

Understanding American Nationalism and White Supremacy  
through the Legacy of Christopher Columbus

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## Introduction

The Spanish Empire began its conquest of the world in the year of 1492. After centuries of in-fighting in the attempts to drive off the Moors of the Iberian Peninsula, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel I finally concluded their reconquest of Spain with the fall of the Kingdom of Granada. What once was a land divided into small taifa kingdoms and even smaller Christian provinces, was now Spain, a nation rising to the epitome of its political and economic power, establishing itself as a united territory under the rule of its monarchs and Catholicism, soon to become one of the greatest international superpowers of the Old World. Centuries of control and dominance across the seas were soon to unfold, set in motion by the sponsored enterprise of one man to carry out the Spanish banners and desire to conquer the world: Christopher Columbus.

Hundreds of years have now passed since the events cited above, but the echoes of European colonialism can still be felt in the many realms of social, political, economic and cultural life of all countries involved, including the United States. This is, however, a special case. Even though it's true that America has a colonial past and its own legacies from colonization, the American experience has redefined its relationship with history: despite the facts that the U.S. was never a Spanish colony and Christopher Columbus never set foot in American soil during his expeditions, the repercussions of these events and figures are repeatedly found throughout American history, politics and commemorations. Therefore, how does a Genoese explorer commissioned by the Spanish Crown become a powerful symbol in a Republican nation from its emergence till the present time?

The celebration of Christopher Columbus is no mistake. His legacy has been molded and reshaped since the times of the American Revolutionary War to become an intrinsic part of the construction of American nationalism. The United States was born from an imperialist mentality,

one that sought to establish the nation with symbols strong enough to outlive its creators and permeate society in the name of freedom, and often the idealized image of Columbus came to be a perfect protagonist.

In this thesis, I argue that American national identity and the representations of Christopher Columbus are intertwined, as they have sustained each other across time and collectively reinforce colonial tools. By exploring the history of the emergence of the United States of America as a nation, I seek to prove how Columbus was crafted to become an American hero, and how his symbolic value is kept alive in the present modern society at the cost of ethnic and racial minorities victims of genocide, slavery, discrimination and sociopolitical erasure. In order to support my claims I review extensive literature on key subjects of interest such as history, psychology, sociology and politics, to help paint a picture of: 1) how history is told, revisited and reinterpreted; 2) why the past is remembered differently in society and its collective memories; 3) how society reacts - by perpetrating or dismantling - old conceptions; and 4) how these symbols remains relevant socially and politically. The scholarship will then be reiterated with concrete demonstrations of these symbolisms by displaying, describing and detailing a collection of places, monuments, and celebrations that exist in a contemporary context, and how they contribute to the reinforcement of American nationalism - which, by default, also reinforces the legacy on which it was built. In conclusion, I will reflect upon my findings and analysis, why does the relationship between history and evidence matter and how do they impact society now, centuries apart from the landfall.

## Historical Background & Context

### **The Landfall**

Christopher Columbus spent nearly seven years worming his way into the Spanish Court in the hopes to win the favors of the newly crowned King and Queen of Spain to support his voyage to the East Indies (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 20). After much lobbying in Spain - a country that has just come off of centuries of territorial and political dispute against the Moors -, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel I finally approved of his projects in April of 1492 to sail west and discover new routes to the coveted land of spices and other merchant riches (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 21-24). However, on October 12th of 1492, Columbus accidentally arrived at the Caribbean shores of what is now known as the Bahamas, on the island of Guanahaní, later renamed by him as San Salvador (National Geographic Society 2022). After the landfall, in the face of a newfound territory, processes of domination, oppression and (dis)possession followed suit, establishing a new colonial world order at the expense of the preexistent native lives, culture and environments already thriving in the Americas (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 1).

From that moment on, there is no denying that the following expeditions and subsequent exploitations of the New World commissioned by Spain and other European monarchies reshaped the course of modern history, forever consolidating Columbus' historical influence and political symbolism as the pioneer in "discovering the New World" (Koning 1992, 35). Nonetheless, despite the promoted and perpetrated atrocities of colonialism, the name of Christopher Columbus is engraved all across the United States in the form of monuments, cities and institutions in his honor. Here, in a place where he has never been and has never touched,

Columbus is still remembered and celebrated, intrinsically exalted in the depths of American culture as a “great explorer”, “national hero” and “one of the founders of America”.

### **Emergence of the United States as a Nation**

To understand the relationship between Christopher Columbus and the United States is to understand how the United States became its own independent nation as well. As a former British colony, it is curious to see the United States bestow upon an Italian colonizer the status of American hero. It was not until the 1760s, when the first sparks of the American Revolution began to fly, that the image of Columbus underwent a renaissance in American literature and was given such status (Larner 1993, 50). In poems and epic novels, Christopher Columbus appears as charismatic, resourceful, an archetypically American character in his heroism and fight for freedom. That is because, in old time conception, he was perceived as relatable by the colonists: an non-English white male treated with ingratitude by an Old World monarchy despite his talents and greatness (Larner 1993, 52).

Feeding into the revolutionary imaginary, Christopher Columbus was then (re)molded by the American colonist experience to fit into their desires and expectations, “commonly portrayed as the seed of individualism”, “employed to represent republicanism, liberty, entrepreneurship, and scientific progress”, as well as a symbol for religious and ethnic identity in the United States (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 66). Essentially, the story of Christopher Columbus’ journey loosely parallels the journey of many of the early-on settlers of the Americas, thus creating a character whose experiences were close to the heart of the masses. Writers and intellectuals of the eighteenth-century transformed Columbus into a national hero, his influence creating a pipeline

from his arrival in the Americas in 1492 until the Declaration of Independence in 1776, crediting to him - in a generous part - the rise of the republic (IBID).

After 1776, the image and influence of Christopher Columbus would not fade into the background entirely, but they were rather replaced by more sophisticated bastions of American nationalism, which, nonetheless, still permeate what Columbus represents and believed in his lifetime. One iconic embodiment of American nationalism is the Constitution of 1787. Written and signed by famous founding fathers James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton and George Washington, the pillars of American constitution echo the demands of American revolutionaries, specially those of freedom and individual rights - two fundamental qualities that the forefathers of the United States explicitly attributed to Columbus, “a symbol of the new nation that safeguarded what were considered English liberties by replacing the monarchical system with a republic” (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 81).

