about the statue in Marconi Plaza generally proposed keeping the statue on the site and adding additional context and/or other cultural representation.

The majority of responses considered three different ways of re-envisioning the space, based on these themes — the park’s purpose, the subject or focus for a new permanent work of art in the park, and who would make the choice about the park’s future and/or create any new artwork for the site.



Percentages are calculated based on the total responses within the respective ZIP code.

A small percentage of respondents did not have ideas for re-envisioning the area, or felt that nothing would work to heal existing social divisions.

The response themes are described in the following table, along with examples from the survey responses. It should also be noted that the largest number of responses falling into the theme of a different subject for public art in Marconi Plaza is not surprising given the wording of the survey question, which directs respondents to consider re-envisioning public art at the site.

Table 3. Thematic Responses: Given the chance to re-envision public art for Marconi Plaza today that would unite Philadelphians, what would you imagine?

Theme	Types of Responses	Example Response
Keep the Christopher Columbus Statue in Marconi Plaza	Keep the statue where it is, it belongs in Marconi Plaza	It is perfect where it currently resides, in a neighborhood where the statue means something and is appreciated.
Consider a Different Purpose for Marconi Plaza	Fountain, Playground, Dog park, Natural Lands, Rotating Art, Collaborative or Interactive Art, Performance Space, Renaming the Plaza	Instead of public "art", why not structures meant for play and relaxation? Do we need to have an art piece? Why not things that just present the natural greenery and beauty of a park. The thing I love about the fountain in Passyunk is that it is a place where people gather and sit. Why not something like that in Marconi so people come just come and gather?
Consider a Different Subject for the Art in Marconi Plaza	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Philadelphia Symbols</i>: Sports mascots, City Icons (LOVE sculpture, cheesesteak, etc.), Gritty (5% of all Philadelphia responses) 2. <i>Other People</i>: Famous Philadelphians, Famous Black People (athletes, artists, political and/or historical figures), Lenape People, Historical Italian American People (other than Columbus) 3. <i>Conceptual Ideas</i>: Diversity, Inclusion, Positive Sentiments (hope, justice, equality, etc.), Abstract Art 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I imagine a nice statue of all the Philadelphia Sports Team mascots together would both be a nice nod to the Sports Complex not too far from the location, as well as, act as a mutual bond of brother/sisterhood for the community to get behind. After all, what do all Philadelphians passionately care about more than their sports teams? 2. Some famous historical figures from Philadelphia, such as Octavius Valentine Catto, Charlotte Forten Grimke, Henry Brown, & Frank Webb. 3. Something representing diversity and a respect for all of the cultures of people who live and thrive in Philadelphia.
Someone Else Should Decide the Future of Marconi Plaza and/or Art Within It	Youth, BIPOC, Artists (Philadelphia, BIPOC, etc.), Lenape, Italian Americans, Near-neighbors, Arts Organizations (Mural Arts, African American Museum, etc.)	This is a question to ask the Lenape people, whose land we are occupying.

Conclusion

A clear division of public opinion exists about the Christopher Columbus statue on Marconi Plaza. At present, the negative sentiment associated with the statue outweighs the positive for a majority of Philadelphia survey respondents. Though positive sentiment is more strongly represented in the neighborhoods adjacent to Marconi Plaza, it does not outweigh the negative sentiment in those neighborhoods or in the city as a whole.

Responses from this survey indicate that those who feel positively about the statue see it as a symbol of freedom, heritage, and pride. Those who feel negatively about what the statue represents see it as a symbol of colonialism, hatred, and violence. As noted above, while interest in keeping the statue in its present location is stronger in the neighborhoods near Marconi Plaza than in the city as a whole, this positive sentiment is a minority view even in the neighborhoods closest to the Plaza. That said, the combined responses of those expressing an interest to keep the statue in its present location on Marconi Plaza with those advocating to relocate or sell the statue is nearly equivalent to the percentage of respondents suggesting that the city dispose of or destroy it instead.

