Dismantling Racism in Public Art

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge that this work was created on the unceded ancestral lands of the **Ramaytush Ohlone**, original stewards of the land now known as San Francisco, and the **Confederated Villages of Lisjan/Ohlone**, whose ancestral territory encompasses much of the East Bay.

We honor the enduring presence, sovereignty, and resilience of Ohlone people, who have maintained their cultural, spiritual, and political traditions despite centuries of displacement, violence, and erasure. This acknowledgment recognizes not only the historical truths of colonization and genocide, but also the continued existence and leadership of Indigenous communities today.

As a framework committed to dismantling racist narratives in public space, this document affirms that land acknowledgment must be accompanied by action. We recognize the responsibility of public institutions, cultural workers, and allies to move beyond symbolic gestures toward material repair, accountability, and the return of land, resources, and decision-making power to Indigenous Peoples.

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01 Introduction

Introduction

In recent years, the United States has undergone a significant shift in how it examines and challenges dominant racist narratives in public life. Statues and other forms of public art have become flashpoints in national debates about whether symbols rooted in white supremacy should continue to be upheld as "cultural heritage." In June 2015, ten days after a racist massacre claimed the lives of nine Black churchgoers at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina, filmmaker, musician, and activist Bree Newsome climbed a thirty-foot flagpole to remove the Confederate flag from the South Carolina State House grounds. Her act of creative disobedience captured national attention and helped ignite a broader public reckoning with racist symbolism.

In the years that followed, a growing movement emerged to remove monuments and imagery that glorify and sustain the tenets of white supremacy. Concentrated initially in the southeastern United States, these removal efforts were often met with fierce opposition, including threats and acts of violence by those who viewed the monuments as physical representations of American heritage. In August 2017, three people were killed and nineteen injured at the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which was organized in opposition to the planned removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The rally was widely considered the largest gathering of white nationalists in a decade. Three years later, following the public release of video footage documenting the police murder of George Floyd and the nationwide protests that followed, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported the removal of 168 Confederate symbols in 2020 alone.

As this movement expanded westward, efforts increasingly shifted from Confederate monuments tied to Jim Crow–era ideology to so-called "pioneer" monuments that continue to demean Indigenous peoples and perpetuate the false narrative that Native

Americans have vanished. Erected during the same historical period, these monuments glorified settler colonialism, the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, and the genocide that accompanied westward expansion. Whether in the South or the West, the intent of these monuments was largely the same: to legitimize white dominance and to use public symbolism as a tool of intimidation, reinforcing a racial hierarchy that instructed both white and non-white communities about their “appropriate” place in society.

During debates over the removal of pioneer monuments, comparisons are often drawn to Confederate statuary. While many acknowledge that Confederate memorials should be removed due to their association with slavery, pioneer monuments are frequently defended as benign tributes to an “uncivilized” or “extinct” Native population. These arguments reveal a widespread lack of understanding of the United States’ history of Indigenous genocide and settler colonial violence. This absence of historical education has long undermined the efforts of Indigenous communities and their allies, who have advocated for decades for the removal of public symbols that reinforce racist and exclusionary narratives.

