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Italian-American Defense League: Open letter to Stamford Board of Education on Christopher Columbus



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A crew removed a statue of Christopher Columbus from Columbus Green in Hartford in 2020. (Courant file photo)



By [Matthew Guarnieri](#), [David Generoso](#), [Phil Dickey](#)

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Christopher Columbus, once commemorated for the grandest achievement of human history, connecting two worlds in 1492, is now the target of the decolonize movement, which has the goal of decentering European culture in the United States. [Decolonizers blame Columbus](#) for all

the sins of human history, without acknowledging the historical facts that prove war, slavery, rape, and murder existed in every society on every continent since the beginning of human history, including in the Americas long before Columbus ever encountered the Taino and Carib peoples. As matter of fact, Columbus not only followed the laws of his time, but advocated for the Taino people repeatedly during his voyages.

In Stamford, five board of education members sided with the decolonize movement. Versha Munshi-South, Josh Esses, Michael Hyman, Gabriela Koc, and Antonia Better-Wirz voted to eliminate Columbus Day as a holiday and day off for students. To further the decolonize agenda, the five board members also removed Veterans Day. More than 1.5 million Italian Americans served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, and eliminating Veterans Day is an insult to them, every American that served, and anyone who reaps the benefits of those who sacrificed. The rest of this piece will focus on [Columbus and his legacy](#).

When describing instruction in Stamford Public Schools, Munshi-South, clearly stated in the [Stamford Advocate](#). "The students were using primary sources to investigate the true history of Columbus and I can tell you that based on primary source research, no, they did not conclude that Columbus was a hero." Contrary to Munshi-South's opinion, Columbus demonstrated an admiration and respect for Chief Guacanagari and the Taino people. Columbus referred to the Tainos' intelligence, physical features, and peaceful nature in his journal (Columbus, Journal of the First Voyage). Columbus formed an alliance with Chief Guacanagari and protected the Taino people from the Caribs. After the Santa Maria capsized, Columbus was forced to leave a group of Spaniards behind in Hispaniola forming the first settlement with the aid of the Tainos. Columbus gave the Spaniards specific orders to respect the Natives and to stay away from the Taino women. To form the opinion that Columbus was not a hero, without reservation, is pure indoctrination.

Columbus also wrote letters to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand advocating for the rights of the Taino people. He asked for missionaries to be sent to the New World to teach the Natives Christianity. In today's world, many would feel that this infringed on the Natives' religious rights. But remember, freedom of religion was the eventual consequence of Columbus' discovery. During Columbus' time, prisoners of war were forced to convert at best, enslaved or murdered at worst.

While exploring the Caribbean, Columbus encountered Carib tribes and defended the Taino, freeing Taino slaves. On later journeys, when chiefs of warring tribes tried to gain favor by offering Columbus women, Columbus sent the women back untouched (The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus by his son Ferdinand). Columbus' request to teach the Natives Christianity and constraint show he saw the humanity of the Natives, and that he was concerned about their salvation. Are these facts being taught in [Stamford Public Schools](#)?

By 1503, the encomienda system was in place, with the original intent to decrease the abuse of Natives who were prisoners of war; however, the practice is viewed today as a form of enslavement (www.britannica.com). It was Columbus' responsibility to enforce these laws, though his capability of enforcing the protection of Natives was limited. According to Bartolomé

de Las Casas, known as the “Protector of Indians,” actions in the New World before the death of Queen Isabella in 1504 were just (A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies). When forming an opinion about the legacy of Columbus, it is crucial to consider the intent behind the laws Columbus supported with principles of civil rights and humanitarianism in mind in the context of his times.

Globalization commenced and a new era began. The Columbian Exchange increased food production and the exchange of goods to every continent around the globe. The sharing of ideas led to the improvement of human rights. The Laws of the Indies added more protections to Indigenous rights, the intersection of peoples from three continents created a new history of Hispanics/Latinos, and centuries later, it was written in the Declaration of Independence that our rights as Americans are endowed on us by our Creator, and the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution abolished legal chattel slavery.

I would like to say that Munshi-South, Esses, Hyman, Koc, and Better-Wirz know better, but what do they really know? Why would they side with the decolonize movement over American traditions? Why do educators simplify history and follow a political agenda? Stop Italian hate and anti-Americanism.

Matthew Guarnieri, President, Italian-American Defense League, Clinton; David Generoso, Director, Italian-American Defense League, Guilford; Phil Dickey, Director, Italian-American Defense League, Guilford.