Another milestone for the formation of America and American nationalism was the rise of Manifest Destiny. Conceptualized in the mid 1800s, the idea of Manifest Destiny claims that the United States has the divine calling and right to expand its dominance across the continent, connecting East and West coasts under a single democracy and capitalist nation (Pratt 1927, 795). Echoing the previous ideas of European colonial empires, the newly forged American republic began laying claim on already inhabited lands, imposing an old model of Columbian “order on America, (by) conquering the savage and civilizing through the construction of cities and churches” (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 70), not to mention the increased demand for enslaved African Americans to work on stolen lands. The stealing of the West “was popularly understood as a movement toward empire” (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 82), painting the map of the United States

red with violent erasure of indigenous communities and continued forced captivity of Black communities.

These neocolonialist processes later culminated in the American Civil War, another time where representations of Columbus were still alive in the Southern slavers' minds by perpetuating the imagined reality of civilizations as "white", "male" and "European". Despite centuries old of commitment towards freedom and liberty, the Confederacy had strong beliefs that "without the institution of slavery American would in all likelihood have had no democratic tradition and would not have come to enshrine freedom at the very top of its pantheon of values" (Patterson 1987, 545). Since its dawn, the only system America knew was based on indigenous genocide and Black enslavement, the way Christopher Columbus paved for the profit and domination of the colonial powers which sponsored his endeavors. Only in 1865 would the Abolition of Slavery be endorsed, however, generations of trauma, exploitation, racism and oppression would not be abolished so easily. Till this day, the foundations of white supremacy installed by Columbian colonialism remain unshaken, institutionalized in American society culturally, politically and economically towards racial minorities.

### **Colonial Legacies: Weaponized White Supremacy**

In 2020, Black Lives Matter protests took thousands of people to the streets amidst a worldwide lethal pandemic to march for their lives and civil rights after the blunt assassination of George Floyd by the local police of Minneapolis, Minnesota (Grottbrath 2020). Among many screaming "I can't breathe", black flags swinging and fists up in the air to fight against oppressive systematic racism in the United States, something impressive and seemingly



unrelated happened: statues of Christopher Columbus began to be defiled, vandalized and toppled over across the world (Delsesto 2022, 20-21).

To some it was a senseless display of destructive rioting behavior for the sake of causing a reaction, however, it was a bold claim on colonial continuities and historical reparation, one that is almost invisible but deeply felt. The disposability of bodies of color and the over militarization of the police are unhealed symptoms of white supremacy, encouraged by ancient forms of colonialism and maintained to this day in more complex and concealed ways than blunt slavery or massacre (Azarmandi 2016, 151) in order to control, subjugate and marginalize people of color. Therefore, taking down statues of Columbus or defacing monuments built in his name is reclaiming the power back to the peoples who fell victim to his enterprise, regaining control of the narrative to demonstrate that the effects of colonialism still linger in society, channeled through painful commemorations of Christopher Columbus.

Even though his figure is ingrained in American society and it is utilized as a major historical pillar for the creation of a sovereign state, new cultural movements can revisit history, revise it, and rebel against it. Be it through the ever-growing indigenous activism for historical reparation, the BLM movement or common people online questioning the existence of a Columbus Day, these pillars can be taken down and these figures can be rewritten, atoning the harm caused by years of empire building on the back of controversial men. As we grow more aware of our history, as we gain more access to knowledge, there is an opportunity to redefine values and the status quo imposed by founding fathers and historical heroes.

The imperialist mentality, one way to another, still lives and permeates not just these very symbolic elements of modern life but practical elements as well. It is present in the collective built-in world view of Americans and how they maintain their relationships with their colonial

past. In this essay I plan to explore these many symbols and evaluate their relevance, arguing that Christopher Columbus is still lively and sustained in present modern society.

## Literature & Academic Discourse

There is no denying the historical and political relevance of such a prominent figure as one of Christopher Columbus. However, debates may arise concerning the meaning behind its significance, whether it falls on the spectrum of timeless social impact or not. Five hundred years since his landfall in 1492 and to date an ongoing struggle persists within scholarship to determine the underlying truth of Columbus and his legacy in the Americas (Koning 1992, 35).

By reviewing the following collection of frameworks on historical accounts (Abott 1905; Canoutas 1943) and revisions (Krauthammer 1991; Koning 1992; Levack 2011; Sale 1990; Schuman 2005; Yewell, Dodge & DeSirey 1992), collective memory (Barash 2016; Delsesto 2022; Narvaez 2006; Zubrzycki & Woźny 2020), social legacy (Butzer 1991; Kubal 2008; Pfeilstetter 2017; Van Dijk 2005), political structuring (Larner 1993) and, most importantly, empire building (Bartosik-Vélez 2014; Pomper 2005; Steinmetz 2014; Von der Muhll 2003), this thesis intends to prove on the basis of historical documents and scholarly discourse that the representations of Christopher Columbus throughout history has a major impact in modern nation-state political infrastructures by promoting and reaffirm imperialist notions and, subsequently, empire building.

All of these authors have approached the broader theme of colonialism in their writings using both historical and social perspectives, yet, every single one of them chose to return their focus to the figure of Christopher Columbus through different angles on the theme, therefore leading to an ensemble of multiple perspectives that mutually help complement each other's argument, ultimately build a strong foundations to the narrative, culminating in a conclusion drawn from plural points of views. Each one of them brings important and substantial materials

to the debate on who was Columbus and why was he important to shape history as we know it, all majorly contributing to this literature review.

### **Historical Accounts**

In Abott's book, *Makers of American History: Christopher Columbus*, readers encounter an interesting recollection of Christopher Columbus' life and deeds. In his work, Abott intends to make the image and memory of Columbus relevant and uncontested, as he expresses vigorously how dignified this character was: thoughtful, studious, pensive, pious and, on top of it all, an adventurous soul (1905, 13). In his clear bias, Abott argues that a person of such honor and high regard could never be the same person to commit unspeakable evils against humanity, and the "assaults upon his character" (1905, xi) must not go unchecked, hence the book dedicated to Columbus.

The same happens with Canoutas in *Christopher Columbus: A Greek Nobleman*. Onto a similar goal of fighting off modern critics towards Columbus, Canoutas does a deep-dive into the conquistador origins and early life in order to clear misconceptions and prove that Columbus was in fact of a noble descent - despite the confusing evidences scarcely available - and that this person is owed respect for both his status and merits (1943, 50). Both sources aforementioned approach the topic of representation of Christopher Columbus in a unique way which this thesis and so many other brilliant essays are trying to dismantle and debunk. Therefore, these historical accounts are the groundworks of this paper, the bits that will be turned to pieces.

