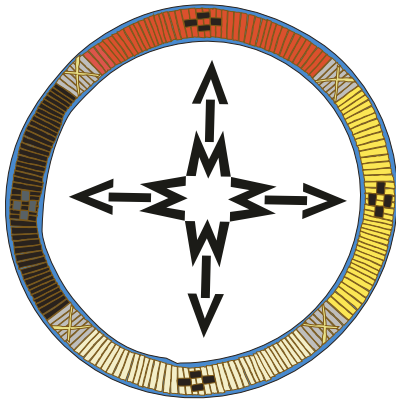


AMERICAN INDIAN MOVEMENT of Colorado



Spirituality • Self-Determination • Solidarity • Sobriety

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24 June 2020

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REMOVE RACIST ANTI-INDIGENOUS MOMUMENTS FROM DENVER NOW!

Mayor Hancock and Denver City Council,

To begin this communication, we acknowledge the land and the total environment upon which we live, and we acknowledge that we are issuing this statement in the traditional territories of the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Ute, Lakota, Kiowa, Comanche, and other indigenous peoples and nations who have lived in relationship to these lands, waters and other relatives from time immemorial. We honor and respect the traditional peoples of this land and we support every effort to achieve justice for them to restore their right to complete and unmolested right to political, economic and cultural self-determination, which has been obstructed through murder, theft and dispossession under the policy and practices of the invader United States and its proxies.

The American Indian Movement of Colorado is one of the longest, continually operating, indigenous-led organizations in the City of Denver and the State of Colorado. Colorado AIM is unapologetic in its defense of Native people, and the assertion of our right to dignity, justice and self-determination. Mayor Hancock, we know that you are aware of this because for years prior to becoming mayor you marched with us for racial justice and to abolish the racist Columbus Day holiday in Colorado. In that spirit we transmit the following message about state-sponsored, anti-Indian monuments and practices in the City of Denver. We insist that you use your authority to remedy these insults immediately.

Today marks the 109th anniversary of the unveiling of the “Pioneer Monument” at the corner of Colfax Avenue and Broadway Street and topped with the Indian-murderer Kit Carson, and the 50th anniversary of the dedication of the “Christopher Columbus” statue at the north end of Civic Center Park. Both of these state-sanctioned monuments located in Denver convey the racist, anti-Indian message of the triumph of “civilization over barbarism,”¹ and “stand as a silent witness in the advance of civilization in the West.”² The Columbus Statue proclaims Columbus to be “THE DISCOVERER OF AMERICA,” where “A NEW CIVILIZATION WAS BORN: A NEW NATION WAS TO RISE...TO BECOME THE BIRTHPLACE OF DEMOCRACY. IT WAS GOD’S COUNTRY.” Both monuments erase the existence and histories of indigenous peoples and nations, and celebrate the racist and white supremacists ideologies of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery³ and Manifest Destiny⁴ the foundational cornerstones in U.S. law and policy for European invasion and subsequent genocide against indigenous peoples⁵. We demand that these racist, anti-Indigenous monuments be removed immediately, and that a formal review be conducted of other ways in which the City of Denver perpetuates racism against Native people.

For over forty years the American Indian Movement of Colorado has called for the removal of anti-Native statues and monuments, place/street names, school mascots, holidays, school curricula, and other symbols of white supremacy and domination. In 1990 we called on Mayor Federico Peña to remove the Columbus Statue from Civic Center Park and to repudiate Columbus Day and the Columbus Day Parade. He refused. Similarly, in 1991 and 1992 we asked Mayor Wellington Webb to do the same. In 2004-5 we made the same request of Mayor John Hickenlooper. All refused. All said that the removal of the statues and monuments would be divisive, and would pit one ethnic community against another. In their willful blindness, they

¹ The purpose of the Pioneer Monument was to celebrate “the irrepressible conflict between civilization and barbarism,” *Sons of Colorado*, April 1907, p. 32. The official organ of the Society of the Sons of Colorado, open to “all white males of good moral character who were residents of the Territory of Colorado prior to August 1, 1876. [statehood] *** “It shall be the object of this Society to perpetuate the memories and
² “A Day with the Pioneers,” *The Trail* [official publication of the Society of the Sons of Colorado], vol. IV, no. 2, July, 1911, p. 10.

