

Columbus Day Tension Brews at Gracie Mansion

Alex Catti (October 06, 2017)



New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Italian Ambassador Armando Varricchio at Gracie Mansion in Manhattan for a celebration of Italian pride. However, Mayor Bill de Blasio and some of his constituents did not necessarily see eye-to-eye.

[New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio](#) [2] is of Italian descent, and he often makes reference to his Italian roots. Recently, however, Mayor de Blasio has come under fire from the Italian-American community for not protecting enough statues depicting world-renowned explorer [Christopher Columbus](#) [3]. Columbus, who was born on the Italian peninsula but sailed for Spain, has become both a symbol and a source of pride for Italian-Americans. [Italian Ambassador to the United States, Armando Varricchio](#) [4] attended, de Blasio's celebration in Manhattan and offered his thoughts. The Mayor's event highlighted the many viewpoints surrounding Christopher Columbus.



de Blasio welcomed attendees in Italian: “Benvenuti nella casa del popolo,” “Welcome to the house of the people.” He told the crowd to be proud of their roots, and he criticized the Italian-American stereotypes that exist due to “a few bad apples.” de Blasio also listed some important Italian names like [Fiorello LaGuardia](#) [5], former mayor of NYC in the 1930s and 40s. The Mayor did not comment on the parade or on the Columbus statue controversy. de Blasio previously stated that a newly appointed committee will recommend which statues should or should not be removed.

Ambassador Varricchio was next to speak. He stated that historical figures should not be judged on specific episodes, but rather, they should be judged based on what they have contributed to the world. In this particular case, Varricchio stated that Columbus was responsible for “connecting two sides of the world [and] allowing the exchange of ideas.” He also proclaimed that Italians and Italian Americans “should all be proud of this great sailor who set sail with bravery, with very poor technology at the time.”

Varricchio’s comments came on the heels of Mayor de Blasio’s decision to appoint the [Advisory Commission on City Art](#) [6]. The commission was a reaction to the [race riots in Charlottesville](#) [7], which resulted in a young woman losing her life. The Advisory Commission on City Art is currently reviewing art around New York City and will determine whether or not certain works should be removed.

In addition to the Mayor, other prominent individuals in the Italian community also voiced their opinions.

Angelo Vivolo, President of the [Columbus Citizen’s Foundation](#) [8], did not attend the celebration. He stated, “I’m in total disagreement with the mayor’s position on statues around the city and Columbus Circle. I feel it would be hypocritical of me to show up at the mayor’s affair tonight.”

In an interview with ABC 7, [Cardinal Timothy Dolan](#) [9] of the [Archdiocese of New York](#) [10] also expressed a sentiment regarding Columbus: “I’m proud of our Italian people sticking up for Columbus. He’s a great hero. Is he flawless? No. But I don’t know of too many flawless people around. I don’t know who we’d be able to name our churches after if we’re looking for perfection.”

Regarding the boycott of the Mayor’s event, de Blasio commented, “Look, it’s a free country. If they choose not to come to an event honoring our heritage that’s their choice.”

The Columbus Day Parade is scheduled for Monday, October 9, and Mayor de Blasio’s Advisory Commission on City Art will issue its statue-removal recommendations by the end of the year.

However, on the day prior to the parade, October 8, a “Wreath Laying” ceremony, performed by the National Council of Columbia Associations, will take place at Columbus Circle. According to Joseph A. Guagliardo, CEO of The Conference of Presidents of Major Italian Organizations, “now more than ever we must do two simple activities to help defend and protect Columbus Day and our historic memorial dedicated to Christopher Columbus.”

Guagliardo urges everyone to participate in both the Wreath Laying ceremony and the Columbus Day Parade in order to send a message to elected officials and potential elected officials about “[preserving] the history of our Italian-American experience.”

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[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/varricchiodeblasiopng>

[2] <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/bio.page>



[3] <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Christopher-Columbus>

[4] http://www.ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/ambasciata_washington/en/aboutus/ambasciatore.html

[5] <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fiorello-H-La-Guardia>

[6] <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/582-17/mayor-de-blasio-names-mayoral-advisory-commission-city-art-monuments-markers>

[7] <http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/14/us/charlottesville-rally-timeline-tick-tock/index.html>

[8] <https://www.columbuscitizensfd.org/>

[9] <http://cardinaldolan.org/>

[10] <https://archny.org/>