

BLACK LIVES MATTER ON INDIGENOUS LAND

Solidarity in Sacramento



by
Vanessa Esquivido
and
Maya Esquivido
and
Morning Star
Gali

THE YEAR 2020 IS NO DOUBT ONE OF THE HARDEST, as the world endures a global pandemic and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) fight for liberation. Since the public lynching of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and of several others, including Breanna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, a vibration has rippled throughout the world in protest. In this time

of social unrest, California Indian communities are standing in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) in Sacramento and beyond. We as a nation witnessed the outcries of historical injustices that continually target BIPOC communities. For example, people in Sacramento are calling for the Sacramento Police Department (SacPD) to be held accountable for the death of numerous Black individuals, including the highly publicized murder of Stephon Clark, whose life was stolen in the backyard of his grandparents' South Sacramento home in 2018.

Sacramento is in the traditional homelands of the Miwok, Maidu, and Nisenan peoples. It is also a place of

immense activism, including the current protesting centralized at Cesar Chavez Park in downtown Sacramento. Organizations leading the way and mobilizing include the Movement for Black Lives and Black Lives Matter Sacramento, Sacramento LGBT Center, Anti Police-Terror Project Sacramento (AFTP), Showing Up for Racial Justice Sacramento (SURJ-S), and countless others, including many generations and decades of local Native organizing efforts. Through this article we want to recognize the labor of and momentum created by the global movement for Black lives. Indigenous peoples continue to benefit from the BLM movement, and we are not erasing generations of



▶ *Right, top to bottom:*
 Albert Titman Sr. (Miwuk) speaks at Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of Marc Dadigan.

Following the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in Minneapolis, demonstrations erupted across the world, including in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of Marc Dadigan.

◀ *Left, top to bottom:*
 Maya Esquivido (Nor Rel Muk Wintu/Hupa) at a demonstration in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of Vanessa Esquivido.

Morning Star Gali (Ahjumawi Band of Pit River) in front of the removed John Sutter statue in Sacramento. Photo courtesy of Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie.

Native activism and work. We are finally seeing movement on issues that have remained stagnant for years, such as the removal of colonial statues, the name change of a racist football team, and reignited conversations around place names. Addressing the anti-blackness within our own Native communities is work we still need to do. Accepting and hearing our Black Indigenous relatives' experience of racism within our own families is how we can start having those conversations.

BRIEF SACRAMENTO HISTORY

Growing up we often learn about settlers as “heroes,” their names splattered across our cities, freeway exits, and hospitals, becoming a part of our everyday lives. Sacramento is no different. Learning the ahistorical account of John A. Sutter as a “founder” of present-day Sacramento silences the truth of the Miwok, Maidu, and Nisenan peoples by erasing their epistemologies and place names for this valley. Sutter's Fort, still standing in downtown Sacramento, is a continued memorialization to white settlers and a site of significant historical trauma for our Native community. Sutter's horrific accounts of enslavement of and violent attacks on our Native ancestors are conveniently left out as a part of settlers' moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012).

It has been over a year since June 18, 2019, when California Governor Gavin Newsom apologized for the state-sanctioned genocide of California Indian peoples. This was a stunning difference from the first governor of California in the 1850s, Peter Burnett, who called for a “war of extermination [that] will continue between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct” (Lindsay 2012, 231). Meaningful apologies need to have action behind them. The Sacramento Native community purposely held the De-Columbus event one year later, on the anniversary of the apology, and will continue to push for tangible

actions: for example, moving forward with building the California Indian Heritage Center (CIHC), as promised over twenty years ago.

REPRESENTATION AND RE-NAMING

The word Sacramento, which means “most holy sacrament,” is loaded with a deep connection to Catholicism and the missionization and colonization of California, always represented as positive within our education system. Re-naming places is an important aspect of a colonizing project; therefore we see this throughout the state and nation. Natives continue to fight for accurate portrayals and new curriculum that includes Natives histories. This is important because an idealized, romanticized, white-washed history is often held as fact. Hence, many of us protesting in Sacramento continue to be met with backlash and ill-informed beliefs about these settlers when their statues are removed.

The momentum from the BLM project has forced us to revisit meaningful conversations surrounding the changing of harmful place names. These harmful place names are not unique to the Sacramento region, but appear across the US. Not only do we see Sutter's name littered across the city, we also bear witness to derogatory place names like [S-word] Valley, which is in the traditional homelands of the Washoe Tribe. (We have chosen not to name these slurs in this article.) While we continue to fight racial slurs in place names, we also continue to fight for the removal of Native people as mascots. Misrepresentation is unfortunately a dominant narrative across the state. In 2015, the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center “analyzed 7,169 California Public K-8 schools and identified 78 mascots for a statewide total of 146 public schools with American Indian mascots.” As the BLM movement has propelled the renaming of the Washington NFL team, we hope to see continued activism and

push for the change of dehumanization of Native peoples as mascots.

