

# A Controversial Celebration: Columbus Day [B2]

L'impresa del navigatore ed esploratore Cristoforo Colombo si celebra tuttora come la scoperta del Nuovo Mondo. Ma i popoli nativi abitavano quei territori già da decine di migliaia di anni prima che arrivassero gli europei: questo 12 ottobre è una buona occasione per ricordarlo.



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Italian explorer Christopher Columbus never [set foot](#) in what is now the US, but he is the third most [memorialised](#) person in the nation, behind Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. He is particularly celebrated on Columbus Day on 12 October. This annual celebration is now highly controversial — but it is [a big deal](#) for many Italian Americans, especially those who live in New York City.

## LATE STARTER

Columbus only became an American symbol three hundred years after his death, in 1506 because 18th-century revolutionaries [seeking](#) independence from Britain needed a historical [figurehead](#), a hero who could unite the young country. The first celebration of Columbus Day dates back to 1792.

However, controversy over Columbus Day began in the 19th century, when anti-immigrant groups rejected it because of its association with Catholicism. In 1937, it was proclaimed a national holiday by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, under pressure from the Catholic lobby.

## **CELEBRATION**

According to the Italian American Studies Association, the US has a total population of about eighteen million Italians and Italian Americans, making up 6 per cent of its total population. Over 2.6 million live in the greater New York metropolitan area. The first Columbus Day [parade](#) took place in 1929, when the Italian American businessman Generoso Pope marched from Harlem to Columbus Circle, where a large monument to Columbus still stands. Since then, every 12 October, a huge [parade](#) travels down the streets of New York City, from 44th Street north to 79th Street along Fifth Avenue. Folkloric dancers perform to Italian music, and delegations of associations from all over the country proudly [parade](#) among Ferraris and Lamborghinis.

## **CONTROVERSY**

Columbus Day is now highly controversial, as many people believe it perpetuates a colonial narrative. After all, it commemorates the day on which European exploitation of the American continent began, [disregarding](#) the genocide that America's indigenous population have suffered for centuries. Across the country, around forty statues of Columbus have been [removed](#) as a gesture against the legacy of colonialism and the beginnings of the transatlantic [slave trade](#), although many more monuments and literally thousands of references remain.

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# Glossary

- **slave trade** = commercio degli schiavi
- **memorialised** = commemorare
- **a big deal** = fatto importante
- **figurehead** = figura rappresentativa
- **parade** = parata
- **set foot** = mettere piede
- **seeking** = cercare
- **disregarding** = trascurare
- **removed** = rimuovere