## Historical Revisions

In more modern accounts, the shift in tone and narrative is noticeable, where historians and political scientists go from glorifying Columbus to assessing his life and career through a more critical lens. Nearing the 500th anniversary of 1492's landfall, in 1990 author Kirkpatrick Sale releases *The conquest of paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian legacy*, a work which aims to do a more comprehensive study to measure the Columbian legacy (4), the result of a corrupted and decadent Europe who sought out in the "New World" a new home (32), thus conquering "paradise" unrightfully and violently (73).

Even though more comprehensive and closer to reality, some authors still choose a more middle ground when approaching the subject of Columbus. In 1991, Charles Krauthammer wrote his article, *Hail Columbus, Dead White Male*, to the *Time Magazine* also in response to the 500th anniversary of the landfall, as academia was descending into chaos debating over Christopher Columbus and his legacy. To Krauthammer, however, the backlash Columbus was suffering centuries after his death was nothing but a byproduct of double-standards: "The European conquest of the Americas, like the conquest of other civilizations, was indeed accompanied by great cruelty. But that is to say nothing more than that the European conquest of America was, in this way, much like the rise of Islam, the Norman conquest of Britain and the widespread American Indian tradition of raiding, depopulating and appropriating neighboring lands" (1991).

In the article *Elite Revisionists and Popular Beliefs: Christopher Columbus, Hero or Villain?*, authors propose themselves to travel back in time and revisit - as well as revise - history behind Christopher Columbus. The literature of Schuman, Schwartz and D'Arcy understand the complexities of history and the painful outcomes of actions beyond undoing in the past (1992, 2), but they still maintain in their argument as well the importance of Christopher Columbus: how

and where these old glorified perceptions came to be and are changing overtime. They state that “*Examination of what has happened to beliefs about Columbus within the general public possess questions the results of revisionist efforts and illuminates the forces that sustain long-held collective memories when they are attacked*” (Schuman 1992, 6). Therefore, to them it is vital to go back in time, understand it, question it, and, afterwards, produce new meaning for the literature in some fashion.

Despite the scholarly resistance in holding historical figures, such as Columbus, accountable, some authors exit the middle ground and dive into the topic unashamedly. In his article, *The Legacy of Columbus*, Hans Koning rejects the “respectable outlets” (37) which still insist in painting Columbus in a positive light, and criticizes those who “have an astounding talent for putting up walls within their own minds”, namely, the “scholars who describe all the horror, (and) proceed, in the next paragraph, [...] describe Columbus as a hero for all time” (38).

In this work he is not alone, as others have mustered the courage to demystify and break down the harsh truth of the Columbian legacy, as Yewell, Dodge & DeSirey’s anthology from 1992 has proposed itself to do. In *Confronting Columbus*, authors upon authors delve into the topic and paint Columbus in a colder light, as an ignorant “proto-Nazi” (Churchill 1992,153), who could not and would not understand native peoples, land and customs (Bigelow 1992, 114), seeking out in his calculated warfare to rip the fortunes of the Americas for his own gain at the cost of enslaved Africans and indigenous people (Galeano 1992, 76).

A similar misunderstanding and epic historical distortion happened in medieval Spain, where one of its historical figures had his story twisted in awkward dispositions to serve the purpose of a great nation in the making. El Cid is a historical figure from Spain’s medieval times who was deeply influential during the period of La Reconquista, as he was a leading military

force within the kingdom of Castilla-León to take back regions occupied by Moorish settlers. The accounts for El Cid, also known as Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, are unclear and highly romanticized as the most reliable record of his endeavors are the epic poem *El Cantar de mio Cid*, which retells his life, great deeds and death. However, the truth behind this character is that he wasn't a heroic nobleman, but a self-serving soldier who kept switching sides to his convenience, but the need to create a symbol "transformed this cruel, vindictive, and utterly self-interested man into a model of Christian virtue and self-sacrificing loyalty" (Levack 2011, 294), a tale very much alike to the recollections of Christopher Columbus.

All authors above have taken a step further away from putting Columbus on a pedestal, but not all of them take it upon themselves to admit that the potential good brought by the colonization of the Americas does not outweigh the harms it has caused to those alive in 1492 and all generations who followed. This segment of the literature reviewed is important to demonstrate that revisions of history glorifying genocide do exist, but not even modern times were enough to dissipate the urge to keep the image of Columbus somewhat immaculate within scholarship, producing works that still find themselves on a theoretical fence trying to meet halfway with a past built on extremes. That's why working with theories on collective memory is the next vital topic to touch on, because it allows the debate to understand itself in its own microcosm.

### **Collective Memory**

Early studies on collective memory propose a level of influence of the memory which does go beyond the conscious mind, suggesting that collective memory operates by enrolling in "universes of collective reminiscences and symbols" (Narvaez 2006, 52); however, newer researches on collective memory argue that collective memory is the result of a link up between

bodily schemata, to mental schemata and to social frameworks, meaning that collective memory is not a product of time but the collective understanding of the past is embodied in society thus forming what we call collective memory (IBID). Under the section, *The Politics of Embodied Collective Memory*, Narvaez demonstrates that cultural performances are “charged with collective significations, [...] hence conveys ‘retail’ consistency to social groups [...]”, meaning that “the embodiment (of these collective significations) can set in motion larger cultural choreographies, , which, often rehearsed over the lifespan of the citizens, demarcate social and cultural boundaries; boundaries of gender, of sexual identity, of normality, of nationality, class, religion – of time and place” (2006, 64). Therefore, this proves that the way in which collective memory works is through the deeply rooted embodiment of an imagined past that seeps into the culture, thus influencing performances and relationships of identity and shared history in the way it is learned. Learning about Christopher Columbus is a struggle between many facets, pushing onto people different and contradicting perspectives, where the one of an “adventurous heroic figure” still prevails.

Further studies have taken upon themselves the challenge of understanding collective memory, and reflect on it to decide whether it is a figment of public imagination or not. In Jeffrey Andrew Barash’s book, *Collective Memory and the Historical Past*, he ventures into the question, where he concludes that the lack of “in the flesh” encounters and experiences of history by the public makes it impossible to remember de facto our past, only its images and gestures imprinted in the culture (2016, 40). His findings keep backing Narvaez 'argument that the knowledge of collective memory is naught but a performance of what the public sphere perceives to be the past, affirming that remembrance is a matter of perspective and so it can be shifted.



