

Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission
Statement on the removal of the Columbus Statue at Grand Park
Wednesday, October 17, 2018

A week ago, the City and County of Los Angeles celebrated the first Indigenous Peoples Day. On the heels of that celebration, the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC), together with concerned community members, have taken action to demand the immediate removal of the Columbus Statue in Downtown Los Angeles Grand Park.

The LANAIC requests that the statue is deaccessioned (removed) from the Los Angeles County Civic Art Collection. According to the Los Angeles County Arts Commission Civic Arts Procedures, if an artwork has received consistent adverse public reaction for a period of five or more consecutive years, it warrants the process of deaccessioning. Indigenous community members have been protesting the statue through direct action, education, and arts activism for at minimum 25 years.

The County has a responsibility to ensure its civic arts collection is not comprised of artworks that exalt a historical figure that is a proven murderer and slave trader, and causes psychological harm to Native American children and youth.

The American Psychological Association and other professional organizations have conducted studies on the effects of exposure to demeaning and diminishing symbols, images and messages – such as race-based mascots, holidays such as Columbus Day, and physical symbols – and have found that this exposure severely erodes Native American children and youth self-worth and self-image.

Native youth suffer amongst the worst outcomes of all youth across the country, and have a suicide rate three times the national average. It is irresponsible for any municipality to display harmful symbols that damage the psychological health of children and youth.

Further, the LANAIC requests that this action be contextualized within a greater understanding and recognition of the history of Los Angeles and California Native Nations. LANAIC recognizes and acknowledges the Yaavitam, the first people of this ancestral and unceded territory of Yaanga that we now know as downtown Los Angeles; honors their elders, past and present, and the Yaavitam descendants who are part of the Gabrieleño Tongva and the Fernandeño Tataviam Nations.

The State of California Assembly Joint Resolution No. 42 relative to indigenous peoples, calls for “increased awareness, sensitivity, and respect for issues of sovereignty related to the heritage of Native Americans and indigenous peoples,” in its adoption of the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

AJR No. 42 additionally recognized that, “The “Doctrine of Discovery,” emanating from the European colonization after 1492 of the continents later to be known as the Americas, has had profound and lasting negative effects on the cultures and populations of the indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas.”

Based on these reasons and more, the LANAIC has requested that the statue is immediately removed and placed in storage until the process of deaccessioning takes place. The LANAIC also requests that the process of deaccessioning is managed in an efficient, transparent and timely matter.

Lastly, the LANAIC requests an assessment of how the Los Angeles County Arts Commission is fulfilling its responsibility to the largest Indigenous community in the United States, including but not limited to representation on the commission, and resource support for Indigenous arts programming, internships, performances, and public artworks.

Statement Approved by the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission on October 16, 2018