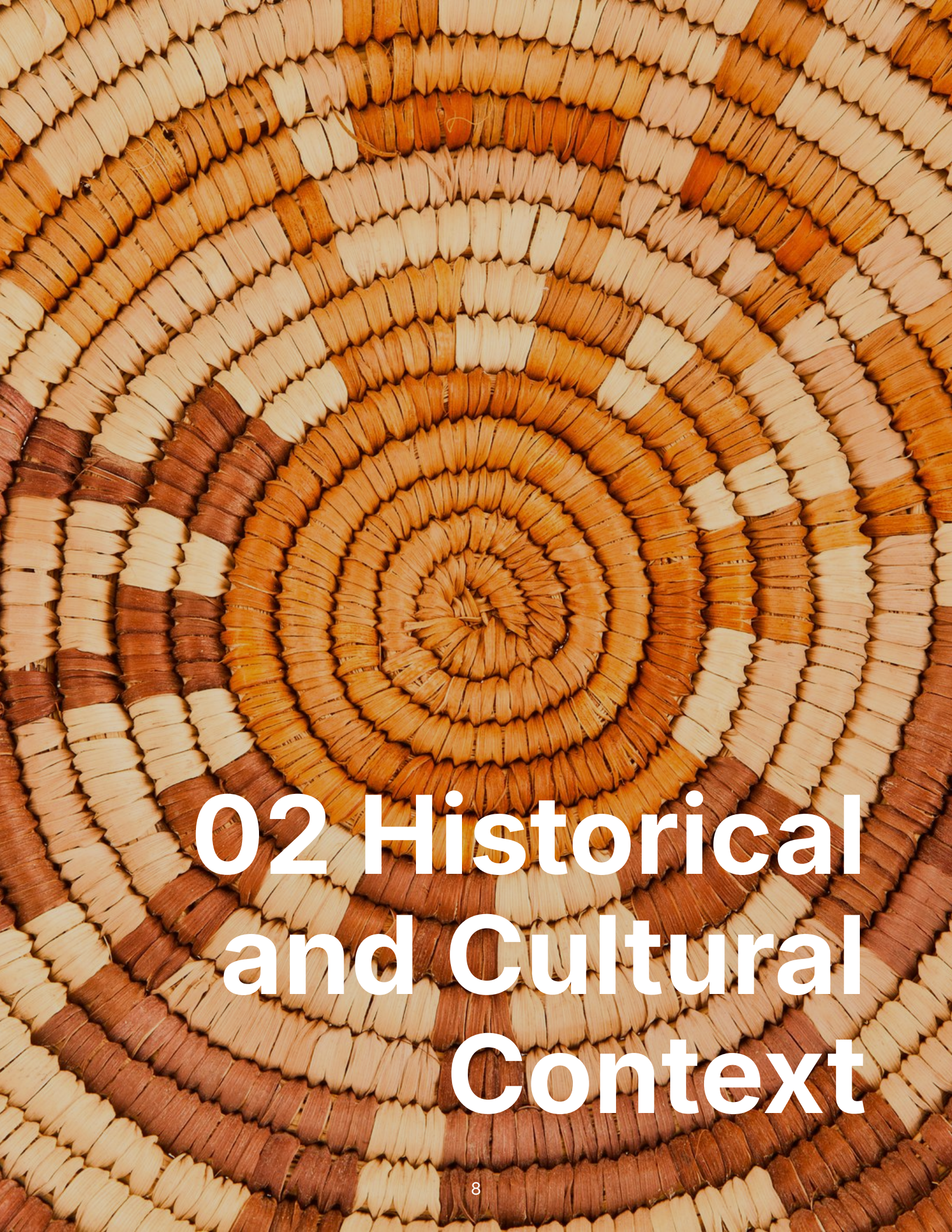
This framework is designed to support Indigenous Peoples and allied communities in seeking redress for the ongoing harm caused by false narratives and racist imagery in the public realm. By establishing a clear foundation, the framework aims to make education and advocacy efforts more accessible and effective, while minimizing the re-traumatization that often accompanies this work. It also calls on public institutions to take proactive responsibility for addressing harmful public art, shifting the burden away from marginalized communities and toward the institutions that uphold these symbols, and modeling pathways toward accountability, healing, and restorative justice.

Core Questions

- How do communities demand removal without being forced to relive trauma?
- How do we make governments share responsibility, instead of placing the burden on those most harmed?
- What does real repair look like after centuries of violence and erasure?

Framework Goals

- Expose the real harm caused by racist public imagery
- Demystify the systems, laws, and processes that block removal
- Equip communities with practical tools to act—while reducing re-traumatization



02 Historical and Cultural Context

Historical and Cultural Context

Statues, monuments, and other forms of public art that depict figures tied to racism and oppression are deeply embedded in the history and culture of the United States. These symbols are not neutral remnants of the past; they are active representations that continue to shape public memory, civic identity, and contemporary social life. In recent years, growing public scrutiny has called into question the legitimacy of maintaining monuments that uphold and normalize white supremacy.

Historically, many of these monuments were erected during periods of intense social and political upheaval to reinforce dominant racial hierarchies. Confederate statues, which proliferated throughout the Southern United States during the Jim Crow era, were not simply commemorations of individual historical figures. They were deliberate instruments of racial control, designed to legitimize white supremacy, enforce segregation, and assert racial inferiority. While often framed as expressions of “heritage,” these monuments functioned equally as tools of intimidation—signaling to Black communities, and to the public at large, the racial order that those in power sought to preserve.

A pivotal moment in the contemporary reckoning with these symbols occurred in 2015, following the mass shooting at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where nine Black parishioners were murdered by a white supremacist. In the days that followed, activist Bree Newsome climbed the flagpole at the South Carolina State House and removed the Confederate flag in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience. Her action became a powerful catalyst for renewed national debate about the place of Confederate imagery in public space and the broader role of symbols that glorify racial violence.

