



Italian Historical Society of America

Newsletter

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Tutto Italiano **Benvenuto a Tutto Italiano**

What started as private collections of artifacts and artwork was eventually converted into public institutions – museums, derived from the ancient Greek term for [Muses](#). By most reports, the oldest museum in the world is the [Capitoline Museums](#) in Rome, established in 1471 with Pope Sixtus IV donating a collection of prehistoric bronzes to the people of Rome. The museum opened to the public in the 1730s.

The second oldest are the [Vatican Museums](#), started with one statue found underground in a vineyard and transported to a courtyard at the Vatican in early 1506. When Pope Julius II learned of the unearthed statue he sent several court artists, including Michelangelo who was working on the [Tomb of the Pope](#) at the time, to inspect the sculpture. The marble statue was identified as a reproduction of the bronze [Laocoon and His Sons](#), completed in the early first century and had been – according to Pliny the Elder – on display at the Imperial Palace of Emperor Titus (who ruled from 79 to 81).

Throughout the nineteenth century, museums were opening at a steady pace; and in 1866, Americans meeting in Paris decided “[to bring art and art education to the American people](#).” In April 1870, The Metropolitan Museum of Art opened in New York City with “[no building, no art collection, and no professional staff](#).” It acquired its first piece, a Roman sarcophagus, later that year. During this time, the United States was developing international relationships and diplomats were sent around the world. Many diplomats in the Near East took an interest in archaeology, participating in excavations, and collecting antiquities and historical objects. The owner of the sarcophagus, a diplomat, offered it to the American government, but the gift could not be accepted, and the Metropolitan became the recipient.

In 1870, Luigi Palma di Cesnola was an American diplomat in Cyprus; appointed in 1865. Born in a small town about 20 miles north of Turin (region of Piemonte) in 1832, di Cesnola was trained as a military officer. Some sources note he followed in his father’s footsteps; other sources add his family was of noble prominence. At 15, di Cesnola joined the Sardinian army to fight against Austrian rule in the First Italian War of Independence; and in the mid-1850s he fought in the Crimean War with the British Army.

After he immigrated to America in 1860, di Cesnola taught Italian and French, married the daughter of a war hero (War of 1812), and started a military school. He joined the Union Army during the Civil War and even though his service was peppered with accusations of misdeeds, he was awarded a Medal of Honor, and the brevet (honorary) rank of Brigadier General.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln sent di Cesnola to Cyprus as the United States Consul. At the time, Cyprus was under Ottoman rule, and after 10 years as Ambassador, di Cesnola wrote about his experiences in [Cyprus, its Ancient Cities, Tombs and Temples](#). In the 12 years di Cesnola was in Cyprus, through supervised excavations and purchases, he assembled a collection – from Bronze Age to Roman relics – of thousands of Cypriot antiquities (many from Kourion).

By the late nineteenth century, collecting, storing, and displaying objects of historical,

cultural, or artistic value was starting to become more competitive for museums. In 1870, di Cesnola began discussions with Napoleon III who wanted the collection for the Louvre, and with Russian representatives of the State Hermitage Museum; but decided to have the collection shipped to London for exhibition. In 1872, the Metropolitan, now with funds and seeking artifacts, bought most of the collection from di Cesnola. The acquisition was the Museum's showpiece, bringing attention and the opportunity to acquire more collections.

As with his military service, di Cesnola received some criticism for his archaeological digs, and he addressed it in the Preface of his book: "That the explorations I superintended in that island were carried out systematically, and all the most interesting facts concerning them properly recorded, I hope the following pages will prove. ... My firman [royal decree] from the Ottoman Government made it imperative that I should leave the excavated fields in the same state in which I found them, no matter though they had become my property by purchase."

Di Cesnola left Cyprus in 1877, and supervised the transfer of his collection to the Museum. That same year he joined the Museum's Board of Trustees and two years later, he became the first Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, serving until he died in 1904. While director, he wrote [*Descriptive Atlas of the Cesnola Collection of Cypriote Antiquities*](#).

[Laocoon and His Sons: c.42-20 BCE](#) (Detailed)

[Cesnola, Luigi Palma di](#) (1911 Encyclopedia Britannica)

[Luigi Palma di Cesnola Leads Union Cavalry Charge, Receives Medal of Honor](#)

[Kourion, Cyprus](#) (Archaeological Sites)

[The Cesnola Collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Unpacking the Past: General Luigi Palma di Cesnola](#)

[The Graveyard that General di Cesnola Disturbed](#)

From the Italian American Press

Are you in a book club? Are you a member of an Italian heritage or Italian American organization? Do you want to learn more about Italian American culture? The books listed on the Italian American Press cover all genres and give you the opportunity to support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian and Italian American culture, heritage, and history. Does your organization have a book club? If not, start one with a book selected from the Italian American Press.