In *Comparative Politics of Collective Memory*, Zubrzycki and Woźny (2020) sustain that, although selective, collective memory plays a major role in the creation, legitimation and maintenance of national identities and nation-states. As per the works aforementioned, collective memory is a collective construct, and so is the knowledge it produces: it is a “new form of political organization”, meaning that “much work had to be done to legitimize and naturalize it” (Zubrzycki & Woźny 2020, 177). They state:

*These new national narratives were shaped by the specific political imperatives of respective nations, but everywhere a new national collective memory needed to be molded for the people to care for the nation. Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), in their canonical volume *The Invention of Tradition*, convincingly showed that the state and government agencies invented new traditions with fictitious links to the past to create this new collective memory to the extent that most of what people remember as part of their national past was invented between 1870 and 1914 by self- interested actors. A key objective then was to foster allegiance to the newly created nation-states and their elites at a moment of social and political unrest, hence the widespread establishment of commemorative holidays and the construction of national monuments at the turn of the century (IBID).*

As such, then again, collective memory has been - and continues to be - molded in order to sustain a political purpose or more, explaining the academic friction on the representations of Columbus.

In Matthew Delsesto’s *Reckoning with Christopher Columbus*, he demonstrates the public shifts in the American collective memory around Columbus, demonstrating new trends in culture and social norms as well as old ones which persist. He writes:

*In moments of public discussion about monuments, and each year in October, news stories about Christopher Columbus superficially show two sides of a debate: traditionalist Italian Americans clinging to an antiquated holiday, and Native Americans with other activist allies pushing for acknowledgment of the brutal history of colonization. Those interested in eradicating racism today must do more than dismiss Columbus supporters as racist, naive, conservative, or all three. Decrying individuals or groups as racist obscures the deeper systemic roots of racism that pervade United States culture and institutions. Increased public attention to Columbus presents a valuable historical moment to ask deeper questions about how Christopher Columbus became tied to Italian cultural identity and memory in the United States—and how the memorialization of Columbus can help us understand deeply entrenched ideas about race in the United States. While tearing down statues may be an appropriate response to the demands of Indigenous peoples (to acknowledge realities of racism and colonization in the United States), the act of removing statues is not enough (Delsesto 2022, 16-17).*

In his work the clear implications of collective memory and its constructs are evident, and so is the uphill battle it is to reshape and remold them. The social legacies, on both sides of the narrative, run in too deep and feel personal, making it ever more necessary to detach and analyze carefully from all angles possible.

### **Social Legacy**

It is undeniable that the discourse surrounding social legacies is abundant and broad, bringing forth the many sides of history which have been displayed so far. Despite its complicated history, these legacies are inescapable. According to Richard Pfeilstetter and his article *Culture in Heritage: On the Socio-Anthropological Notion of Culture in Current Heritage*

*Discourses*, the conflicting nature of the social legacies of Columbus and the colonial past are explained through the fact that the concept of cultural heritage lies in a “relativist viewpoint on history [...] linking heritage primordially to power and authority” (Pfeilstetter 2017, 614). Since conquistadores and colonizers once held power and influence over the colonies, even against their will, they’ve left an heritage imprinted on them.

A prime example of this lingering power and influence from colonizers, although distasteful and undesirable, is the blatant racism against people of color. Teun A. Van Dijk develops in his book *Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America* the many layers of this segment of inherited past. Racism is first defined as a tool for social domination, a form of power abuse weaponized by previous institutions of authority to subjugate any non-white European groups in the colonies (Van Dijk 2005, 2). Today, the colonial system no longer holds, but like many other aspects of the colonial legacies it stayed, and it is as present as the Spanish language still spoken in old colonies.

In *Spanish Colonization of the New World: Cultural Continuity and Change in Mexico*, Karl W. Butzer (1991) expands on the topic by looking into the contemporary impacts the colonial past has had in countries like Mexico, one of Spain’s ex-colonies. Two main arguments present by Butzer are immigration patterns and agricultural systems. Important Spanish immigration flows into the country were responsible for reshaping Mexico’s demographics, changing concepts of race and “Spanishness”, as interracial marriages grew more frequent in rural settlements (Butzer 1991, 207). As far as agricultural systems go, once Spaniards came to Mexico, previous knowledge on agriculture had to be altered because “(I)n the lowland tropics, the Spaniards were forced to abandon part or most of their agricultural repertoire, since wheat,

barley, and many of the orchard trees did not thrive [...]” (Butzer 1991, 210), causing a whole economic system makeover and redesign in Mexico (Butzer 1991, 212).

Other ways which the colonial past has contributed, for better or for worse, are cultural and national aspects. In Timothy Kubal’s work with *Cultural Movements and Collective Memory: Christopher Columbus and the Rewriting of the National Origin Myth*, after analyzing over 50 different interview groups, he has noted that “(F)our types of movements - patriotic, religious, ethnic and anticolonial - have successfully transformed their partisan localized memories of Columbus into collective memories that were shared across time and space” (2006, xvi). Kubal uses these many groups who appropriated and redirected Columbus’ image to demonstrate the malleability of collective memory and the power of myths in building cultural movements: “(W)e continue to remember Columbus not because of what he did, but because of what we did with him” (Kubal 2008, 2).

### **Political Structuring & Empire Building**

Echoing the political structures Kubal was able to demonstrate with his ethnographic work, in John P. Larner article, *North American Hero? Christopher Columbus 1702-2002*, the author seeks to understand where this “rather [...] dramatic [...] hero-worship, myth(ical)” image of Christopher Columbus stems from in the history of United States, and what is “its interaction with historiography, (and) its role in civic patriotism” in America (Larner 1993, 46). Remounting back to the times of the Thirteen States and the heavy presence of the British Crown, Larner draws a timeline where Columbus was perceived envious by Saxon settlers to the historical turning point where he began to be exalted and reminisced in a melancholic way by these same settlers a few centuries later, in 1769, when the preludes of the American Revolution started to grow stronger. The sociopolitical and historical lenses through which the idea of

Christopher Columbus was shaped in the U.S. determined not only the purpose of this arising international sovereign superpower but also the pillars in which it stands. Through Columbus America evokes ownership to itself by building off of the explorer's archetype and everything it entails: freedom, liberalism, nationalism and, of course, autonomy (Larner 1992, 49-50).