In the two ZIP codes nearest to Marconi Plaza, 19145 and 19148, respondents suggested three different ways to re-envision the Plaza, including the park's purpose, the subject or focus for a new permanent work of art in the park, and who would make the choice about the park's future and/or create any new artwork for the site. Their ideas can be helpful to city as its plans for both the statue and Marconi Plaza continue to develop.

This survey represents one aspect of public voice and opinion-gathering conducted by the city on these subjects. The Philadelphia Art Commission and Philadelphia Historical Commission both held public hearings on the subject, as well. In conjunction with the responses from this survey, records of those hearings provide additional information about residents' feelings regarding Christopher Columbus, the statue, and Marconi Plaza that can be drawn upon as the city's plans evolve.

Methodology

Philadelphia's survey regarding the Christopher Columbus statue on Marconi Plaza was open to the public from June 24 to July 21, 2020. The survey was available online at https://form.jotform.com/philagov/columbus-feedback?mc_cid=caa2509d93&mc_eid=0b4a866679. Not all questions were required, and respondents were not specifically instructed to refrain from multiple submissions. However, as the City's primary interest lies in understanding how Philadelphians feel about this issue, some survey responses were removed from this analysis.

In total, 13,835 survey responses were received. Of these, 1,700 were removed because the ZIP codes listed were either non-existent or located outside of Philadelphia, while another 1,717 were removed due to no ZIP code being provided. This left 10,418 survey responses, which were then screened for multiple identical responses based on a combination of their IP addresses, date-time stamps, text answers, and demographic information. For every identified case of multiple identical responses, one original response was kept while the others were removed. There was also one instance of two nearly identical survey submissions, with an internal note identifying one as an edited version of the other. In this case, the edits were incorporated as directed and the final edited survey response was kept, while the other response was removed. Through this process another 762 responses were removed, leaving a total of 9,656 viable survey responses available for this analysis.

Given Philadelphia's total population of 1,526,006, a sample size of 9,656 responses is sufficient to report out results with a 99% confidence level and a +/-1% margin of error. In the two ZIP codes closest to Marconi Plaza, 19145 and 19148, survey responses of 1,148 and 1,257 (respectively) represent confidence levels and margins of error of 95% and +/-3%, or 99% and +/-4%, in each ZIP code. Thus, we can be confident that even with the removal of responses as described above, a sufficient number of survey responses exists to assess the public opinion of both near-neighbors and Philadelphians regarding the Christopher Columbus statue in Marconi Plaza.

However, as the demographic charts in the next section demonstrate, the survey responses, while statistically valid, do not directly reflect the demographics of all Philadelphians. Respondents aged 25-34, males, Whites, and residents of ZIP codes 19145 and 19148 are over-represented compared to the total Philadelphia population. Respondents under age 18, aged 35-44, aged 55-64, and aged 65 and above, African-Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanic/Latinx, and residents of Philadelphia ZIP codes other than 19145 and 19148 are under-represented compared to the total Philadelphia population. Respondents aged 18-24, aged 45-54, females, and Native Americans are represented in proportion to the total Philadelphia population. Given that the survey is likely of high interest to residents of ZIP codes 19145 and 19148, it is not surprising that respondents from these areas are over-represented compared to the city as a whole. The 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles shows that the population of these ZIP codes, while similar in gender and age to the rest of Philadelphia, skews higher towards Whites (53.2% in 19145, 67.4% in 19148) and Asian/Pacific Islanders (14.4% in 19145, 24% in 19148) than the city's total population.

The survey consisted of eight questions in total. Four open-ended questions were designed to assess public opinion about Christopher Columbus, the statue, Marconi Plaza, and plans for the future. The other four questions requested demographic information from respondents including their ZIP code, age, race, and gender. A review of responses to the open-ended questions is the main focus of this report. In the review, responses were thematically coded, and those codes were then assessed for their rate of frequency within the population. Questions 1, 2, and 3 were assessed for all Philadelphia ZIP codes, while question 4 was assessed only for ZIP codes 19145 and 19148.

