

Indigenous People's Day [C1]

Analizziamo il complesso dibattito che circonda la celebrazione del Giorno di Colombo (Columbus Day) e la Giornata dei popoli Indigeni negli Stati Uniti. La docente Laura Ruberto, esperta di studi culturali italo-americani, chiarisce le prospettive divergenti della comunità italo-americana e della popolazione statunitense in generale.



In 2021, US President Joe Biden designated 10 October Indigenous People's Day. It falls two days before the now-controversial Columbus Day celebration. The [aim](#) of Indigenous People's Day is to honour the sovereignty, resilience and cultural [heritage](#) of the Native American people, and to [acknowledge](#) the painful history of wrongs and atrocities that many European explorers inflicted on Native communities after Columbus journeyed to the Americas in the late 1500s. To find out more about Columbus Day and its controversial history, Speak Up talked with Professor Laura Ruberto of the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at Berkeley City College. After extensive research on the topic, Ruberto co-[authored](#) a series of articles on the Italian American [engagement](#) with Columbus as an identitarian symbol. We began by asking what [sparked](#) her interest. **Laura Ruberto** (American accent): I have long been interested in Italian cultural

issues, especially related to migration and transnationalism. And I also have an interest in what's called 'material culture' and public ways we come to define ethnicity. So the Columbus so-called controversy seems like a natural place to take my research because it brought together a number of factors that were important to me of thinking about how in the United States we remember and sometime celebrate various parts of national history, how those celebrations get created over time and reinforced over time, and how they're connected to the way different communities in the US in our very multicultural world define themselves and see themselves at different moments and in different parts of the US.

DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

Columbus isn't celebrated in the same way across the United States. Back in the early 1990s, the city of Berkeley in California was the first to no longer celebrate Columbus Day, celebrating Indigenous People's Day instead. However, in New York it is still a major celebration for the Italian American community. **Laura Ruberto:** In New York City and New York State there's a higher number of Italian Americans. California is a very big state and so it doesn't have the same density as a place like New York or New Jersey. Even so, when Berkeley made the decision in the early 1990s, there was controversy as well. However, there were also local Italian Americans here in California who very much supported the idea, who stated that Columbus didn't represent them, and certainly the use of his image as a symbol for exploitation and genocide and violence and the [settlement](#) of land and the [overtaking](#) of peoples' entire lives and [livelihood](#) didn't represent them as Italian Americans.

THE MEDIA

Even though there is a growing number of Italian Americans who do not identify with the Columbus [heritage](#), the media still tends to give voice to the pro-Columbus side. **Laura Ruberto:** Many Italian Americans find Columbus to be an important hero for them. But also many Italian Americans very explicitly do not find Columbus as an important hero for

them. And so the relevancy exists in a sense on either side of the debate. The media tends to only present one side of the debate with respect to Italian Americans. In the US there's a very significant presence of voices against Columbus and Columbus celebration. The media tends to present a clear dichotomy between a more progressive political position that's [headed](#) by indigenous voices and minority cultures that are anti-Columbus and then puts more politically conservative white Americans, who may or may not be Italian American, on the pro-Columbus side. The media rarely [acknowledges](#) that there are Italian Americans who are against Columbus.

COMPLEX DEBATE

Ruberto and her collaborator, Joseph Sciorra, [carried out](#) a series of interviews with Italian Americans and asked them [to reflect](#) on their identity. **Laura Ruberto:** There are those Italian Americans who we've spoken to, especially young people, who have been really active in this "contro Colombo" movement, who are just extremely articulate about wanting to [acknowledge](#) and remember and understand the history of Italian working-class immigrant struggle but at the same time [acknowledge](#) the ways the dominant movement in the US has always been towards an exploitation of people and that Columbus represents that almost above all else.

RECENT CHANGES

Ruberto [acknowledges](#) that Columbus Day is now less relevant in the US than before. **Laura Ruberto:** More and more cities and states and small towns even no longer celebrate Columbus Day, many have changed the day officially to Indigenous People's Day, others to Italian American Cultural Day or Italian Heritage Day. The city of San Francisco celebrates both Indigenous People's Day and Italian Heritage Day on the same day. Others have kind of separated them out or only focus on one or the other. I think that's a very significant change. There have been dozens upon dozens of Columbus

statues and other icons of Columbus that have been removed across the world. And there has been so much more conversation about Columbus in educational spaces, certainly in high schools and universities in the US.

Glossary

- **authored** = scrivere
- **engagement** = coinvolgimento
- **overtaking** = usurpazione
- **livelihood** = sostentamento
- **headed** = dirigere
- **to reflect** = riflettere
- **aim** = scopo
- **heritage** = eredità, patrimonio
- **acknowledge** = riconoscere
- **sparked** = accendendere
- **settlement** = occupazione, insediamento
- **carried out** = realizzare