All the devices presented this far have the goal of elaborating the many mechanisms through which the representations of Christopher Columbus have been and still are used and explored, remembered and weaponized, intrinsic in cultures yet ever-changing. These texts and theories are only true because they are real and made real through statecraft and empire building.

The idea of empire comes from an extended analogy to the ancient Roman rule (Steinmetz 2014, 78), but it can also unravel into modern Colonialism as a narrower concept (Steinmetz 2014, 79). In Von Der Muhll's work, *Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Study of Government*, he draws the same connection: "nineteenth-century colonialism provides a novel perspective on that familiar subject by drawing attention to parallels between the European metropolitan powers' export of their political institutions overseas and the common practice in Caesar Augustus's Roman Empire of transferring templates of governance from Rome to its colonies" (Von Der Muhll 2003, 355). Empires have a number of features, but they "typically signify the top rank of a hierarchy of powerful sovereign states in which power elites shape the grand strategies of the most important power projects" (Pomper 2005, 2), which is quite fitting for the colonial rule and project of old colonizer superpowers.

To scholars such as Elise Bartosik-Vélez that is none the clearer. In her book, *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus in the Americas: New Nations and a Transatlantic Discourse of Empire*, there are a few questions Bartosik-Vélez poses, in the hopes to deepen our understand of how the image of Christopher Columbus became so powerful, and how it still holds meaning

in our modern society. Her argument consists that “during the pre and post-revolutionary periods, New World societies commonly imagined themselves as legitimate and powerful independent political entities by comparing themselves to the classical empires of Greece and Rome.

Columbus, who had been construed as a figure of empire for centuries, fit perfectly into that framework. By adopting him as a national symbol, New World nationalists appeal to Old World notions of empire” (2014, 2-3). Focusing on empires and empire-building, Bartosik-Vélez is one to show us that modern societies - from Old or New World - still hold on to their colonial past and colonizer mentality.

There is no lack of evidence that the image of Christopher Columbus and everything he represents is still persistent in modern day and shapes in intrinsic ways the culture and society we know today. His name can be found in streets, his monuments are spread all across the country, October 12th is a special holiday in the U.S. under his name and for his much controversial and distasteful endeavors.

The works here discussed, when put together in such order and manner, showed that the representations of Christopher Columbus are crafted with a political purpose, conflicting in nature but yet continued because it can be helped since it is interwoven with national and personal identities of different groups who share a colonial past. Each framework analysis showed us the importance of this dialogue and that the best way to go about this complex relationship with the national hero/worldwide villain is to, bit by bit, tear down preconceived notions and carefully, with the help of many theories, bring it back together in what hopefully would be a more accurate representation of reality.

## Method & Approach

Modern Western society has been slowly going through a collective awakening surrounding its colonial past and the impacts of its legacies; namely one of them being the representations of the influential historical figure of Christopher Columbus, who not only shaped but pivoted such colonial experiences, especially in the Americas. However, although academically aware - as observable in the last section -, culturally speaking there seems to be a disconnection between the past and present, where these representations are silently perpetrated, but, at the same time, still actively and visibly harming the same racial and ethnic communities who fell victim to the violent processes of Western European colonization and slavery.

I am arguing that the idealized image of Christopher Columbus has, through the course of American history, deeply influenced the cultural and political make-up of American Nationalism and white supremacist ideologies in the modern day United States. In other words, Christopher Columbus as a historical figure became with his catastrophic exploits a political catalyst through which we can explain and analyze the sociopolitical progression of how and why America was built as a nation on the backs of white supremacy.

Since my argument grapples with various concepts that are not necessarily intuitively intertwined, I have decided to divide my research into six different realms of literature which explore the core topics to my claims in order to layout its many components, and later assemble them in a comprehensive way which demonstrates the truthiness of my thesis inducted. In these subsections, there are authors who favor historical accounts in a opaque, more optimistic light, approaching Christopher Columbus under the “great explorer”, “founder of the Americas scope” (Abott 1905; Canoutas 1943); however, in contrast, there are author who revisit and revise such overly positive discourse and provide depth to the debate, either by condemning Columbus

entirely or trying to find a middle ground between the “hero or villain” dichotomy (Krauthammer 1991; Koning 1992; Levack 2011; Sale 1990; Schuman 2005; Yewell, Dodge & DeSirey 1992). To aid my argument and understand not just history but how history is both remembered and reproduced, I’ve found authors to speak on matter of collective memory (Barash 2016; Delsesto 2022; Narvaez 2006; Zubrzycki & Woźny 2020) and social legacy (Butzer 1991; Kubal 2008; Pfeilstetter 2017; Van Dijk 2005) to demonstrate the reality of remembrance as well as collective trauma, which might explain why it is so common to see a confirmed genocidal megalomaniac still being celebrated. Other authors on political structuring (Larner 1993) and theories empire building (Bartosik-Vélez 2014; Pomper 2005; Steinmetz 2014; Von der Muhll 2003) were also explored in order to better understand the inner works of how a nation is built, just like the United States was in the backs of its colonial heritage.

All of the accounts here aforementioned are by no means new concepts, terms and ideas: they have been already largely explored, researched, written and debated thus far. However, it seems that these same concepts, terms and ideas have never - or have scarcely - been approached in this manner; meaning that they haven’t been used and put together the way I did in order to draw such specific and borderline obscure connections and conclusions which intertwine Christopher Columbus to American national identity.

I will demonstrate that said representations of Christopher Columbus, its legacy and, ultimately, all qualities attached to his name are responsible to a considerable degree for laying down the building blocks to create America as a nation with strong white supremacist undertones, present and reverberating in American society till this day. I will do so by showing concrete real life examples found in our physical world - such as cities, states, streets and universities - and its customs - for example, holidays -, and by analyzing their origins I will



compare and contrast these elements with their subsequent sociopolitical repercussions in order to prove the nuanced connection between the abstractions of culture and history.

## Representations of Columbus in Modern Society

Although the knowledge of Christopher Columbus and European colonialism as historical facts is virtually wide-spread and well-known, it is also true that the acknowledgement of these figures and events are seemingly not perceived with the same concreteness as active social and political factors in modern times. It is commonly assumed that these two elements of past and present are disconnected from each other or irrelevant in relation to one another, making the correlation between them proposed by this thesis seem more obscure than what it actually is. Throughout this paper the goal was to establish an evidence-based scholarly foundation in order to create a path to understanding how the idealized image of Christopher Columbus significantly helped in the development of American national identity and white supremacist ideologies, currently present, active and relevant in modern American society. The culmination of these facts are translated into real and observable examples across the United States, particularly places, monuments, and national holidays in honor and remembrance of Christopher Columbus; all incredibly intrinsic to the American identity and experience.

