



## **The North American Indian Center of Boston**

October 14, 2020

BOSTON ART COMMISSION  
1 City Hall  
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BAC Chief, Chair, Vice-Chair, AND Members:

Chinua Achebe reminds us of the African proverb that, "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." (1) In an interview with CBS News, African academic and philosopher Professor Achille Mbembe says, "The debate over statues is always a debate about more than statues. The transformation of the curriculum so that it reflects who we are, where we come from, where we are struggling and where we want to go. In the case of the ongoing debates in the U.S., in the U.K. and Germany, in France and elsewhere the key issues are, of course, those of racial justice." (2) Russell Rickford asserts that, "Good history, like a good historian is never inert. It is dynamic. Restive. Social upheaval is its author, not its adversary. History belongs in the scrum of politics because historical narratives are not merely truth claims; they are assertions of power." Rickford continues, "By attacking statues and other emblems of oppression, the demonstrators are fashioning a vernacular counter-history from the depths of alienation and exploitation. They are renouncing the cultural edifice of domination. They are reclaiming history. And in so doing, they may help stimulate a greater intellectual and social awakening." (3) And so, demonstrators, protestors, and protectors who are labeled as "vandals" and "terrorists" specifically within the Boston Art Commission's (BAC) public hearing process relative to the fate of the Christopher Columbus statue, once on public display in the North End; these are the historians of the lions. The actions of the hunter, be it Christopher Columbus or Arthur Stivaletta are then not glorified rather they are called out as corrupt, pillaging, racist, white supremacist atrocities.

The North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB), United American Indians of New England (UAINEN), and Indigenous Peoples Day MA (IPDMA) submit this

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testimony in opposition of the restoration and public display of the statue of Christopher Columbus, commissioned in 1979 by Arthur Stivaletta and never formally entered into the City of Boston's public art inventory. We further call for the BAC to reconsider it's recommendation that the pedestal be treated as a separate piece with indefinite maintenance in public space. Furthermore, it is the position of NAICOB, UAINE, and IPDMA that Mayor Walsh's determination of a replacement piece is premature, ill-informed, and undermining of the public process. It is the determination of Mayor Walsh that a replacement should "highlight the contributions of the North End Italian immigrant community" and that this was "the original intent of the statue when it was put up over 40 years ago." (4) We further call upon City Councilor Lydia Edwards who deemed the Mayor's determination as a "reasonable solution" to clarify that the process should "be led by those in the community, especially Italian-Americans." (5) Such clarification is needed as Councilor Edwards' comments privileging Italian-Americans above all others can be construed as discriminatory.

As stated in public testimony by NAICOB President of the Board of Directors Jean-Luc Pierite, our organization was designated (6) as the liaison between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and residents who are members of tribes which have historical government-to-government relationships with the state yet are now outside of the current borders. The scope of these relations are regional, national, and international as tribes, Indigenous nations, and confederacies were displaced through acts of war, epidemics, and theft of unceded territory by colonists and citizens. This executive order is upheld by state case law. (7) It is pursuant to the duties and obligations in that executive order that NAICOB deliver the attached Community Resolution No. NAA-B20-10-008, "Taino Opposition to Public Display of Columbus Statues" voted, passed, and signed by the political and spiritual leadership of Taino Nation Puerto Rico. This sovereign entity remains on traditional, ancestral land on the island which is distinct from the United Confederation of Taino Peoples. The opposition is rooted in acts inclusive of but not limited to, "hunting by dogs, mass rape of adults and children, mass hangings, mass decapitations, mass impalement, forced drownings, forced suicides, forced starvation, all manner of dismemberments, and smashing of infant children's heads against rocks." Kasike Roberto Múkaro Borrero, United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP), says of a 360 feet tall Columbus statue in Arecibo, Puerto Rico that, "The statue is really a tribute to genocide, colonialism,



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religious intolerance, racism, gender violence, and white supremacy." Kasike Borrero continues that neither Hurricane Maria, earthquakes, nor COVID-19 stopped his community from marching through San Juan to protest colonial monuments.(8)

Formal national observance of Columbus Day in the United States is rooted in an 1892 proclamation by President Benjamin Harrison.(9) The observance of Columbus Day had little to do with Italian immigrants, despite lynchings of 11 people on March 14, 1891 in New Orleans.(10) The Harrison proclamation was issued with persuasion from Francis Bellamy in the editor's office of the Boston-based Youth's Companion. It coincided with a national marketing campaign for the installation of American flags at school houses coupled with the proliferation of the newly authored pledge of allegiance.(11) The timing of that observance also came at a time in which the United State military actively engaged in war with Indigenous nations. President Harrison presided over the Ghost Dance War and the Wounded Knee Massacre in which 300 unarmed Lakota including women and children were murdered by the 7th Cavalry. In 1937 "at the behest" of the Knights of Columbus President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed Columbus Day a national holiday, in spite of the core principle in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution of the separation of Church and State. At both points and until 2005 locally in the City of Boston it was illegal for American Indians to walk the streets unescorted which was punishable by imprisonment under the Boston Indian Imprisonment Act which was enacted contemporary to the King Philip's War.