In the years that followed, efforts to remove Confederate monuments expanded across the country, particularly throughout the South. These efforts were frequently met with organized resistance and, at times, outright violence. The 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia—organized in opposition to the planned removal of a statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee—resulted in the deaths of three people and injuries to dozens more. The rally exposed the extent to which monuments to white supremacy continue to function as rallying points for extremist ideology and underscored the deep divisions surrounding how the United States confronts the legacies of slavery and racism.

As the movement for removal gained momentum, its geographic and political scope expanded beyond the South. Increasing attention turned to monuments in the Western United States that glorify settler colonialism and the violent displacement of Indigenous peoples. Many so-called “pioneer” monuments, erected during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, celebrate westward expansion while erasing the genocide, land theft, and cultural destruction inflicted upon Native nations. These monuments often frame Indigenous peoples as obstacles to progress or as relics of a vanished past, reinforcing the myth of an “empty” or “untamed” West.

Like Confederate statues, pioneer monuments were created with the intent to legitimize white dominance. They cast Indigenous peoples as primitive, disappearing, or defeated, while celebrating settlers as civilizing heroes. Such representations rely heavily on racist stereotypes and false narratives that obscure both the violence of colonization and the continued presence, sovereignty, and resilience of Indigenous communities.

Debates over the removal of these monuments reveal starkly different interpretations of history. Some view Confederate and pioneer monuments as neutral historical markers worthy of preservation. Others—particularly Black and Indigenous communities—experience them as daily reminders of oppression, trauma, and erasure. Resistance to removal is often fueled by widespread gaps in public education about the full scope of U.S. history, including the intertwined realities of slavery, settler colonialism, and genocide. This lack of understanding continues to undermine efforts by Indigenous communities and their allies who have long advocated for the removal of racist public symbolism.

This historical context makes clear the need for a framework that goes beyond monument removal alone. Addressing racist imagery requires confronting the false narratives embedded in public space while also attending to the cultural and historical harm those narratives have caused. As removal efforts expand into more complex regional and political terrain, they demand a deeper understanding of how public art has been used to reinforce overlapping systems of racial and colonial domination.

Ultimately, the removal of racist public art is not about erasing history. It is about correcting historical distortions, dismantling symbols of domination, and creating space for more truthful and inclusive narratives. By challenging these monuments, communities work toward a public landscape that acknowledges past and ongoing harms while making room for equity, accountability, and collective healing.

03 The Impact of Racist Imagery

The Impact of Racist Imagery

Racist imagery in public spaces is not merely representational; it actively reinforces harmful ideologies and oppressive systems. Monuments, statues, flags, and other forms of public art often function as symbols of dominance, offering a daily reminder of subjugation, exploitation, and exclusion. Their presence sends a powerful message—both explicit and implicit—about whose histories are honored and whose lives are considered expendable.

For communities of color, particularly Indigenous peoples and African Americans, these symbols are deeply painful. They do not simply reflect a troubling past; they continue to deny the presence, humanity, and contributions of marginalized communities. Confederate statues, for example, commemorate a social order built to preserve slavery and racial hierarchy, signaling that the suffering of enslaved people and their descendants is subordinate to the values of white supremacy. Likewise, pioneer monuments that glorify westward expansion uphold a false narrative of "civilization," erasing the genocide, displacement, and cultural destruction inflicted upon Indigenous peoples.

The harm caused by these images is not confined to history—it is intergenerational. Children in marginalized communities encounter these symbols in everyday life, absorbing the message that their identities, cultures, and histories are unworthy of respect. Repeated exposure to imagery that glorifies their oppression can foster alienation, diminished self-worth, and a sense of powerlessness within systems that continue to privilege dominant narratives.

Racist imagery also reinforces broader societal divisions by normalizing the belief that some communities are inherently superior to others. This dehumanizing logic shapes how people of color are treated in schools, by law enforcement, in workplaces, and in public life. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing patterns of discrimination, marginalization, and violence.

