

**New York State Commission for Social Justice**  
**2020 Summer Plenary Session**  
**Report**

Brothers and Sisters,

I want to thank all of you for your continued support for the CSJ. In this quarter we have seen a vicious attack on our heritage and culture. The disgusting death of George Floyd has for some reason emboldened the attacks on Christopher Columbus. Attached are just some of the attacks we are fighting.

In our own State, Senators Jessica Ramos and Brad Hoylman proposed a bill S8553 to remove Columbus Day from the state calendar and replace it with Indigenous Peoples Day. I want to thank all those that called their Albany representatives to voice your objections to this bill. We have been in contact with several legislators and each of them told us this bill is dead and will not come out for a vote. National chair Robert Ferrito spoke to the Majority leader of the senate, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins who assured Robert of the same conclusion. We will continue to monitor this situation to make sure that in the middle of the night they do not add this measure to another bill.

In Syracuse there is a movement to remove the Columbus Statue that has been in place for many years. This statue, like so many, were paid for by the Italian American Community. The Mayor of Syracuse has always said that he does not support removing the statue. However, there was a forty-day protest in Syracuse demanding the statue. The mayor appointed a commission to examine this issue and to come up with recommendations. According to Robert Gardino, a Syracuse leader, there has always been a working relationship with the Indigenous community. He reported to me that he and other Italian Americans were appointed to this commission. I want to thank Carmine Federico and the members of the Progresso Lodge for keeping me informed. We will stay on top of this and report back to you in the future.

In White Plains we were notified by Mario Cermele that there is a move to remove their statue of Columbus. This statue was also paid for by the Italian American Community. There is an online petition demanding that the statue remain in place. We have been in touch with Mario and will give them all the support that they need to defeat this bigoted action. Michael Santo has agreed to represent the community if fighting the removal of the Columbus Statue.

The attacks by mobs on Columbus statues by those claiming to be fighting for racial justice across America is increasing to a point that we have never seen before. The sad part of these attacks is it is happening with police officers present and taking no action to prevent it. We have been told in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and other cities that they have been told

to stand down by city officials. This is unacceptable and we will not stand for this. Both our CSJ and National CSJ, along with the Columbus Heritage Coalition will explore taking legal action against those mayors that allow this violation of law. We cannot allow this vandalism to go unchecked any longer.

### The National Columbus Education Foundation and the Columbus Heritage Coalition

As I reported to you in the past, we have two organizations that were formed for the fight to preserve the Columbus holiday and our Columbus statues. The National Columbus Education Foundation is a 501c3 not for profit organization. OSDIA along with four other major Italian American Organization each donated \$50,000.00 each as seed money to begin the process of eradicating the negative narrative of Columbus. Joe Sciame and Robert Ferrito sit on this board of directors. Lou Gallo has been asked to work with the foundation's educational component. The Columbus Heritage Coalition is a 501c4 organization. The function of the coalition is to lobby elected officials in combating the attacks on our heritage regarding Columbus. The coalition is comprised of over 50 Italian American Organizations and OSDIA is again a major part of this initiative. I serve as an officer of the coalition.

### Columbus, as Taught in the Schools

The Committee has not been idle during the present crisis. Two audio conference calls have been made over the last month. The group has been discussing plans to satisfy its mission of providing schools with fact-based information on Columbus' legacy. Having cobbled together diverse sources already, members have now designed a plan to create a stand-alone website with "metatags" connected to three pilot lodges' websites. The idea is that when students and teachers google information on Columbus, our sources will emerge before all others and capture their attention firstly.

Lou Gallo and his committee have been working with Robert Graham to begin to launch a Columbus website. Currently, they are searching for an attractive domain name. We are hoping to have this website completed soon.

### LaBella Lingua Award

I would like to take the time to congratulate all our La Bella Lingua Award recipients for 2020.

District 1 – Michael Parrinello  
District 2- Christopher Piccirillo  
District 3 – Antonia Greco  
District 5 – Christian Sciarretta

District 7 – Jennifer Klix  
District 8 – Francesca Carmella Martinez

I want to take the time to thank MaryAnn Rispoli for chairing this award and doing a fantastic job.

John Dabbene Essay Contest Award

These are the names of the John Dabbene Essay Contest winners.

District 1  
Alexis Montana  
Sachem High School North  
Vigiano Bros. Lodge #3634, President Anthony Rotoli

District 2  
Michael Mele  
Herricks Middle School, 7th grade  
John Michael Marino Lodge #1329, President Marc J. Biundo

District 4  
Marcello Cappello  
White Plains High School  
Antonio Meucci Lodge #213, President Antonio Amato

I would like to thank Geraldine Graham for chairing this award and doing a great job.

On a sad note for our CSJ we lost our Treasurer Joseph Vallone who passed away in June. Joe was an integral part of our CSJ. He loved his heritage and culture. He will be sorely missed. May he Rest in Peace in the hands of our Lord.

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 lodge 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*