

**New York State Commission for Social Justice**  
**2018 Fall Plenary Session**  
**Report**

Brothers and Sisters;

I want to thank all our Brothers and Sisters who attended both the Long Island Columbus Parade and the New York City Columbus Day Parade. Both days were great days as we showed all the great pride we have in our heritage and culture. I want to thank Lou Gallo, who once again, came to the parades as Columbus and I want to thank Biagio Isgro and Arthur Spera who organized our buses.

Update on our efforts to preserve Columbus Day and our Statue

Today, I was totally excited to give all some good news we have in our fight to preserve and protect our Columbus statue in Columbus Circle. On Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup> we were all please to hear that Columbus Circle has now been declared a Historic District. This adds a new layer of protection to this site that is so important to our Italian American Community. Just to be clear, this does not prevent the mayor from placing a plaque or a marker on the statue but it makes it more difficult. This was all accomplished due to the hard work of our Italian American Heritage Coalition. So, you can see great things do happen when we all stick together.

The attacks on Columbus Day continue throughout our Country. In our own state we are continuing to fight those that change our holiday to Indigenous Peoples Day. In Southampton, we are continuing to work with the residents to overturn the school board's decision to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples day. Once again, CSJ took out a full page ad in the Southampton

Press informing the community of this position and demanding that it be reversed. Sadly, I was informed by Majorie Focarazzo, our liaison from Rochester that the mayor of Rochester changed the Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Originally they were told before the declaration that they were just adding Indigenous Day to Columbus Day. However, when the announcement was made it was not the case. I am urging everyone to call Mayor Lovely Warren 585-428-7000 to voice your objections. We also have been informed that Columbus, Ohio has decided to remove Columbus Day from their calendar.

On the day before Columbus Day I was invited to the Philadelphia to be part of their parade and festivities. I marched in their parade and the excitement was contagious. Not one local elected official participated in this celebration. There is the same movement there to remove the Columbus statue as well as a statue of the first Italian American Mayor, Frank Rizzo. The day was great and the pride was evident. Sadly, the next day, Columbus Day I was informed by our brothers and sisters in Philly that two statues of Columbus were vandalized as well as the Italian American Immigrant Museum. This has got to stop! I spoke to National CSJ Chair Kevin Caira and asked him to write to Attorney General Sessions to have these crimes declared hate crimes. We are pursuing this in New York.

As you can see we are in a major war on this issue. We can no longer sit by and allow these attacks to continue. We have been fighting this with all we have but it is not enough. We have been trying to fight this issue in a positive way. That is not working. The opposition is throwing daggers at us while we are throwing kisses. This tactic has to end. We have to become more vigilant and go after anyone that comes out against us. This is going to take more resources and funding. Newspaper ads are very expensive but they do get the word out and put those politicians on the spot. We need to rally our troops and protest. But we have to organize it the right

way with transportation to these rallies. We can't continue to lose on this issue.

### New Orleans Lynching's Effort

The New York State Commission for Social Justice began the process to get a public apology and a plaque to commemorate the New Orleans Lynching's from the City of New Orleans. This tragic event took place on March 14, 1891. We are very close to making this happen. Thanks to Mike Santo discussions have been taking place with the Mayor's Office of New Orleans. Mike managed to identify two descendants of the victims that still live in New Orleans and discussions have taken place with them. The City appointed a staff person to work with us on trying to make this happen. Descendants also of those that committed this act are still in the city and are prominent in the community. The discussion taking place now is to bring both parties together shake hands and bury the hatchet. A draft of an apology is being formulated and will be approved by both the city and our CSJ. We are hoping to have this done on March 14, 2019. I will keep you informed of any further details.

CSJ has updated our complaint report and directory. This new form will be sent to all lodge presidents to be copies and given to all members. We are asking our members to use this form when notifying us of issues.

### Positive Image

#### John Dabbene Immigrant Contest

We are gearing up for the next John Dabbene Immigrant Essay Contest. There will be some changes to this program this year. This year all middle school students and high school students will be able to apply. Last year it was only 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and high

school seniors. We feel this will give us a larger pool of applicants for this program. Applications will be going out in this month's president's packages. One middle school student and one high school student will be awarded \$200.00 each. I urge every district to be part of this program. Charlie Lucie will again be chairing this program.

### La Bella Lingua Award

Once again, CSJ will be implementing the La Bella Lingua Program. This program is open to students taking at least three years of the Italian language. One student will be selected to receive a \$500.00 award in each district. Applications will be sent to each district chair in January. I urge each district to be part of this program. Mary Ann Rispoli will be implementing this program.

In closing, I am urging all to stay united and involved in our fight to defend our heritage. If you hear of any issues negatively affecting our heritage please get it to us ASAP.

Our CSJ is only as great as the brothers and sisters on our executive board and our liaisons. Each of them is totally committed to defending and promoting a positive image of our heritage. I thank each of them.

Brothers and Sisters, I want to thank you for your support to CSJ.

Fraternally,

*John A. Fratta*