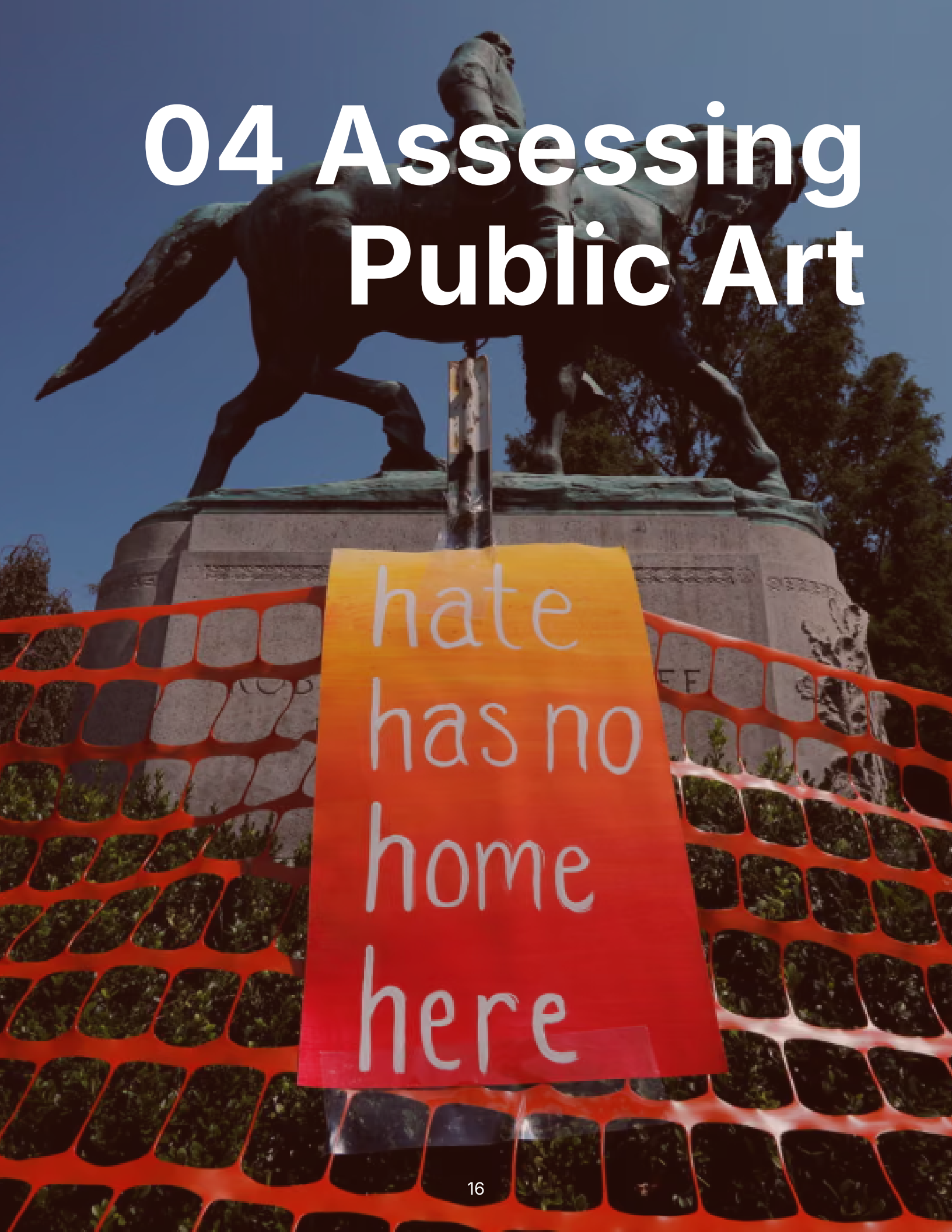
For these reasons, the removal of racist imagery from public spaces is not simply symbolic—it is a necessary step toward healing and repair. Dismantling these representations allows communities to begin correcting the historical record and reimagining public spaces as places of inclusion, truth, and dignity. However, removal

processes must be undertaken with care and accountability. Impacted communities must be meaningfully involved to ensure that decisions center their experiences, needs, and well-being.

The consequences of racist imagery extend beyond individual or community harm; they also impede societal progress. When such symbols go unchallenged, they discourage honest conversations about race, equity, and justice, allowing the legacies of racism to persist unexamined. Addressing these images must therefore be understood as part of a broader effort to confront structural racism, acknowledge historical harms, and foster collective healing.

Ultimately, this work calls on the broader public—not only those directly affected—to engage in education and reflection. By reconsidering the narratives embedded in our public spaces, we create opportunities to build a shared understanding of history that is more accurate, inclusive, and just. Through this collective reckoning, public spaces can begin to reflect the full humanity and contributions of all people, cultivating belonging, respect, and accountability.