Indigenous peoples voice broader concerns around the topic of Boston Public Schools curriculum as guided by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The 2018 History and Social Science Framework addresses(12) history on this continent that predates the American Revolution only at the elementary level. Third grade students are expected to explain encounters between Indigenous nations in the Northeast and European explorers in a passive context. Europeans such as Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot), Bartholomew Gosnold, Giovanni de Verrazano, John Smith, and Samuel de Champlain arrive with an intention to document the region, based on the content standards of Grade 3. Fourth grade students are expected to explain encounters between Indigenous nations across the continent(s) and European explorers in the context of colonization. Voyages of Vasco Nures de Balboa, Jacques Cartier, Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus), Ferdinand Magellan, Juan Ponce De



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Leon, Amerigo Vespucci, Hernán Cortés have intentions of expansion of European empires, new trade routes to reach Asia, and new natural resources, based on the content standards of Grade 4. Students just learning about these topics would not be prepared to rebut the likes of Robert Royal, director of the Reason and Faith Institute, who argues that, "Many also claim that Columbus did not 'discover' the New World. Those living here already knew where they were, the argument goes, and didn't need to be discovered. This is a half-truth. Indigenous peoples, of course, knew their own lands. They did not know that they were part of a larger world."(13) The statue under review exacerbates the deeper conditioning of our youth in public spaces to contradict knowledge affirmed in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) homes.

The 1492 Project coordinated collaboratively by Open Systems (OPSYS)/Landscape Infrastructure Lab extensively documents the illegitimate installation of the statue commissioned by Arthur Stivaletta's "committee of one" the Friends of Christopher Columbus Committee.(13) Despite Mayor Walsh's assertion that the original intent of the statue was to highlight the Italian-American community, Stivaletta's actions speak otherwise. Stivaletta used the statue as a lightning rod for his activism inclusive of flag burnings of the Soviet Union and Iran. Previous to the installation, Stivaletta convinced the Massachusetts House of Representatives to erect a plaque in his honor in 1976. This pattern of Stivaletta ingratiating himself as on the currently maintained pedestal is consistent with his "Wake Up, America!" campaign and corporation based at 33 Clough Rd., Dedham, MA 02026. Stivaletta's influence as a building contractor and resident of Dedham is in no way connected to the Italian-American or Italian immigrant community of Boston's North End.

In conclusion, the NAICOB, UAINE, and IPDMA are disappointed in the recommendations by the BAC. Furthermore, we disagree with the commissioner's individual opinions on vandalism and terrorism in relation to public art. How many times since the installation of the decapitated head of Po Metacomet (or "King Philip" in English) have BIPOC had to endure the hostile dog whistles or explicit messaging on public display within the United States? How many lynchings of human bodies, including Italian immigrants excluded from whiteness, were on public display? Art is provocative and reflective of political dynamics. The toppling or removal of the imagery and names of slavers, rapists, invaders, and oppressors made divine through



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apotheosis is merely the first step towards the structural change our communities have demanded for centuries.

### Notes:

1. I. by J. Brooks, "The Art of Fiction No. 139," *The Paris Review*, 17-Jul-2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1720/the-art-of-fiction-no-139-c-hinua-achebe>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
2. D. Patta, "In Africa, toppling statues is a first step in addressing racism, not the last," *CBS News*, 19-Jun-2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/in-africa-toppling-statues-is-a-1st-step-in-addressing-racism-not-the-last/>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
3. R. Rickford, R. Rickford, K. Gurney, T. Kupa, A. K. Ahmed, and A. C. Fick, "Toppling statues as a decolonial ethic," *Africa Is a Country*. [Online]. Available: <https://africasacountry.com/2020/07/toppling-statues-as-a-decolonial-ethic>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
4. "Boston's vandalized Columbus statue to get a new home," *AP NEWS*, 06-Oct-2020. [Online]. Available: <https://apnews.com/article/marty-walsh-boston-immigration-e5c458bb6e8a75efea763992aa5079d3>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
5. D. McDonald, "Boston's vandalized Columbus statue to get a new home - The Boston Globe," *BostonGlobe.com*, 06-Oct-2020. [Online]. Available: [https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/06/nation/bostons-vandalized-columbus-statue-get-new-home/?fbclid=IwAR1GvMIkCarayht\\_51STK9VcnznqiCXkV83GbsDh3ZsWB11uqcxKPAIQax8](https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/06/nation/bostons-vandalized-columbus-statue-get-new-home/?fbclid=IwAR1GvMIkCarayht_51STK9VcnznqiCXkV83GbsDh3ZsWB11uqcxKPAIQax8). [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
6. "No. 126: Massachusetts Native Americans," *Mass.gov*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mass.gov/executive-orders/no-126-massachusetts-native-americans>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
7. "COMMONWEALTH vs. MICHAEL L. MAXIM (and a companion case [Note 1]).," *MAXIM, COMMONWEALTH vs.*, 429 Mass. 287. [Online]. Available: <http://masscases.com/cases/sjc/429/429mass287.html>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]



