



## In Dishonor of Columbus Day, Protesters Shroud Obscenely Racist Statue at AMNH

By Nick Pinto

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Jessica Lehrman for the Village Voice

Several hundred activists draped a parachute over a statue of Teddy Roosevelt outside the American Museum of Natural History yesterday afternoon to protest the statue's white supremacist iconography and the racist, 19th-century attitudes that still pervade the museum behind it.

The 10-foot tall 1939 statue depicts Teddy Roosevelt, heroic astride a horse, loyally flanked on one side by an indigenous man in a feathered head-dress and on the other by an African man.

"This statue is all about hierarchy and division," said Luis Ramos, a lifelong New Yorker who identifies as a Taíno, one of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. "Kids who come to this museum every day have to walk under this statue — think about the message that sends. It's time for it to come down."

New York City government offices were closed yesterday in honor of Columbus Day, which celebrates a slaver and murderer who cut off people's hands if they didn't bring him enough gold. That New York City still shuts down and holds a parade very year for this world-class genocidaire is probably attributable in equal parts to the general cowardice and convictionlessness of New York's politicians worried about the Italian-American vote and the inexplicable failure of said demographic to identify a countryman more worthy of celebration than this bloody sociopath.

But people keep trying. Around the country, local governments including those of Denver, Phoenix, Spokane, Eugene, and the state of Vermont have all rejected Columbus Day in recent years in favor of Indigenous People's Day. In New York, activists say they've been advised by City Council members that while celebrating



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an Indigenous People's holiday on some other day might be an achievable goal, replacing Columbus Day is a political non-starter.

Yesterday's action was intended to challenge that assumption, and to call attention to the way some of the city's institutions and landmarks reinforce the kind of racist ideologies that keep Columbus Day a going concern in the first place.

The protest began with several hundred protesters assembling in the museum's Theodore Roosevelt Rotunda, under the looming fossilized skeletons of a Barosaurus and an Allosaurus. The group then toured the second floor of the museum, pausing at intervals to point out the ways in which the displays reflect the racist assumptions that date back to the museum's early days. Along with its displays of birds, beasts, plants, minerals and stars, the museum also features exhibits on Asian Peoples, African Peoples, Islam, and Northwest Coast Indians. What sort of division of knowledge, protesters asked, categorizes non-European cultures with primates and meteorites? "Where is the hall of Christendom?" protesters asked as they moved through the museum, with guards warily looking on. "Where is the Hall of European Peoples?"

After the tour, the protesters filed back out and onto the front steps of the museum, which are dominated by the statue. A team of activists who had been waiting across the street in Central Park approached the statue and attempted, by means of long aluminum poles, to shroud it in a dark parachute. The poles weren't quite long enough to cover Roosevelt himself, but after some effort, and despite the half-hearted efforts of some police officers to stop them, the would-be Christos managed to get much of the statue under cover.

The statue "is an affront to all who pass it on entering the museum, but especially to African and Native Americans," Kandia Crazy Horse, a musician and activist (and former Village Voice writer) told onlookers. "A monument that appears to glorify racial hierarchies should be retired from public view. We demand that City Council members vote to remove this monument to racial conquest."



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Along with the removal of the statue, protesters also demanded that the museum reconsider “the bogus racial classification that assigned colonized peoples to the domain of Nature here and Europeans to the realm of Culture, across the park in the Met,” and asked that human remains and sacred objects in the museum’s collection be returned to indigenous people. They also demanded that the Mayor and City Council rename Columbus Day as Indigenous People’s Day.

The Voice left a message seeking comment from American Museum of Natural History. We’ll update this post if we hear back.

This isn’t the first time indigenous activists have called attention to the statue. In 1971, six Native American protesters were arrested for splashing the statue with red paint. “If you’ve seen the statue,” a local representative of the National Indian Youth Council told the New York Times afterwards, “you know why.”