

December 1, 2020

Ras J. Baraka, Mayor
City of Newark City Hall
920 Broad Street
Newark, NJ 07102

Dear Mr. Mayor:

The statue of Christopher Columbus located in a public park in downtown Newark is missing. The statue's pedestal is there but the statue itself is gone.

Defacement of public and private property, examples of which exist in various locations in Newark, is bad enough, but the disappearance of an entire public monument is much worse. It is a crude attempt to obliterate history. The statue of Columbus was given to the city of Newark as a gift in 1927. Accepting that gift conferred upon the city of Newark the sacred responsibility to safeguard that statue for future generations.

While it is true that in the ensuing years Newark, in terms of its size, ethnic composition, and economic base, has changed, what has not changed is Newark's historical roots that connects Newark's past and present. That remain inviolate. The statue of Columbus is part of Newark's history. Indeed, Christopher Columbus himself is a part of history. While some consider Columbus to be an invader who wantonly decimated indigenous populations and therefore is not worthy of honor, he was nevertheless a leading figure in a vast historical process that transformed the Western Hemisphere politically, socially, culturally, and economically, bringing with it a language (Spanish) and a religion (Christianity) that are now spoken and practiced by hundreds of millions of people, including many millions of people throughout United States which includes Newark. The magnificent Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart located in Newark is part of the cultural legacy left by Columbus.

So widely acknowledged is Columbus's pivotal role in history that numerous geographical and cultural landmarks are named in his honor. These include the Republic of Columbia; Columbus, Ohio; Columbus, Georgia; the Columbia River; Columbus Circle, New York City; Columbia University, New York City; and the District of Columbia. This makes the absence of the statue of Columbus in Newark even more glaring.

Also noteworthy is that although Columbus performed his duties in the service of Spain, he was Italian. Thus, Columbus's name is linked to both Italy and Spain, two countries with whom the United States has strong cultural ties and to which millions of Americans can trace their ethnic roots. Accordingly, please do what you can to locate and restore the statue of Columbus to its rightful place on its pedestal in downtown Newark.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Phillip W. Weiss



Photographs by Phillip W. Weiss