In the United States alone there are over 6,000 public spaces named after Columbus, including churches, schools, municipal buildings, roads, rivers and mountains (Shin, Kirkpatrick, D'Ignazio & So 2021). Although 36 statues of Christopher Columbus were taken down since the 1970s and defiled in the latest protests of 2020, currently there are still approximately 149 statues of Columbus standing throughout the country (Capps 2019). More than 60 cities and counties - including the national capital - were named after him, making Columbus the third most celebrated historical figure in the U.S. after Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, memorialized in some way, shape or form in all 50 states with the exception of Hawaii (Shin, Kirkpatrick, D'Ignazio & So 2021).

Data shows that homages to Christopher Columbus are numerous and amass to impressive numbers, however, amongst the thousands of possible examples, there are specific cases that spark the most interest to the study here at hand. I intend to describe and analyze different seven instances of places, monuments and celebrations which have the figure and ideals of Columbus at their core, perpetrating his image in contemporary contexts in the United States which inevitably impacts society on a smaller or larger scale. Following I will be providing the individual historical background needed to understand how these examples were named, the circumstances which they were built and created, evaluate their past relevance and reassess their value in the present time - how they changed or remained intact.

### **Washington, District of Columbia**

After the Pennsylvania Mutiny of 1783, the American Congress recognized the need to relocate the country's capital out of Philadelphia onto a safer and more permanent site (Journals of Congress 1783, 654). Ultimately, it was decided that the new capital was to be established on the Potomac River banks near Georgetown after the Residence Act of 1790 was passed, the exact location to be determined by the then president George Washington himself (Crew 1892, 87). The final spot picked by Washington was to the north of the Potomac (Crew 1892, 89), where it is found to this day. With a place finally chosen, the new federal city was then named on September 9th of 1791 by the three commissioners responsible for overseeing its construction - Thomas Johnson, Daniel Carroll and David Stuart - the capital as "the city of Washington in the Territory of Columbia" (Crew 1892, 101). Only in 1871 the capital's name officially became

known as “District of Columbia”, since the term was more popular than “territory” (The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. 2010).

These names were purposefully chosen to honor two prominent figures to the nation, symbols deserving of recognition in the eyes of the new republic in the making: George Washington, the first president of the United States, and Christopher Columbus, the man credited to have “discovered” the Americas (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 67). Although it makes sense to recognize George Washington, the general of the Revolutionary Army, nation’s first president, and all encompassing national hero, to grant Christopher Columbus the same privileged status displays a more premeditated creation of a national narrative. “Columbia” and other variants such as “Columbian” are poetic adaptations derived from the name Columbus which began to be popularized since the times of the American Revolution to distill from the image of Christopher Columbus ideas of progress, liberty, and individuality (Bartosik-Vélez 2014, 11). Therefore in order to make the construction and nomination of the new capital of the republic a defining moment of inspiration and empowerment to the United States they chose to name it Columbia.

### **Statues in honor of Christopher Columbus**

Beyond the naming of the capital, there are other embodiments of Columbus which include the most explicit form of commemoration: monuments and statues. As aforementioned, there are 149 statues of Christopher Columbus spread all across the United States and of these statues I choose to talk about five different of them located throughout the East Coast. The relevance of mentioning these instances of Columbian celebration is to demonstrate not just the permanence of his image, ideas, and values but also to demonstrate the insistence on the part of the government to keep them standing, polished and well kept.

## I. Columbus Fountain, D.C.

Commissioned by the Congress after a strong pressure from the religious order of the Knights of Columbus in 1906, the Columbus Memorial for Washington, D.C. was finally assembled in June of 1912 near the Union Station and Plaza (Smithsonian 2020). Carved in White Cherokee marble, the statue stands 45 feet tall, featuring the prominent figure of Columbus at the center, surrounded by symbols to reaffirm his power:

“[the] figure of Columbus is crowned with a globe surmounted by four eagles connected by garlands. At the base, on the right and left, are two figures, one a Native-American, typifying the New World and the other an elderly, typifying the Old World. At the foot of the statue is the prow of the ship Santa Maria. The prow extends into the upper basin of the fountain with a winged figurehead representing Discovery. Mounted on either side of the fountain are two marble lions” (IBID).

At the back of the shaft, a final touch to the memorial - an inscription, which it can be read:

“ To the Memory of Christopher Columbus  
 Whose High Faith and Indomitable Courage  
 Gave to Mankind a New World  
 Born MCDXXXVI” (IBID).

Monuments and memorials can serve a multitude of purposes, but it is always possible to break down their meaning to the basic desire to remember and eternalize figures and/or events worthy of a homage. Their construction, display and maintenance reinforces all these values internalizing them in generations of beholders. The presence of Columbus through these commemorations subconsciously indoctrinates America into the perception of its forefathers on Christopher Columbus: the explorer, the discoverer of America, bringer of civilization, bastion of

glory and freedom, and many more outdated notions. This presence leeches into the culture the more it goes unnoticed or uncared for, explaining why there is so much of it across the United States in 49 states.

## II. Columbus Circle, NY

Another example of permanence of a monumental celebration of Christopher Columbus is the Columbus Circle in New York City. Originally known as “the Circle”, this 5-way intersection in the heart of Manhattan has always been a busy heavy traffic area, however, its first design was disorganized and borderline chaotic due to the lack of an efficient traffic control system (Bruner Foundation, Inc., 2008). It was only in the late 1870s that the Circle started to undergo significant restructuring of the system which included speed limits, new signages, and a new traffic code (IBID).

Alongside these basal changes in infrastructure, the Circle also underwent architectural remodeling a few years later. In 1892, when it was first named “Columbus Circle” in dedication “of Gaetano Russo’s Christopher Columbus monument on the 400th anniversary of the explorer’s landing in the new world” (IBID). Since then, at the center of the round-about has had a 76 feet tall marble statue of Columbus looming over the circle, which today is “one of New York City’s most famous landmarks, drawing more than 16 million visitors per year, thanks to its world-famous restaurants, lounges, and 50-plus retail stores” (Related 2023).