04 Assessing Public Art



Assessing Public Art

In response to public demands for the removal of offensive public art, many governing entities have convened ad hoc advisory groups to establish guidelines and assessment frameworks for contested works. Too often, these groups are composed primarily of affluent or well-connected community figures who have little to no direct relationship with the communities most harmed by racist imagery. As a result, impacted communities are rarely meaningfully embedded in decision-making processes. This pattern suggests that such advisory bodies are frequently structured to preserve the status quo rather than to seriously examine how certain public artworks harm the health, dignity, and well-being of marginalized communities.

When impacted communities are authentically included, their recommendations are often challenged, delayed, or undermined through threats of litigation or procedural and legal maneuvering. These dynamics reinforce existing power imbalances and further marginalize the voices of those most affected.

For public institutions to establish a transparent, consistent, and trauma-informed approach to determining whether public art should be removed or recontextualized, it is necessary to confront the ways white supremacy is embedded within bureaucratic systems and decision-making frameworks. Without this critical shift, dominant and harmful historical narratives will continue to be reproduced. Any credible assessment process must be grounded in equity and must explicitly incorporate considerations of reparations.

Developing a Process

To ensure meaningful community engagement, public institutions should take a proactive approach by assessing their entire public art collections in partnership with impacted communities—before sustained public outcry forces action. Doing so alleviates the disproportionate burden communities often carry when navigating complex and opaque bureaucratic systems on their own. These processes should also include early consideration of reparative actions that address both the harm caused by the artwork and the broader systemic practices that enabled it.

The following five-pronged equity framework is offered to guide the development of review processes and advisory committees:

Power

The development of advisory committees and review processes must occur in direct consultation with affected communities. All participants should engage in intentional efforts to shift power dynamics and embed equity principles throughout the process. This includes establishing committee structures that align with Indigenous decision-making frameworks. Local tribal representatives must be central to any review process, and decision-making authority should be shared with community representatives. In urban areas with multiple tribal nations, inclusivity is essential, recognizing that Native Peoples are not homogenous and that no single individual speaks for all communities. The process must affirm the right of impacted communities to determine how they are represented in the public realm.

Accessibility

All review processes should be accessible and welcoming to the public. This may require holding meetings during evenings or weekends and in locations that are familiar, safe, and easily accessible. Courtrooms and government buildings can be significant deterrents for communities with historical and ongoing mistrust of legal systems. When possible, meetings should be held at or near the site of the contested artwork to contextualize its daily impact on Indigenous Peoples and other affected communities. Clear explanations of the process and next steps help foster trust and deeper engagement. Efforts should also be made to eliminate jargon, provide multilingual materials as needed, ensure disability accommodations such as sign language interpretation or live captioning, and offer childcare when possible.

Accountability

Adequate time must be dedicated to building trust and acknowledging historical and systemic inequities. Communication should be clear, consistent, and transparent, including clarity about whether committee decisions require approval from other governing bodies. The process should also address potential legal challenges that opponents may use

to delay or obstruct implementation.

Representation

Impacted communities must be guaranteed meaningful participation and engaged as collaborative partners, not symbolic representatives. Their lived experience, cultural knowledge, and expertise should be respected and valued regardless of formal education or professional credentials. Community members should be compensated for their time, labor, and contributions.

Reparative

Participants must feel safe throughout the process. This may include options for anonymous public comment and other safeguards to reduce harm. When meetings are held at sites of contested artwork, additional supports should be provided to address trauma, including the presence of Native spiritual advisors or cultural practitioners when appropriate. A meaningful reparations strategy should be integral to the process—one that works to protect, repair, invest in, and transform affected communities. Reparative actions may include commissioning new artworks, dedicating space for community use, or returning parcels of public land to local tribal nations for cultural, educational, or stewardship purposes. These actions ensure that engagement continues beyond removal or relocation and that healing remains a shared, ongoing responsibility.

05 Developing Evaluation Criteria

Developing Evaluation Criteria

Drawing on existing tools and review processes, the following evaluation criteria has been developed to center both the historical and cultural contexts of public artworks and their impacts on the health and well-being of the public.

Historical Context

A thorough understanding of an artwork's historical context requires extensive research. While this research may be conducted by the entity responsible for stewarding the artwork, it is strongly recommended that affected communities also become knowledgeable about the history to ensure that what is presented is accurate and reflective of lived experiences across communities. Evaluation begins by asking: Who is the subject of the artwork? If the subject is a historical figure, do they carry a legacy of colonization, exploitation, oppression, abuse, or enslavement? While the general public may regard the individual as a hero, are there communities whose historical experiences directly contradict that narrative? If the artwork depicts or centers specific groups of people, were those groups meaningfully engaged in the creation of the work and given agency in how they were portrayed?

