

The New Negative Image of Italian Americans

Joey Skee (August 23, 2012)



The inane opinions of a few and the diminution of Italian America.

Forget about Paulie Walnuts or Snookie or even Big Ang. The new threat to the public image of Italian Americans is the "outraged spokesperson."

Who are the "outraged spokespersons"? The inane, ill-informed, and often bigoted opinions of a few, who, in the name of "cultural sensitivity," take backward and disconcerting takes on Italian-American history and culture.

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The hope is that the public and media will do more to educate the public on the history of Italian Americans in New York City and the United States — will also entail a much-needed restoration of the Columbus statue.



A number of people affiliated with Italian-American organizations, including the Italian consul general in New York City, find the project intriguing:

“ ‘Discovering Columbus’ will give people from all over the world the opportunity to come face-to-face with a majestic work of art normally seen from afar while allowing for the restoration of the Columbus Monument.” – Frank Fusaro, president of the Columbus Citizens Foundation. ([CBS News, 08/22/12](#) [3])

“It opens up an opportunity to have a dialogue about the role of Christopher Columbus.” –John Calvelli, secretary of the National Italian American Foundation. ([CBS News, 08/22/12](#) [3])

And yet others have seen fit to express their opinions and “outrage” about the project:

“Encasing this majestic statue in a cocoon of conceptual art demeans the community and trivializes history.” –Rosario Iaconis, chairman of the Italic Institute of America. ([CBS News, 08/22/12](#) [3])

“Christopher Columbus is turned into some clownish figure in the middle of the room that many visitors are sure to find amusing — [it’s a] fun-house view of Christopher Columbus.” –Arthur Piccolo, “a vocal Italian-American advocate in the city.” ([New York Post, 8/20/12](#) [4])

“He’s been sitting up there for 120 years with nobody bothering him, enjoying the view. And now this has to be done? I think this is just another swipe at the Italian-American community.” – André Dimino, president of the Italian American One Voice Coalition. ([CBS New York, 08/20/12](#) [5])

“If the artist had attempted to stage a living room set around the Lincoln Memorial or the Martin Luther King memorial . . . sensitivities would have been aroused. It’s buffoonery masquerading as art.” –John Mancini, executive director of the Italic Institute of America. ([CBS News, 08/22/12](#) [3])

~~Reaction to the project has been mixed. Some see it as a chance to restore the statue to its original glory, while others see it as a way to erase the history of Italian Americans at large that represent the new negative image of Italian Americans.~~

~~At the same time, the project has been criticized by the Italian American community. The Italian American One Voice Coalition, formerly known as Casa Italiana, has expressed its opposition to the project.~~

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As a result of the economic crisis, Italian immigrants in the United States were often portrayed as profiteers. See the New York Times article May 24, 1892 (p. 3):

As we shall see in the example of the dedication of the Columbus Monument celebration, tensions also existed between the prominenti and working-class Italians. This will serve as an example of intra-ethnic tension, an area of investigation still under-explored in ethnic studies. The image of a singular and unified Italian community, displayed during public events, fractures if we look behind the scenes, where a different social reality prevailed. Working-class Italians did not always identify with the middleclass goals of the prominenti, and many never attended the elaborate celebrations. Others, while proud that Italians could carry off such pageantry, harbored resentment toward the prominenti for their achievements. The Catholic clergy, often at odds with a large number of Italians, formed a third source of contention. Despite the cacophony of voices representing diverse interests, values, and expectations, usually one group's agenda prevailed, providing an illusion of unity to the non-Italian majority. With careful analysis of the orchestration of the event, the existing social and political fissures become evident. The Columbus Day celebrations were key events illustrative of how the prominenti introduced and promoted the new role of American ethnic.

The [franchise experience](#) said it gets into the fold of false information by being in the distasteful parts of the field that the media:

Nishi's "Discovering Columbus" provides us with an exciting opportunity to face our past, present, and future, up close and personal, warts and all.

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- [1] <http://www.iitaly.org/files/34163titzunishipublicartfund1345736829jpg>
- [2] <http://www.publicartfund.org/DiscoveringColumbus/>
- [3] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501843_162-57498019/nyc-columbus-statue-enveloped-by-living-room/
- [4] http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/manhattan/it_colum_bust_AX1DiUrZqtPM0uV1yXm7WK
- [5] <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2012/08/20/columbus-circle-public-art-project-has-some-italian-americans-upset/>
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- [7] <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-08-22/columbia-university-sued-over-mission-of-casa-italiana>
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- [9] <http://www.i-italy.org/1304/corleone-day-parade>
- [10] http://www.amazon.com/Italian-Folk-Vernacular-Italian-American-Critical/dp/0823232662/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1345737421&sr=1-1&keywords=Italian+Folk
- [11] <http://www.i-italy.org/16589/anti-defamation-punch-line>