Bustling with life, millions of people from all over New York and the world pass by an opulent statue and landmark dedicated to Columbus at the exact geographic center of one of the most important cosmopolis in the world. The symbolic value of New York City alone carries an immense weight, as it has developed itself into an international hub for culture, arts, politics, and

economy. For that reason there are a number of tokens to be associated with New York - one of them being, due to its magnitude, Christopher Columbus in the Columbus Circle. Then again, through the iconic exhibit of his image, it is fed to the people the centrality that Columbus occupies in American society. Nonetheless, these representations can't always afford the privilege of remaining untouched, as they are bound by time to be questioned and to be challenged.

### III. Statue of Christopher Columbus, PA

Located in South Philadelphia in the Marconi Plaza there is a simple monument of Christopher Columbus, erected in 1876 (Nickels 2022). Long standing for over 100 years, the statue was commissioned in the past to bolster Italian-American heritage, however, in recent years, the controversies surrounding the monument have become more intolerable. On two different occasions the statue in Marconi Plaza was defiled or was a target of vandalism.

The first occurrence was on Columbus Day - October 8th - of 2018, when the “statue of Christopher Columbus and a museum devoted to Italian immigration in Philadelphia were both vandalized with graffiti opposing Columbus on Columbus Day” where the words “‘Italian-Americans against racism’ and ‘End Columbus Day’ [were] found spray-painted on the sidewalk Monday” (NBC10 2018). The second occurrence was in 2020, when following the events of the George Floyd protests, “South Philadelphians and pro-Columbus Philadelphians [...] came to Marconi Plaza armed with baseball bats when rioters surrounded the statue in what seemed set to become a toppling ritual” (Nickels 2022). Due to the rise in potential conflict and vitriol in the population, “Mayor Jim Kenney approved the boxing up of the 146-year-old Columbus statue for possible removal to a nonpublic space, where its presence would no longer

offend” (IBID). However, “citizens mounted a court challenge [...] to have the box removed” and “[O]n December 9 [...] Pennsylvania judge Mary Hannah Leavitt ruled that the plywood box covering the statue must be removed. She stated that, if the city disagrees with the statue’s “message,” it could add a plaque explaining what is ‘more in line with the message the City wishes to convey’” (IBID).

Despite the many attempts on its existence, the statue remains. Both governmental bodies and ordinary civilians were responsible for its protection and permanence, just as much both figures of authority and regular citizens were responsible for the manifestations against the statue of Columbus. The Philadelphia case demonstrates yet another level of power that Columbus continues to hold: in the previous examples, the presence of Columbus was silent - objective and widespread, but still quiet and untouched. Here, however, it is latent - specific and concentrated, but it causes turmoil, disagreement and unrest. And this is no coincidence: “[T]he Black Lives Matter movement [...] generated awareness around symbols of white supremacy and led to more support for Indigenous issues from those outside the community” (Shin, Kirkpatrick, D’Iganizio & So 2021). Powerful and iconoclast, the BLM protests broke down social barriers and tore up many oppressive symbols from colonial times, including two more statues of Columbus in Connecticut and Maryland who did not resist the wrath of people.

#### IV. Statue of Christopher Columbus, CT

On July 4th of 2020, the statue of Christopher Columbus at Grand Street was decapitated (Pisani 2020). The statue had been in Waterbury, Connecticut since 1984 uncontested and untouched, however, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests, it became a target. Reportedly, “[P]rotesters and protectors of the monument faced off with each other on Tuesday



night [...] but there was no violence or vandalism” (IBID). It was just in the weekend, on a remarkable day - Fourth of July - that the statue was beheaded. At the time, the mayor of Waterbury, Neil O’Leary, spoke against those actions claiming to be “deeply disappointed and disturbed by the destruction inflicted upon the Christopher Columbus statue” (IBID). Also found to be deeply perturbed by the events was the president of the Waterbury chapter of UNICO - a non-profit, non-partisan Italian American service organization in the United States (UNICO National 2023). Francine Nido stated that “[I]t was very shocking and heart-wrenching thing to wake up to especially on Independence Day, the Fourth of July, we’re supposed to celebrate America and someone you know actually attacking another American basically” (Pisani 2020).

Right after the statue was found vandalized UNICO was also responsible for raising money to fix it, as well as offering a 5-thousand-dollar reward for any information leading to an arrest of suspect(s) (IBID). Eventually, a suspect was arrested and charged with first-degree criminal mischief and released on a bond of \$1,500 (O’Neil 2020). As for the statue, in December of 2020, after a city referendum the town of Waterbury determined to repair the damages to a statue of Christopher Columbus with the Waterbury’s chapter of UNICO, who raised \$8,800 to fund the restoration (AP News 2020).

Much like the Philadelphian episode, there is a sociopolitical divide in Waterbury. At the same time that there are efforts to dismantle representations of racism, genocide, repression and oppression, there are also those who will try to protect these same symbols out of deep relatedness to them. Throughout this essay it has been stated multiple times that the current image of Christopher Columbus in the United States is one that has been idealized, crafted and perfected since the dawn of America to be that of a hero, a patriot, liberator and religious icon. It is only natural that, in some capacity, people of similar backgrounds or similar ideals feel

protective over the elements they read as their cultural heritage. Nevertheless, it is also true that the people on the flipside feel just as deeply towards Columbus but in a more negative light, once that the reinforcement of his image as a hero further wounds generations of victims of his enterprise and devices.

#### V. Statue of Christopher Columbus, MD

*"He was a man of many nations"*, said Mayor Schafer during his introductory remarks on Columbus Day on October 8th of 1984 (Reagan Library 2016). The ceremony was marked by the unveiling of a statue of Christopher Columbus in the Little Italy's neighborhood, near Inner Harbor, Baltimore (IBID). It was a special occasion, not only because of the celebration put together in honor of Columbus and the local Italian-American community but also because they were in the presence of then president of the United States, Ronald Reagan, there to celebrate with them the holiday (IBID). During his opening speech, he said:

*"I'm pleased to be here in Little Italy with you to honor a man who reminds all Americans that we must always strive for the best. To push to the limits and beyond. Americans of Italian descent have given a great deal to this country; their contribution began 492 years ago when Christopher Columbus, the son of a general Weaver, set forth on a voyage of discovery that changed the world. The ideals which many successive Italian immigrants brought with them are at the very heart of America. I'm speaking of hard work, love of family, patriotism and respect for God"* (IBID).

