INDIGENOUS PEOPLE’S DAY, 2016 DECLARATION

We are gathered here at the American Museum of Natural History to issue three demands:

RESPECT – New York’s premier scientific museum continues to honor 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. We demand that the museum’s display arrangements and classifications be reconceived by curatorial representatives of the “exhibited” populations, and that human remains, sacred things, and objects of power stolen from Indigenous peoples should be returned.

REMOVE – The equestrian status of Theodore Roosevelt outside the American Museum of Natural History is a stark embodiment of the white supremacy that Roosevelt espoused and promoted. It is an affront to all who pass it on entering the museum, but especially to African and Native Americans. 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.

RENAME – It’s time for the Mayor and City Council to rename Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples’ Day. New York City sits on the territory of the Lenape, and over one hundred thousand Indigenous people live on this territory today. We demand that this holiday be relaunched as an occasion to dignify our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and it should no longer commemorate a figure widely associated with exploitation and enslavement.

#decolonizethisplace

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING (available for download at decolonizethisplace.org)


WE ARE HERE, in this museum, with our friends, families and communities. We begin by acknowledging that we are standing on occupied Lenape land. Although it is labelled as a Natural History museum, it includes displays of Indigenous and other colonized peoples. Though its exhibits change from year to year, this museum is frozen in time, bound by nineteenth-century racial classifications that designated human populations as “primitive” or “civilized.” Generations of curators have continued this racist legacy, and millions of visitors are invited to take them for granted.

We are here to amplify the tradition of resistance to this way of depicting history, and to respect the Indigenous artifacts and ancestral presence that have been collected, through acts of violent appropriation, and gathered, under this roof. We are here to protest this monument of white supremacy on a day that should be renamed. And we are here to demand the removal of the Teddy Roosevelt statue that stands outside the museum.

This is an alternative tour of the exhibits on the Second Floor. It is only a sample of how deeply flawed the museum continues to be.

* Museum admission is by donation – if you are getting your own ticket, pay as little or as much as you would like *

* The tour begins in the Hall of Asian Mammals – once you have your ticket, wait for the guides there *

* After the tour, we will gather on the front steps by the statue of Theodore Roosevelt for a speak-out at 5:15pm *

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Please add your own comments to the map, take a photo, and tag it with #decolonizethisplace

RESPECT, REMOVE, RENAME.