It is also critical to ask: Who funded or commissioned the artwork? Was the benefactor or commissioning body associated with systems of colonization, exploitation, oppression, abuse, or enslavement? In many cases, such fortunes were built through the exploitation of labor and the theft of Indigenous land. It may also be discovered that a single commissioning body installed similar iconography across multiple communities. Identifying whether other jurisdictions have removed related artworks can help strengthen arguments for removal.

Another key question is whether the artwork was created—explicitly or implicitly—to uphold the tenets of white supremacy.

Many public monuments erected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries functioned as tributes to those in power, while portraying marginalized communities as subordinate, inferior, or invisible. Finally, who created the artwork? Were the artist or artists associated with institutions or efforts that advanced colonization, exploitation, or racial domination? The social and political lens through which an artist works often manifests in the final piece and should be considered as part of the evaluation.

Cultural Context

When an artwork depicts specific cultural groups, research must include engagement with community members who possess deep knowledge of the cultural practices, histories, and protocols of those groups. Reliance solely on anthropological texts—particularly those authored by non-Indigenous scholars—is insufficient to fully understand cultural context.

Key evaluative questions include:

- Is cultural appropriation present?
- Does the artwork improperly use or extract from a culture's intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or sacred beliefs?
- Does the artwork perpetuate harmful stereotypes or myths?
- Is it historically inaccurate?

Indigenous Peoples are frequently portrayed as a homogenous group, ignoring the diversity, specificity, and complexity of distinct Nations and communities. This also includes depictions of Indigenous people as deceased, defeated, or vanishing, as well as the sexualization of Indigenous women and children. Another consideration is whether imagery is used outside of its original cultural meaning or purpose. Cultural symbols and designs are often appropriated and repurposed in ways that violate traditional protocols. Additionally, evaluators should examine scale and visual hierarchy: Do figures representing Indigenous Peoples or other marginalized groups appear smaller, passive, or subservient in relation to figures representing the dominant culture?

Public Impact

Government officials and leaders of public institutions have an obligation to safeguard the health and well-being of their constituents. Racist imagery in public spaces perpetuates ongoing trauma, particularly for communities that are already marginalized and numerically underrepresented. When these communities challenge dominant narratives, their dissent is often overridden, reinforcing cycles of harm. In such cases, equity and inclusion must be prioritized. Key questions include: What is the impact of the artwork on the health and well-being of vulnerable communities, including children, elders, and people with disabilities? Has there been sustained adverse public reaction to the artwork over two or more years?

Public opposition may not be continuous; it often resurfaces during moments of social reckoning. For example, during the George Floyd uprisings, numerous settler-colonial monuments— representing figures such as Columbus, Serra, Grant, Lee, and Roosevelt—were challenged, removed, or altered as communities made explicit connections between historical violence and present-day systemic racism. Is the artwork located in a highly visible or unavoidable public space that substantially limits an individual's ability to avoid exposure? Prominently placed offensive imagery can deny people agency and contribute to chronic stress and retraumatization. Finally, does the artwork reflect outdated values that are no longer aligned with current community standards? Societal values evolve over time, and the physical symbols that represent those values must be reassessed accordingly.

Scoring

The evaluation criteria require a series of yes/no responses. A higher number of "yes" responses indicates that the artwork likely conflicts with current community values and may warrant intervention. A majority of "no" responses suggests a lower likelihood that removal is necessary. Advisory committees should collaboratively determine thresholds for action.

The following examples illustrate how scoring may inform outcomes:

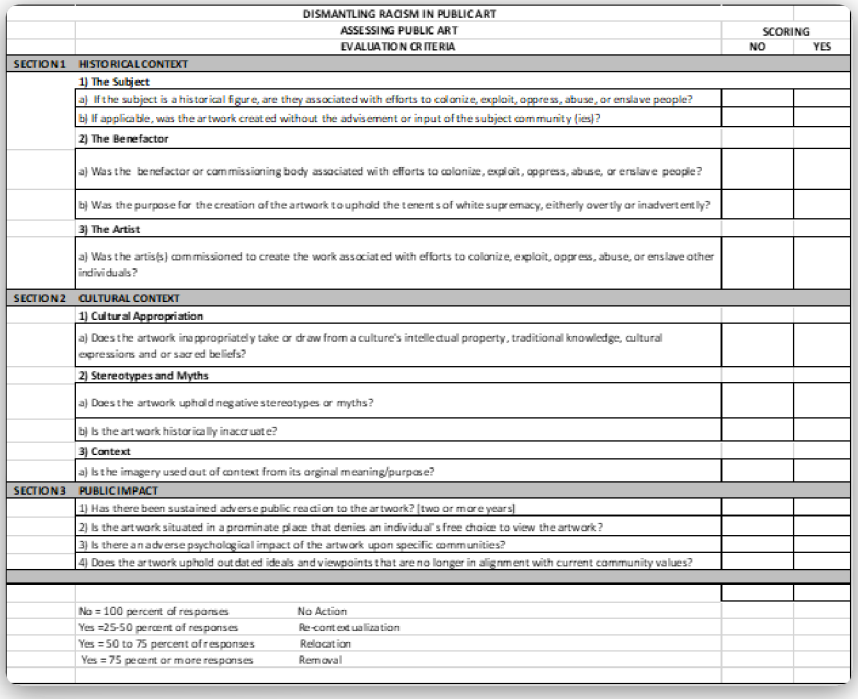
- 100% "No" responses — No Action: The artwork remains in place without modification.

- 25–50% "Yes" responses — Re-contextualization: The committee may recommend additional interpretive materials, such as plaques or signage that provide accurate historical context. Other options include partially obstructing the artwork from view or allowing visible defacement to remain as evidence of public dissent—acknowledging that marginalized communities are engaged in an ongoing process of making history more truthful, inclusive, and accountable (Wolde-Michael, 2021).

- 50–75% “Yes” responses — Relocation: The artwork may be moved to a more appropriate setting or placed on long-term loan to a cultural institution equipped to contextualize its history. Feasibility depends on the medium, scale, and cost of relocation. Some works, such as frescoes or site-integrated pieces, may not be movable without damage.

- 75% or more “Yes” responses — Removal: The artwork may be removed from public display entirely. This could include deaccessioning, long-term storage, transfer of ownership, or—in some cases—destruction. When destruction is considered, digital archiving may be recommended to preserve the artwork for educational purposes.

