

Take down 'racist' Theodore Roosevelt statue, activists tell New York museum

Protesters gather at the American Museum of Natural History to demand the removal of the statue and issue an urgent call to rename Columbus Day

Mazin Sidahmed OCT 11



Theodore Roosevelt campaigns for president in 1904. 'The statue is seen as an affront to all who pass it on entering the museum, but especially to African and Native Americans.' Photograph: AP

Hundreds of activists gathered at the American Museum of Natural History on Monday to take down the "racist" statue of Theodore Roosevelt and an urgent call to rename Columbus Day.

More than 200 people cheered outside the museum as activists covered the statue of Roosevelt on horseback flanked by an African American and Native American on either side and demanded it be ultimately removed.

"A stark embodiment of the white supremacy that Roosevelt himself espoused and promoted," the group explained in a statement. "The statue is seen as an affront to all who pass it on entering the museum, but especially to African and Native Americans."

Activists from the groups NYC Stands with Standing Rock and Decolonize This

Place organized the protest to draw attention to the museum's encouragement of racist tropes, and implored New York City to rename Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day.

Columbus Day controversially commemorates Christopher Columbus reportedly arriving in the Americas on 12 October 1492. Columbus is believed to have brutally enslaved the indigenous people upon his arrival and imposed harsh punishments, including torture. His arrival also ushered in European settlers to the Americas who waged wars against Native Americans and brought diseases with them that had a lasting devastating effect.

There is growing movement to change the name of Columbus Day. In the past year cities in 10 different states have moved to change the name to Indigenous People's Day, the largest being in Phoenix, Arizona. However, opposition remains in places like Oklahoma City, and Cincinnati.

In New York, the Columbus Day Parade attracted 35,000 marchers and many more viewers. It's considered a celebration of Italian heritage given Columbus was born near Genoa.

"This is Indigenous People's Day," said Kandia Crazy Horse, a country singer who is a member of the Pamunkey tribe of Virginia. "In celebrating this, we're trying to see that New York City and the rest of Turtle Island [North America] ratifies Indigenous People's Day as an ... annual event that's counter to the Christopher Columbus narrative and Columbus Day."

Amin Husain, an artist and organizer with Decolonize This Place, said they had been working on Monday's protest for about three weeks. He said it was important to debunk what was being shown in the museum.



Anti-Columbus Day protest

“This is the most coveted museum,” said Husain. “I think that people are ignorant. It’s a white supremacist society. It doesn’t seem like it’s important [renaming the day] but it is super important” for oppressed people.

The group started with a 10-stop tour of the museum in which they highlighted a variety of exhibits they felt were racist and misrepresentative, which ranged from how the representation of Africans reinforces negative stereotypes to the exoticizing of Islam in the Hall of Islam exhibit. “Where is the Hall of Christendom?” one of the tour guides asked.

“It’s just to echo what this is, it’s really a hall of white supremacy, that’s what this is,” said Nitasha Dhillon, one of the organizers.

At the end of the tour in the hall, activists began chanting, “Respect! Remove! Rename!” before swarming around the large dinosaur skeletons in the lobby with signs that read, “DECOLONIZE THIS MUSEUM”, “ABOLISH WHITE SUPREMACY” and “BLACK LIVES MATTER”.



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The scene outside of @AMNH today as #DecolonizeThisPlace's anti-#ColumbusDay tour covered the Teddy Roosevelt statue. (pic: @hoods4justice)

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“Teddy Roosevelt’s nature was not empty wilderness. It was and is indigenous land,” one reader said as the organizers took turns reading from a speech. “Taken through violence. Just like Columbus who came to enslave. To take their gold and their bodies and their souls.”

Musicians played songs from the Lenape tribe, whose territory the city sits on, and activists walked through the crowd with burning sage.

Outside about 25 police officers arrived as the group attempted to shield Roosevelt’s statue with a green material, but there were no arrests.