

New York State Commission for Social Justice
Summer 2017 Plenary Session
Report

I am honored to be appointed the Chairman of the New York State Commission for Social Justice. I along with our Co-chair Eleanor Jobbagy and our Executive Board have been working on the following issues.

Saving Columbus Day

This issue is spreading across America. Alaska, Nebraska and San Francisco have already voted to remove Columbus Day from its calendar of holidays and replacing it with Indigenous Peoples Day. Los Angeles will be voting on a similar motion. We have been writing to the Los Angeles City Council Members urging them to reject this proposal. Once again, we were notified that New Paltz has removing Columbus Day on their agenda to be voted on in August. This we believed was removed from their agenda last year but unfortunately we find it on the agenda again. We will do all we can to prevent this from happening.

I am getting in contact with the leaders of the Latino Community to ask them to join in this fight. As you know, the day before we march up 5th Avenue the Hispanics have a Columbus Day parade. Columbus is honored in the Caribbean where he landed in 1492. Only by joining forces with others can we be successful. We can no longer allow that small minority, who speaks the loudest, to try to erase the great achievements of Christopher Columbus.

My Brothers and Sisters, This issue is not going away. It is like a cancer spreading all across America. We have to stand firm and united in defeating any attempts to remove Columbus Day from our calendars. We have to put all our efforts in having President Trump declared Columbus Day a National Holiday. Please, if you have not signed our petition do so immediately. Take the petition attached to my report to your lodges and have every member sign it. We have over 7000 members in New York State. We need 7000 signatures.

Linda Stasi's Daily News Article

In her weekly article in the Daily News Linda Stasi referred to the Trump Administration as a mob. She called President Trump the "Don". In her article she used words like omerita and had a picture of President Trump holding the members of his team on puppet strings as shown in the Godfather movie. I praised Linda for her past articles and made it clear I was not getting involved in politics of the article but objected to the fact that she choose to use words and

pictures reminiscent of the mafia. I reminded her of the constant stereotyping of Italian Americans and told her the terminology that she used reinforces this stereotype. I then asked her to work with us in fighting negative stereotyping of our community.

Saturday Night Live

On April 8th of this year, *Saturday Night Live* actors performed a sketch in which the setting was the Lower East Side of Manhattan's Tenement Museum. The sketch, which can be viewed in its entirety at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jagg-NMz9A>, focused on a school field trip to the museum where so-called "historically trained" re-enactors (played by Louis C.K. and Kate McKinnon) embodied a Polish immigrant family living in a tenement apartment in 1913.

Depicting these Polish immigrants as bigots was bad enough, however it did not take long before the sketch descended into a barrage of nasty, vulgar, and disparaging remarks against Italian immigrants. It went far beyond the stereotypical Italian jokes that unfortunately have become acceptable in the entertainment industry. This particular *Saturday Night Live* sketch contained the following defaming dialog:

- "there are no good jobs; they are all taken by filthy grease-ball Italians"
- "meatball eating, crotch-grabbing Italians"
- "everyone knows that Italians are not even real-live people"
- (question) "Do you know how to brainwash an Italian?" (answer) "By giving him an enema!"
- (question) "Do you know why Italy is shaped like a boot? (answer) "Do you think that they could fit all that crap into a shoe?"

This was not comedy. This was a vicious attack on Italian Americans and portrayal of the Polish Community as uneducated bigots. I immediately sent letters to all the sponsors of Saturday Night Live demanding that they pull their sponsorship of SNL. On July 26, 2017 we had a meeting with the leadership of the Polish American Congress, who were equally angry at their portrayal. We are planning a telephone blitz on NBC on the same day and the same time to tie up their switchboard. We are also reaching out to ALL elected officials asking them to condemn this vicious attack. On August 22, 2017 we are going to hold a joint press conference with the Polish American Congress in front of NBC headquarters in Rockefeller Center. We are asking for a public apology from NBC, sponsors to drop out of SNL, removal of the skit from all media outlets and for NBC to send writers to sensitivity training. I will keep you informed on our progress.

Our Lady of Loretto Church in Brooklyn

This fight to prevent the church from being demolished has been going on for some time now. CSJ has invested a large amount of time on this issue. Currently, the issue is in the courts and if the injunction regarding the demolition permit is lifted the fight is over. I question our involvement in this issue. We have churches, Italian American churches, closing all over New York State. Are we going to get involved with all of them? I also question what our win is on this issue. This community is no longer an Italian American Community. The African American Community is leading the fight to save the edifice of the structure. Should they be successful in saving this structure it will be a cultural or community center for the community. We are awaiting the court's decision on this issue. If the injunction preventing the demolition remains then we will have to decide if our involvement should continue.

Positive Image

Hofstra Italian American Experience

Co-Chair Eleanor Jobbagy is handling positive image for CSJ. She has been working with the Hofstra regarding their Italian American Experience Event which will be held on September 17, 2017 at 11:00AM. Eleanor is happy to report that this year OSIA will have a time slot on the agenda at this event. Our program will highlight the Traditional Dress of Italy and we will have a membership table at this event. I am urging all our members to try to attend this event.

Positive Image Materials

We have designed a bookmark in honor of Judge Frank A. Gulotta. They are currently at the printer. We also order Hall of Fame posters and more Garibaldi bookmarks. It is important that our members make use of these positive image materials. Having them sit in our storage unit accomplishes nothing. If anyone wants any of these items get in touch with me and I will be glad to get them to you.

In closing, I want to take this time to thank all the members on the CSJ Executive Board. They are all very dedicated and hardworking individuals.

Respectfully submitted,

John A. Fratta