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8. D. Friedler, "There's a 350-foot statue of Columbus in Puerto Rico. Indigenous people want it gone.," *Mother Jones*, 09-Oct-2020. [Online]. Available: [https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/10/christopher-columbus-statue-puerto-rico-indigenous-peoples-day/?fbclid=IwAR3Pvyj7dc9gF3FHQqGARij5wYreGrDQE2Q3\\_2itJernA5ErB\\_T346dIqcY](https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/10/christopher-columbus-statue-puerto-rico-indigenous-peoples-day/?fbclid=IwAR3Pvyj7dc9gF3FHQqGARij5wYreGrDQE2Q3_2itJernA5ErB_T346dIqcY). [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
9. A. Glass, "President Harrison urges Americans to mark Columbus Day, Oct. 12, 1892," *POLITICO*, 12-Oct-2016. [Online]. Available: <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/10/president-harrison-urges-americans-to-mark-columbus-day-oct-12-1892-229293>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
10. B. Katz, "New Orleans Apologizes for 1891 Lynching of Italian-Americans," *Smithsonian.com*, 15-Apr-2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/new-orleans-apologizes-1891-lynching-italian-americans-180971959/>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
11. "A pledge for Columbus Day," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 06-Oct-1988. [Online]. Available: <https://www.csmonitor.com/1988/1006/ecolu.html>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
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13. "Five Myths About Columbus," *KofC.org*. [Online]. Available: <https://www.kofc.org/en/news-room/columbia/2020/september/five-myths-about-columbus.html>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]
14. THE 1492 PROJECT. [Online]. Available: <http://confrontingcolumb.us/>. [Accessed: 14-Oct-2020]

Jean-Luc Pierite, President, North American Indian Center of Boston  
Mahtowin Munro, co-lead, United American Indians of New England  
Indigenous Peoples Day MA



# TAINO NATION

P U E R T O R I C O

## **Community Resolution N<sup>o</sup>. NAA-B20-10-008:** TAINO OPPOSITION TO PUBLIC DISPLAY OF COLUMBUS STATUES

8 OCTOBER 2020

BOSTON ARTS COMMISSION  
1 City Hall  
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BAC Chief, Chair, Vice-Chair, AND Members:

THE Taino people of the Caribbean stand in opposition to the maintenance and public display of statues of Christopher Columbus.

AS Indigenous People, we continue to be affected by legacy of colonialism and the pain and destruction that has been effected on our people, lands, waters, and contemporary and traditional lifeways. The ways in which these are affected are varied and many.

MORE recently, the impacts of slavery and colonialism across these lands found expression in the hands of our Black brothers and sisters, and we stand in solidarity to those who express Black Lives Matter, in mourning and opposition to threats to life, livelihoods, and freedom.

IT is often difficult to determine when a permanent work of art is no longer appropriate, yet Indigenous Peoples continue to assert that such symbols represent and have represented pain and destruction for many. The past few months have spurred the broader community to make it clear that the time is right to remove the sculpture, despite the purpose and goodwill it may have extended for the City years ago.

WE call for resolve in support of motions for the Mayor to have the Christopher Columbus sculpture moved from its current location and to recommend an experienced art handler supervise removal and storage of the piece in an indoor location until its disposition is determined. Additionally, the City of Boston's Parks and Recreation should resolve to change the name of the Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park. As the People impacted directly by this historical figure, your support for motions to remove the statue is requested.

CC: NAICOB

TAINO RESOLUTION TO THE BOSTON ARTS COMMISSION IN RECOMMENDING A MOTION TO THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF ARTS & CULTURE AND THE BOSTON CITY COUNCIL THAT (1) THE STATUE OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (LOCATED AT *CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS WATERFRONT PARK*) BE REMOVED; AND, (2) THAT SAID STATUE BE REPLACED WITH A STATUE THAT REFLECTS BOSTON'S DIVERSITY, INCLUDING THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ON WHOSE TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES THE CITY TODAY STANDS.