Two new listings on the Italian American Press share a common theme – Italian immigrants and coal mining. From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, immigrants worked the coal mines of America, and many were from southern Italy. They endured countless hardships, but their work ethic and desire for a better life was strong. Read [When Italian Immigrants Fueled the Coal Mining Industry](#), an article about Italian coal miners in Black Diamond, Washington. Then, read the books below for historic accounts of the Italian immigrant experience as a coal miner in America.

[Coal War in the Mahoning Valley: The Origin of Greater Youngstown's Italians](#) by Joe Tucciarone and Ben Lariccia

The detailed history of a coal miners' strike in the Mahoning Valley (Northeast Ohio) in 1873, that brings Italian immigrants to work in the mines, and eventually establish a vibrant Italian American community.

[Not for Self: A Sicilian Life and Death in Marion](#) by Joseph L. Cacibauda

Based on the true story of a Sicilian immigrant who first worked in the coal mines and later opened a tavern in southern Illinois in the early 1920s, facing the turbulence of

the times.

Great Holiday Gift

Any book on the Italian American Press will make a wonderful gift, but add a mug and extend the enjoyment with two special gifts. Designed by artist and author Rich DiSilvio, the **Columbus: Grandfather of America Mug** (<http://dvbooks.net/columbus/>) is perfect for coffee, tea, hot chocolate, or Italian mulled wine. The original design – of Columbus, the bow and sail of his ship, and the Statue of Liberty overlaid on a map of the western part of the globe – was on a plate Rich first designed for Columbus's quincentennial. Rich is the author of [The Winds of Time](#) and writes about Columbus. (See below.)

Italian American Heritage Project

October was a busy month, with writing two articles about Columbus and being involved in two major public appeals (and reading numerous articles) against Columbus Day – the month was all about the Italian explorer who sailed for Spain.

In 1892, Christopher Columbus was a hero. To Italian immigrants who were becoming American citizens, Columbus was a symbol of acceptance in a country of intolerance. In 100 years, though, Columbus would be scorned. Read about the history of Columbus Day in my article, "[Christopher Columbus: When Did the Hero Become a Villain?](#)", written exclusively for the Italian Historical Society of America.

On the Italian American Heritage Project, read my article, "[Was Columbus responsible for connecting European and American continents or to blame for wiping out native populations?](#)"

In early October, I learned about the recently published book, [Debunking Howard Zinn](#) by [Mary Grabar](#), "a resident fellow at The Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization." (The AHI looks to "[build a legacy where evidence and argument prevail over ideology and cant.](#)")

Those who read this newsletter and the articles on the Italian American Heritage Project website will recognize Zinn's name and the influence his book, *A People's History of the United States*, has had on the educational system in America and – more specifically – the denigration of Columbus.

In her article [Why I Wrote Debunking Howard Zinn](#), Grabar notes, "Appalled by the rampant corruption of the liberal arts ethos by Marxists and other left-wing extremists on many college campuses, I began monitoring education news sites and going 'undercover' to teacher conferences. ... I knew Howard Zinn was bad—a communist, a corrupt teacher, a fraudulent historian, and an anti-American agitator. I knew *A People's History of the United States* was terrible. Indeed, most people, unless they are young or otherwise impressionable, can see how slanted the book is in the opening pages."

Grabar states, "Zinn pretends to set the record straight, beginning in his famous crusade against Christopher Columbus. In actuality, others had been chipping away at Columbus Day years before Zinn made his grand claim. Primarily this was his socialist comrade, the novelist Hans Koning, ... Zinn plagiarized to form the opening pages of *A People's History*. Sadly, what we have today is a day of protests and defacement of statues of the discoverer whose holiday every year is eliminated by more and more municipalities and states."

"Columbus Day, in fact, is a day for celebration. ... Yet, the 'deconstruction' of Columbus Day—as evidenced not only by the toxic lessons of classrooms but by the kow-towing of government and corporate officials to leftist extremists—reverberates far and wide. Zinn popularized an illegitimate source and stamped it with legitimacy through his academic credentials. He has done this with other major events and movements in American history. Even if Zinn's book itself is not in the classroom, students are likely to be exposed to passages from it in other books; in lessons from

the Zinn Education Project ...”

In another article, [Howard Zinn's Anti-American Propaganda Takes Over The Smithsonian](#), Grabar writes, “Columbus Day of late has been marked by defacement of statues and hordes of angry adolescents demanding an end to the holiday. Leading young people in the hate-fest are teachers who have been educated with Howard Zinn’s ‘A People’s History of the United States.’ This semester, the Smithsonian Institution is helping.”

I learned about this last year – the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian held a workshop to Abolish Columbus Day, a campaign of the Zinn Education Project.