³ See, Newcomb, Steven T. *Pagans in The Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Discovery*. (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008). Miller, Robert J. and Jacinta Ruru. *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies*. (NY: Oxford U. Press, 2012). *United Nations Preliminary study of the impact on indigenous peoples of the international legal construct known as the Doctrine of Discovery*. E/C.19/2010/13. April 2010.

⁴ Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. Drinnon, Richard. *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1980.

⁵ The crimes of the Indian-murderer Christopher “Kit” Carson, including the slaughter of hundreds of Maidu and Wintu Indians in 1846, and the 1864 forced march of Apache and Diné (Navajo) peoples to the concentration camp at Bosque Redondo, NM is well known. Roberts, David. *A Newer World: Kit Carson, John C. Fremont, and the Claiming of the American West*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

refused to acknowledge that the erection, maintenance and retention of the monuments had already pitted communities against one another. Now, Mayor Hancock and Council, history has chosen you to decide whether you stand on the side of racism or ant-racism in this pivotal moment.

Now, in this new era of awakening racial justice and action, the American Indian Movement of Colorado and our allies are no longer willing to wait for the deliverance of historical honesty and racial justice. **We are insisting that these two monuments, which are blatantly racist and anti-Indian, must be removed immediately.** We also endorse the longstanding demand for the city to change the name of Columbus Park on 38th Avenue to La Raza Park. The time for genteel discussions and stalling, investigative commissions has passed. The City of Denver and the State of Colorado are being called to account for their prolonged history of racism, particularly anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. Just as honors to the Ku Klux Klan member and former mayor Ben Stapleton had to be removed, so too must Columbus and Kit Carson and other Indian-killing icons be stripped of their government-supported legitimacy.

Colorado AIM has stood, and continues to stand shoulder to shoulder, with black liberation struggles from the Poor People's March to the Black Panther Party to the All-African People's Revolutionary Party, and the Nation of Islam to the Movement for Black Lives. Colorado AIM acknowledges and recognizes the intimate and inseparable connection between the operation of anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity in the invader-state project that is the United States. In no way do we intend this letter to diminish or the lesson the demands of Black Lives Matter and other organizations who are insisting on an end to white supremacy, the abolition of the prison industrial complex, and the defunding of the police. We know that the "two original sins" of this invader state: genocide and slavery, are two sides of the same oppressive hand. We seek to force America to redress both its shameful history of anti-blackness and anti-indigeneity.

Space does not allow us to go into elaborate detail here about the irrefutable evidence of invasion and genocide, and about how the two monuments mentioned above celebrate and perpetuate ongoing crimes against Native people in Denver, and across the Americas. Colorado AIM is ready and willing to provide professional, scholarly in-service workshops on the history of anti-Indigenous law, policy and practices to the mayor and his staff and to Council and its staff. These workshops will not only outline the history of anti-indigeneity, but will provide specific remedies and recommendations to the City. These workshops are not, however, substitutes for immediate action that the city must take to indicate its commitment to anti-racism and to remedial action.

Colorado AIM and its allies insist that the City of Denver must remove both the Columbus plaque from the Columbus Statue in Civic Center Park, and remove the Pioneer Monument and Fountain at Colfax and Broadway **by two weeks from today, Wednesday, July 8th, 2020.** There can be no question that both monuments reflect racist and destructive messages to indigenous peoples and do not serve any redeeming social value. Failure of the City to remove these statues will be considered another in a continuing line of attacks and insults against Native people. One truism that we know is that when politicians have the will to move they can, when not, they stall.

We submit this correspondence solely on behalf of the American Indian Movement of Colorado. Other Native groups and allies may choose to join us in this effort, that is their prerogative. We do not claim to speak on behalf of all Native people, but we do represent those Native people who refuse any longer to be insulted or subordinated in our own homeland. We give respect to those who respect us, but we will resist those who seek continued benefit from the invasion, theft and destruction of our territories, our cultures and our future generations. We await your reply to this communication.

For all our relations,
The American Indian Movement of Colorado

•Leadership Council
Sky Roosevelt-Morris
(White Mountain Apache/Shawnee)
Spokesperson

•Elder's Council
Dr. Tink Tinker
(wazhazhe/Osage)
Spokesperson

•Youth Council
Aniwna Francis
(Diné/Hopi)
Spokesperson