Demographics of Survey Respondents

Number of Viable Survey Responses (see Methodology): 9,656
Philadelphia Population (2010 Census): 1,526,006

AGE RANGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

Counts by Age	Survey Count	Survey %	Census %
under 18	43	0.45%	22%
18-24	1020	10.56%	10.5%
25-34	3773	39.07%	18.6%
35-44	2353	24.37%	12.3%
45-54	942	9.76%	11.9%
55-64	630	6.52%	11.5%
65 and older	449	4.65%	13.2%
No response	446	4.62%	n/a
TOTAL	9656	100.00%	

GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

Counts by Gender	Survey Count	Survey %	Census %
Male	3441	35.64%	47.3%
Female	5141	53.24%	52.7%
Transgender, nonbinary, or third gender	411	4.26%	(not recorded)
Gender not listed	363	3.76%	n/a
No response	300	3.11%	n/a
TOTAL	9656	100.00%	

RACE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

Counts by Race	Survey Count	Survey %	Census %
African American	888	9.20%	44.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	391	4.05%	8.2%
White	7018	72.68%	43.3%
Hispanic or Latinx	576	5.97%	14.5%
Native American	178	1.84%	1.1%
Race not listed	747	7.74%	n/a
No response	392	4.06%	n/a
Note: Multiple survey responses allowed; total exceeds 100%	10190	105.53%	

ZIP RANGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

Counts by ZIP Code	Survey Count	Survey %	Census %
19145	1148	11.89%	3.1%
19148	1257	13.02%	3.3%
Other ZIP in Philadelphia	7251	75.09%	93.6%
TOTAL	9656	100.00%	

The Census data in these charts is primarily taken from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles at data.census.gov. For the Counts by Race chart, the Total Population data for "Race alone or in combination with one or more other races" is represented here. The Counts by ZIP Code uses 2010 Census population figures to show the percentage of Philadelphians living in ZIP codes 19145, 19148, and the rest of Philadelphia.

Survey Questionnaire

Submit Your Thoughts on the Future of the Christopher Columbus Statue in Marconi Plaza

Like many communities across the country, Philadelphia is in the midst of a broad reckoning about the legacy of systemic racism and oppression in this country. Part of that reckoning is putting a spotlight on what historical figures deserve to be commemorated in our public spaces.

In the late 1800s, Christopher Columbus became a symbol of Italian communities' contributions to U.S. history. But since that time, scholars and historians have uncovered first-hand documentation establishing that his arrival in the Americas marked the beginning of the displacement and genocide of Indigenous people.

There must be a way forward that allows Philadelphians to celebrate their heritage and culture, while respecting the histories and circumstances of others that come from different backgrounds.

On July 22, the City will ask the Philadelphia Art Commission to approve removal of the statue from Marconi Plaza. Prior to making its presentation to the Commission, the City will allow for public input through written submissions.

All submissions are due by July 21.

Please complete the form below to share your thoughts on the Christopher Columbus statue in Marconi Plaza.

1. What does the statue of Christopher Columbus in Marconi Plaza mean to you? *
2. How does the statue of Christopher Columbus represent Philadelphia's or America's past, present, and future? *
3. Is there a private location—indoors or outdoors—that would be suitable for the statue? *
4. Given the chance to re-envision public art for Marconi Plaza today that would unite Philadelphians, what would you imagine? *

Your information:

5. What is your ZIP code? (optional)
6. How old are you? (optional)
7. What is your race? (optional; multiple choices allowed)
 - African American
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Hispanic or Latinx
 - Native American
 - Race not listed
8. What is your gender? (optional)
 - Male
 - Female
 - Transgender, non-binary or third gender
 - Gender not listed

(Submit)