DE-SUTTER: JUNE 15, 2020

As Sutter is well glorified throughout the Sacramento Valley area, it was important that we first address the historical and contemporary references and continued celebration of Sutter through schools, street names, hospitals, and hotels. The de-Sutter community conversation event was planned for June 16. One day before the community event, we received notice that the statue near the entrance of the Sutter hospital was being removed; hospital officials cited the removal as a “public safety issue.”

“To our people, John Sutter is a name that prompts anger and sadness in many, as he was the architect of such destruction against our people.... His name will always be a painful part of our people's memory but this removal and those to follow will provide our people with the much-needed acknowledgement of the State's and Nation's past indiscretions that continue to affect our people today.”

—Jesus Tarango, Chairman, Wilton Rancheria

On June 16, Morning Star Gali (Pit River) organized an event to celebrate the removal of Sutter's statue, inviting the Native community to participate and speak about the injustices we have faced for generations. The opening of the celebration began with traditional songs and an opening prayer by tribal elder Albert Titman Sr. (Miwok/Pit River). This significant event allowed a safe space to speak our truths and take a collective step forward in community healing.

“They put us on reservations and rancherias in hopes that we would die.... In hopes that we would no longer exist. They stripped us of our language, they tried to take our language.

They tried to take our prayer. They tried to take our smudge. They tried to take all these things along with our rights to be human beings...and here we are again today. Standing with our Black brothers. With our Brown brothers. They try to divide us by color. They say 'you're Black, you're Brown.' But we know the truth about who we are. We know who we are."

—Albert Titman Sr., Black and Brown Shut it Down event, June 7, 2020

DE-SERRA: JULY 4, 2020

After the APTP's peaceful 4th of You Lie: De-Columbus Sacramento protest on July 4, 2020, the crowd's unrest continued to grow. We want to acknowledge that the majority of the protests in Sacramento have been peaceful and filled with a beautiful sense of community, but we also have the right to be angry. The media's portrayal of angry protestors is a false narrative. Don't get us wrong, we are mad—but we want and need change.

"My positionality as a Native American womxn, community member, and a mother to Native children drives my desire to create change and to expose the colonial dynamics of silencing Indigenous presence to further settler claims to land and Indigenous dispossession."

—Maya Esquivido (Wintu/Hupa)

Junipero Serra is again revered as this "savior" of Indigenous peoples who brought missionization to California, and was even canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 2015. And again, California Indians work hard to dispel these myths and re-write and re-right this history of forced colonization. The first removals of Serra statues were in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco and Father Serra Park in Los Angeles, both toppled on June 19, 2020—Juneteenth. On the Fourth of July, a de-Serra statue

removal happened outside of the California state capitol. We heard this was a community removal and want to be careful as there are ongoing investigations. This is a good time to remind people that we need to be cautious of what we say and post on social media—police use these platforms to target our community members for arrest. We continue to see the removal of Junipero Serra statues across the state; on July 23, Ventura County removed their statue of Serra.

These are "monuments to racism. These are monuments to genocide. And it's time for them to come down."

—Morning Star Gali to *KQED*, July 7, 2020

DE-COLUMBUS: JULY 7, 2020

On the morning of July 7, 2020, local Sacramento activists began posting on social media, announcing the removal of the Queen Isabella and Christopher Columbus statue. This rang loudly through the Native community, as the fight to remove this statue had been ongoing since the 1970s. Statue removals evoke a public unsettling of white supremacy, one that is a small part of decolonization and often met with settler resistance. The removal of Columbus was no different: Native supporters of removal were met by a group of Christians in opposition, angry about the uprooting of the Serra statue only three days prior. They continued to advocate for Serra and Columbus: that they brought faith and saved the Indigenous people of California. An interesting juxtaposition of faith and Indigenous history stood here, an old conflict almost replaying in front of the propped-up fence, not separating the groups from each other but from the removal of the state. Native protesters began singing the "Woman Warrior Song" in support of the statue removal to drown out the Christian hymns next to us.

"This moment right here, this moment is for us. This is for our ancestors, this is for my daughter. My daughter is six years old and she will know, she will know that these are murderers."

—Vanessa Esquivido to *CapRadio*, July 7, 2020

SOLIDARITY NOT APPROPRIATION

As Black, Brown, and Indigenous folk stand in unity alongside the BLM movement, it is vital to recognize our shared history and the significance of standing in solidarity. The BLM movement and project #BlackLivesMatter were created in 2013 by three queer Black womxn—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—as a response to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer. Seeking justice and demanding accountability, the BLM movement has continued to grow and become unavoidably visible. The Black Trans Lives Matter (BTLM) project has also demanded that their voice be heard. Black LGBTQIA+ people are among the most targeted for violent attacks and it is imperative to recognize the work they have done for the BLM movement. In Sacramento, we have witnessed several events that center LGBTQIA+ Black and Indigenous voices. The BLM and BTLM protests are pivotal, calling attention to social inequality, systemic racism, and other vast injustices created and reinforced through white supremacy.