**WHEREAS**, The Taino were the first Indigenous People of the Americas to establish contact via the voyager Christopher Columbus, AKA Cristoffa Corombo AKA Cristoforo Colombo AKA Cristóbal Colón AKA Christophorus Columbus, and his Castilian crew who departed from Palos de la Frontera, Huelva, Andalusia, Spain under the auspices of the Spanish Crown, landing on our lands on the 12<sup>th</sup> of OCTOBER 1492; and,

**WHEREAS**, Christopher Columbus under the auspices of the Spanish Crown and the The Roman Catholic Church placed our people and others in *encomiendas*, under enslavement mining precious metals to the point of death by exhaustion, and subject to other gratuitous and unspeakable physical and emotional abuses including but not limited to hunting by dogs, mass rape of adults and children, mass hangings, mass decapitations, mass impalement, forced drownings, forced suicides, forced starvation, all manner of dismemberments, and smashing of infant children's heads against rocks; and,

**WHEREAS**, Reverend Friar and Servant of God Fray Bartolomé de las Casas O.P., Bishop of Chiapas, wrote in his multi-volume History of the Indies of 1561 that during the period from 1494 to 1508, "[O]ver three million people [have] perished from war, slavery, and the mines. Who in future generations will believe this?"; and,

**WHEREAS**, these abuses were authorized under the 4<sup>th</sup> of MAY 1493 *Inter Cetera* papal bull, issued by Pope Alexander VI ratifying the Sovereigns of Castille Ferdinand and Isabella's conquest of land claimed to be 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus after he already begun doing so, holding the land as *terra nullius* where we and other Indigenous Peoples held no rights but existed in passive occupation, and which continues to be used in public national and international law to disposses Indigenous Peoples; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Taino across the Caribbean and Indigenous Peoples across the Americas, and their traditional territories, continue to be impacted by continuing encroachment and development, inscluding but not limited to monuments and resorts, continue to impacting traditional use and relationships lands and waters; and,

**WHEREAS**, such monuments in the City of Boston and elsewhere uplifting Christopher Columbus take up vital green space can be otherwise used by Indigenous Peoples for ceremonial and sustenance purposes; and,

CC: NAICOB

**WHEREAS**, statues of Christopher Columbus and the attendant Christopher Columbus holiday are thusly associated with slavery and colonization of the Americas and the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, and accordingly seen by many Indigenous Peoples and others as symbols of oppression; and,

**WHEREAS**, as a result of actions in previous years by Indigenous Peoples and more recently by protestors and activists spurred by Black Lives Matters have in several cities removed and sought to remove such statues including the cities of Richmond in Virginia, as well as Los Angeles and San Jose in California and other cities in various states; and,

**WHEREAS**, on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> of JUNE 2020, a statue in Boston's North End was damaged by decapitation of the statue and subsequently placed in storage whereupon conversations about its historic meaning and the legacy of the historical figure have been held; and,

**WHEREAS**, similar statues will continue to offend people of all backgrounds and races including Indigenous Peoples who continue to be affected by the legacy of both colonialism and Christopher Columbus himself, with vandalism that will continue to take place against similar statues as a result requiring repair and maintenance, now and in the future; and,

**WHEREAS**, the removal of said statue and additional actions such as replacing the statue with another work of art which would serve to recognize Boston's diverse community, including its Indigenous People would be widely welcomed; and,

**NOW, THEREFORE**, the Taino People present this letter to memorialize said request and hereby resolve to recommend to the Boston Arts Commission Council that it:

1. Support the removal of the Statue of Christopher Columbus located at the City of Boston's so-called 'Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park';
2. Promote a motion by the MAYOR'S OFFICE OF ARTS AND CULTURE to have the Christopher Columbus statue moved from its current location;
3. Resolve to change the name of the City of Boston's so-called 'Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park';
4. Replace the statue with another statue or work of art which clearly communicates the values of diversity in the City of Boston's communities, including its Indigenous Peoples; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that it is also recommended that the Boston City Council establish a task force in concert with the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) to provide recommendations as to how to implement the above recommendations.

CC: NAICOB

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

THIS IS TO CERTIFY AND AFFIRM, that we, the Taino Nation as undersigned by (a) community leader(s), do hereby certify the above and foregoing resolution as duly authorized and passed by the Taino Nation on this 8<sup>th</sup> day of October 2020, by a vote of 2 leaders in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain, 1 absent.

MOTION CARRIED.

Dated this 8 day of October, 2020.



Keyla V. R., Leader