On October 11th (three days before Columbus Day), [D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser has signed a bill formally recognizing next Monday as Indigenous Peoples’ Day in lieu of Columbus Day](#). Lawmakers passed emergency legislation to make the change. Why the emergency legislation?

At-Large Councilmember David Grosso, noted that Bowser’s “signature furthers the effort to honor native populations and end the celebration of the false narrative of Christopher Columbus.” He explains, “Columbus Day was officially designated as a federal holiday in 1937 despite the fact that Columbus did not discover North America, despite the fact that millions of people were already living in North America upon his arrival in the Americas, and despite the fact that Columbus never set foot on the shores of the current United States, **Columbus enslaved, colonized, mutilated, and massacred thousands of Indigenous People in the Americas. We cannot continue to allow this history to be celebrated as a holiday in the District.**” (My emphasis.) Apparently, false information and distortion of facts are the basis for emergency legislation.

The article continues, “Because the bill was emergency legislation, it was not subject to a hearing and will last only for 90 days; a permanent version remains pending. (Italian American groups: start contacting the District of Columbia!)”

This is what the Smithsonian Magazine tweeted on October 14th: “Indigenous Peoples’ Day recognizes that Native people are the first inhabitants of the Americas, including the lands that later became the United States of America. And it urges Americans to rethink history.”

“Rethink history” should be “learn history.”

Also in October, an [article in a Chicago newspaper](#) included just a few sentences from my hour-long interview about a petition submitted to the Chicago City Council to replace Columbus Day. (I wrote about the petition in September.) From the article, I was contacted by an historian in Florida and we worked together to dispute the erroneous claims in the Ordinance and to provide key facts to educate the council members. I forwarded the revised document to those in Chicago, following up on the initial advice to be actively involved in the decision-making process (attend council meetings) and educate the council members that Indigenous People’s Day has already been established by the United Nations as August 9th.

For the record, November is [Native American Indian Heritage Month](#), “The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the rich ancestry and traditions of Native Americans.”

With all these agencies acknowledging Native Americans, why do they want Columbus Day?

Additionally, November 28, 2008 was the first official Native American Heritage Day. Both the day and the month were decreed in federal bills signed by President Bush in

1990. It appears, though, that the day changes each year, and is celebrated on the day after Thanksgiving

In mid-October, I learned about an Opinion Piece in the *Sacramento Bee*, "[Murder, rape, slavery and genocide. Here's why California must ditch Columbus Day](#)" (What does the title tell you about the tone of the article?) It was published by a newspaper that states it, "serves the needs of its community without becoming subservient to the whims of public opinion."

The article was written based on an article written in 2015, that was based on an article written in 2006 – all spewing forth from a document that is said to be written by Francisco Fernández de Bobadilla, an enemy of Columbus and the person responsible for sending Columbus and his brothers back to Spain in chains. Along with the historian in Florida, we worked on compiling information for a rebuttal to this ridiculous piece of published trash. (The same opinion piece was featured in the *Chicago Tribune*, from a content agency that "distributes premium content" that is "trusted [and] reliable." Is it just a coincidence that Chicago is contemplating a petition to rename Columbus Day?)

To date this year, 18 states, cities, and educational institutions have replaced Columbus Day. More Italian American organizations are addressing the attacks, and some are fighting back, taking a stronger position in recognizing Columbus for his accomplishments and for his importance to Italian American heritage and culture.

The [Commission for Social Justice](#), the "anti-defamation arm of the Order Sons of Italy in America® (OSIA)," is working on a project to counterbalance what is being taught in schools. Rich DiSilvio, author and designer of the ***Columbus: Grandfather of America Mug*** (<http://dvbooks.net/columbus/>) has written numerous pieces about Columbus – as essays and in his books – and was "contacted to write an essay defending Columbus and rebuking the Zinn methodology for a new enterprise launched by the NYS-CSJ (Commission for Social Justice)."

Rich noted that the NYS-CSJ is looking into "schools in New York State to see which ones use the Zinn methodology," and will provide material to offset "Zinn's flawed and malicious teachings." Rich has also been able to place his books about history in some schools. In 1992, he branded Columbus the "Grandfather of America."

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. While Italian American groups and individuals are becoming more involved in preserving Columbus Day, there isn't an organized nationwide movement. The statements of truth and facts posted on so many Italian American websites should be more effective. Italian Americans need a cohesive nationwide program to battle the campaign to abolish Columbus Day or it will be lost; even though Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9
Native American Month – November
Native American Heritage Day – the day after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

Thirty-One Days of Italians

In 2007, Thirty-One Days of Italians went online. I created the name and the concept with a list of names honoring one person of Italian heritage who has significantly contributed to America for each day in October – Italian American Heritage Month.

Last month, NIAF posted a biography from the 2019-2020 List each day on its social