Restoring Justice for Indigenous Peoples (RJIP), #NativeJusticeNow, is an organization dedicated to serving California Indigenous people in the carceral system. Project director Morning Star Gali works closely with the Native communities affected by mass incarceration.

"We the Indigenous People of this Land, stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter... We recognize that the War on Black People is rooted in slavery, which enabled the accumulation

of wealth and power needed for the genocide of Native Americans, the founding of the United States, and the colonization of countries throughout the world. The suffering and exploitation that plagues all of our communities is rooted in this history of anti-black racism for the development of capitalism.”

—RJIP, “#BLACKLIVESMATTER Solidarity Statement”

Indigenous voices and histories are often written out of the narrative, overlooked, or purposefully silenced. This is a story that Black folx and Afro-Indigenous communities face too. Essentially, this is not a comparison of oppression(s) but a reckoning of the truth. We need to acknowledge the Afro-Indigenous peoples in our community and the challenges they face holding this space of intersectionality. Anti-blackness is the product of colonialism and it continues to perpetuate a racial hierarchy and reinforces the power dynamic of white supremacy. It is our individual and collective responsibility to address anti-blackness within Indigenous communities and within ourselves.

This can start with addressing the harm perpetuated by the term “Native Lives Matter.” Although the phrase has good intentions, it is offensive. BLM is not an exclusion, rather a call for inclusion.

“In this moment, we as Indigenous people need to stand in solidarity with our allies in the Black community and our Afro-Indigenous community as they fight for liberation, equality, and equity; as justice for one is justice for all.”

—Maya Esquivido

CALL TO ACTION

This is not an exhaustive list, rather a short list of suggested initial actions:

1. Conversations: If any part of this article makes you uncomfortable, we ask you to investigate why. We encourage you to do your own research on these topics, reach out, have these tough conversations with family and friends.

2. Allyship, Not Appropriation: Recognize appropriation around Native issues but also how we as Native people can appropriate cultures and move-

ments as well. Be cognizant of the harm to Black communities when we use the phrase “Native Lives Matter”; instead, say “Native Justice Now.” Supporting BLM does not take away from Indigenous solidarity—it strengthens, not weakens.

3. Participating: There are plenty of wonderful organizations already doing this work. Seek them out, show up to their events when you can, donate money, offer rides, and/or repost their pages. Sign petitions when you can.

4. Letter writing: Write to your local elected officials about your stance on issues. Demand justice for Breonna Taylor. *Learn more:* www.untilfreedom.com/breonnataylor.

5. Support: Organizations like Justice Teams Network provide many resources for on-the-ground information. Support local calls for statue removal. *Learn more:* www.justiceteams.org.

6. Know your rights: The activism that you do is highly important; take care of yourself and know your rights when police stop, question, raid, etc., you. *Learn more:* www.berkeleycopwatch.org/know-your-rights.

References

Black Lives Matter. “Herstory.” Accessed August 22, 2020. blacklivesmatter.com/herstory.

California Indian Heritage Center Foundation. Accessed August 22, 2020. www.cihcfoundation.org.

California State Capitol Museum. “Queen Isabella: A Gift of Generosity and Controversy.” Accessed August 22, 2020. www.capitolmuseum.ca.gov/exhibits-and-collections/queen-isabella.

Kuruvilla, Carol. “Native Americans in California Are Toppling Statues of this Catholic Saint.” *HuffPost*, June 26, 2020, updated June 29, 2020. www.huffpost.com/entry/junipero-serra-statue-protests-catholic_n_5ef4b611c5b66c3126832dff.

Lindsay, Brendan. *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846–1873*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012.

Nixon, Andrew, and Kris Vera-Phillips. “Christopher Columbus Statue Removed from California State Capitol Rotunda.” *CapRadio*, July 7, 2020. www.capradio.org/articles/2020/07/07/christopher-columbus-statue-removed-from-california-state-capitol-rotunda.

Pérez, Ana Cecilia. “As Non-Black POC, We Need to Address Anti-Blackness.” *Yes!*, July 6, 2020. www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/07/06/non-black-poc-anti-blackness.

Proudfit, Joely. “Cultural Appropriation in California Public K–12 Schools: Tribal Mascots and Stereotypes.” California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, California State University San Marcos, 2015. www.csusm.edu/cicsc/projects/gis-projects.html.

Restoring Justice for Indigenous Peoples. “#BLACKLIVESMATTER Solidarity Statement.” Accessed August 22, 2020. www.indigenousjustice.org/solidarity.

Severn, Carly. “‘How Do We Heal?’ Toppling the Myth of Junípero Serra.” *KQED*, July 7, 2020. www.kqed.org/news/11826151/how-do-we-heal-toppling-the-myth-of-junipero-serra.

SURJ Sacramento. Accessed August 22, 2020. www.surjsacramento.org.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.