



# New York State Commission for Social Justice

*Order Sons of Italy in America*

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John A. Fratta  
*CSJ Chairman*

Michele Cangiano Ment  
*State President*

July 28, 2021

Mr. John Fry, President  
Drexel University  
3141 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Dear President Fry:

The New York State Commission for Social Justice is the anti-defamation arm of the New York Grand Lodge, Order Sons and Daughters of Italy in America. The Commission has, throughout the years, engaged in a wide variety of activities geared toward accomplishing its twin goals of promoting a positive image of Italian Americans and fighting bias, bigotry, and defamation.

We are urging you to reconsider the removal of the Columbus Day holiday from your university's calendar. Christopher Columbus Day celebrations began after the largest lynching that took place in America in 1891 of Italian immigrants in New Orleans. During this period, Italians in America faced rampant bigotry and discrimination throughout the United States. The Columbus Day holiday was established due to the anti-Italian sentiment that existed and to promote the contributions of Italian Americans here and abroad.

Today, the false narrative of Columbus is being driven by those that choose to rewrite our history to support that narrative. We have many scholars and historians that have evidence disputing this false narrative regarding Columbus. Carol Delaney, noted professor at both Harvard and Stamford debunked this negative narrative, in her book *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem*, Mary Graber, Resident fellow at the Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization authored *Debunking Howard Zinn* exposing the fake history being taught today in schools around our Country, and Taino descendant Rafael Ortiz wrote a number of books and is currently working on another book to fact-check the myths regarding Columbus. I have many more examples we could list but we hope you get the point. We would strongly suggest those pushing this negative narrative about Columbus read these books.

Today, we live in a society where we cherish inclusion and diversity. Where was that inclusion and diversity when these decisions were made regarding Columbus? Was the Italian American student body part of the discussions? We think not. The PRIDE student organization requested Drexel University to reconsider the decision to remove

Columbus Day and to work with the Italian American community at Drexel to establish an inclusive environment to celebrate their heritage as well. We support that request.

Finally, we at the NYS Commission for Social Justice find it to be discriminatory and bigoted to remove a holiday celebrating the positive contributions and history of one group and replace it with another group. Especially one that already has August 9<sup>th</sup> and the day after Thanksgiving to celebrate their history and culture. They also have the whole month of November to honor their heritage. We will not stand by and have our heritage canceled. We, as well as every racial and ethnic group in America are part of that great mosaic that made America a great Country. The New York State Commission for Social Justice is demanding that Columbus Day be restored to your university's calendar.

Sincerely,

*Michele Cangiano Ment*

Michele Cangiano Ment, President  
Grand Lodge of New York  
OSDIA

*John A. Fratta*

John A. Fratta, Chairman  
NYS Commission for Social Justice  
OSDIA

CC: Kimberly J. Gholston  
Chief Diversity Officer