His words were received with roaring cheers and applause, all attendees reacting with excited agreement. The newly inaugurated statue of Columbus stood 14 feet high on Italian Carrara marble, and overlooked Baltimore's Little Italy for the next 36 years, until it was brought

down and drowned in the waters of Inner Harbor in 2020 (Cox and Weil 2020). Following the iconoclast trend in many cities - such as Waterbury, Connecticut - protesters on behalf of the Black Lives Matter movement toppled the statue with ropes and threw the remaining debris into the river, a symbolic gesture of dismantling celebrations of “European colonialism, black slavery, indigenous genocide, human trafficking and rape” (IBID).

It was reported, however, that board member of The Associated Italian American Charities of Maryland, former state senator and now president of Italian American Organizations United, John A. Pica has looked for the sunken pieces of the statue to create a replica molded after the original (Amara 2022). Whereas the statue is already done, it is currently being stored in a warehouse while they look for “an appropriate home for it” (IBID). Pica said “[I]t won't go back to the city” since “[T]he same thing could occur again”, and another statue of an “anonymous Italian immigrant” will occupy the empty pedestal of Columbus Piazza, to be renamed Piazza Little Italy (IBID).

The constant effort to keep representations of Columbus alive is the reason why there is an equal constant struggle to tear it down. The memory of Christopher Columbus for “his bravery and his spirit of adventure and also his strong faith in God” (Shin, Kirkpatrick, D'Iganzio & So 2021) is only one version of the truth - one that is completely biased, incomplete and sugar coated. But it is one that the people who defend it hold on to it vigorously because of the centuries-old work to construct this idealized image. To try and challenge it, deface it or simply hold it under the light of a broader scope is considered an attack to more than Columbus, it is a direct attack to American and Italian-American identity.

Nonetheless, the endearment some nurture for Columbus and everything he represents does not stop the resentment towards him from seeping into the memories of those whose

ancestors were implicated by “his bravery,” “spirit of adventure”, and “strong faith in God”: they were murdered, enslaved, displaced, silenced, and erased. But not entirely. Despite all attempts to represent Christopher Columbus as a national hero, different pieces of commemoration in his name continue to be confronted by the bearers of such ancestry, who rise against injustice and systematic oppression by questioning these Columbian tokens, including Columbus Day.

### **Columbus Day**

The first time Columbus Day was officially proclaimed and celebrated in the United States was in the nineteenth century, in 1892 (Shafer 2021). Instituted by president Benjamin Harrison, the purpose of this new American holiday was to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, but, ultimately, it was a strained attempt to try and “help resolve a diplomatic crisis with Italy [...] after rioters in New Orleans lynched 11 Italian immigrants the year before” (IBID). After 1892 Columbus Day was celebrated on a few isolated occasions, but it was in 1934 that it became a permanent national holiday, “when Congress, after lobbying by the Knights of Columbus, authorized President Franklin D. Roosevelt to declare Oct. 12 as the designated date. In 1971, Columbus Day was made a federal holiday on the second Monday in October” (IBID).

However, it wasn’t installed without protest. Indigenous activist movements began to publicly call for a replacement of Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples’ Day in 1977 at a United Nations-sponsored conference, and since 1990 at least 13 states and more than 100 localities have adopted the new holiday (Shin, Kirkpatrick, D’Iganio & So 2021). But Columbus Day as a national holiday still exists in America. In certain states, for example Tennessee and New York, still commemorate Columbus Day in big festival style: marching bands, religious demonstrations, colorful parades and people rallied in the streets waving their

flags and shouting his name (IBID). Its inherent controversies, however, caused the celebrations of Columbus Day to further branch out and evolve into different variants other than Indigenous Peoples' Day, resulting in Italian-American Heritage and Culture Day and more (History Channel 2023).

Despite the modifications, the origins of this holiday, one way or another, remain rooted in the celebration of Columbus' landfall in the Americas, honoring and commemorating his achievements. To continue to uphold his image and use it as a source of festivity and/or pride is extremely problematic, because it continues to give power to colonial legacies institutionalized with his support that nowadays still harm, discriminate, oppress and kill members of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. Be in celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day or Italian culture and history, there needs to be a rupture between these holidays and Columbus. Recycling the date and changing its celebratory significance is not enough, as it still means that there are Columbian remnants linked to these new holidays.

## Conclusion

Christopher Columbus was in his time and still is today an influential figure, relevant both historically and politically in the context of American society and culture. His legacy is alive in the many realms that constitute the United States as a nation, due to all the symbolic values attributed to him from the birth of this country as an independent sovereign State all throughout its maintenance until present day. He was appropriated during the Revolutionary War to fit the American narrative of republicanism and liberation, thus creating a bond with settlers at the continued expense of Native Americans and Black Africans.

Columbus was never meant to be a national hero. He was meant to be a hero to the white cisgendered heterosexual males alive back in the 1700s who needed a symbol at their convenience to uphold their progressist political agenda, but also someone who wasn't too much of a liberal that would come to dismantle the system of slave trade and indigenous dispossession they so heavily relied. However, enough time has passed to perfect the discourse around Christopher Columbus that future generations of Americans came to embrace him at will as a national hero; which is no accident, but it wasn't the plan founding fathers had for Columbus. Again, it is just a matter of convenience.

Although there are still those who overlook the importance of the representations of Columbus or choose to ignore the connections between his image and modern American societal structure, it becomes clearer after the right investigation that it is undeniable that Christopher Columbus helped build America as we know it. Of course there are centuries worth of history that weren't mentioned here for the sake of argument, and it is also true that Columbus alone cannot possibly be the only actor to be blamed for the ills of the United States in discussions of race and colonial legacies. Nonetheless, he can no longer go unaccounted for. Sooner or later,

society has to recognize that 6,000 public references to Christopher Columbus are not harmless, 149 statues in his honor are not meaningless, and a national holiday for Columbus is not a mockery out of the millions of people who were murdered by his enterprise.

The celebration of Christopher Columbus is a mistake. His legacy has become a deviant intrinsic part in the construction of American nationalism, giving birth to a twisted version of the United States, sustained by an imperialist mentality which can no longer go unchecked. Christopher Columbus, the landfall, European colonialism, slavery and genocide will always be a part of history, but that does not make them irremediable. There is a need for reckoning that is long overdue, one that will not stop at a few broken pieces of marble. An end is only fathomable when there are no longer traces of his glory left behind, and when the people who suffered in the hands of the legacy of Columbus can no longer breathe.

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