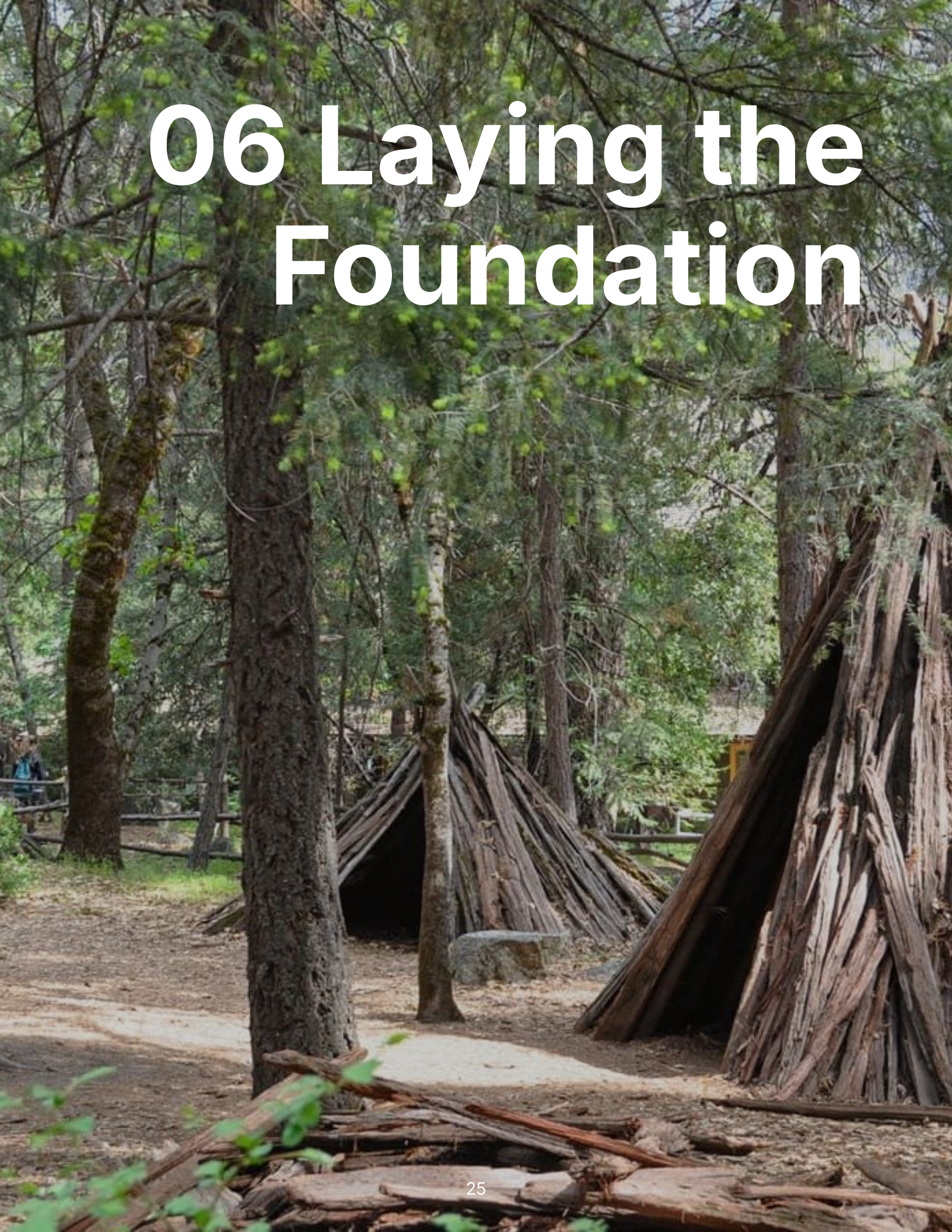
Sample Scoring Form



DISMANTLING RACISM IN PUBLIC ART			
	ASSESSING PUBLIC ART	SCORING	
	EVALUATION CRITERIA	NO	YES
SECTION 1	HISTORICAL CONTEXT		
	1) The Subject		
	a) If the subject is a historical figure, are they associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave people?		
	b) If applicable, was the artwork created without the advisement or input of the subject community (ies)?		
	2) The Benefactor		
	a) Was the benefactor or commissioning body associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave people?		
	b) Was the purpose for the creation of the artwork to uphold the tenents of white supremacy, either ly overtly or inadvertently?		
	3) The Artist		
	a) Was the artis(s) commissioned to create the work associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave other individuals?		
SECTION 2	CULTURAL CONTEXT		
	1) Cultural Appropriation		
	a) Does the artwork inappropriately take or draw from a culture's intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and or sacred beliefs?		
	2) Stereotypes and Myths		
	a) Does the artwork uphold negative stereotypes or myths?		
	b) Is the artwork historically inaccruate?		
	3) Context		
	a) Is the imagery used out of context from its orginal meaning/purpose?		
SECTION 3	PUBLIC IMPACT		
	1) Has there been sustained adverse public reaction to the artwork? (two or more years)		
	2) Is the artwork situated in a prominate place that denies an individual's free choice to view the artwork?		
	3) Is there an adverse psychological impact of the artwork upon specific communities?		
	4) Does the artwork uphold outdated ideals and viewpoints that are no longer in alignment with current community values?		
	No = 100 percent of responses — No Action		
	Yes =25-50 percent of responses — Re-contextualization		
	Yes = 50 to 75 percent of responses — Relocation		
	Yes = 75 pecent or more responses — Removal		

[A reproducible evaluation criteria form can be found in Appendix 1]

06 Laying the Foundation



Laying the Foundation

In most cases, governing entities responsible for public artwork are not proactive in implementing standardized and equitable processes to assess their collections or remove harmful imagery. Even when a governing body agrees that an artwork should be removed, it often faces a complex web of local, state, and federal laws that complicate and delay the process. These efforts are frequently met with threats of costly and prolonged litigation from opponents. As a result, the burden of advocating for removal often falls on the communities most directly impacted by the harm. Navigating bureaucratic systems can be confusing and overwhelming, particularly when compounded by unfamiliar legal frameworks at multiple levels of government. The following section outlines steps for developing a community-led removal campaign and provides an overview of key policies and regulations that may affect these efforts.

Identifying Stewardship and Process

The first and most critical step is identifying who has legal responsibility for the care and oversight of the contested artwork. If the artwork is located in a public park or on city-owned land, stewardship typically falls under the city's Arts Commission or Parks Department. Artwork located in public schools is usually under the authority of the school district or school board. If the artwork is situated along a major transportation corridor, stewardship may lie with the state's Department of Transportation. In some cases, it may be necessary to contact elected officials who represent the area where the artwork is located to determine which agency has jurisdiction.

Persistence and patience are essential—not only in identifying who has authority over the artwork, but also in determining whether a formal process for removal already exists. These efforts are rarely linear, particularly when the artwork is protected by historic preservation statutes or other legal safeguards. The process may be further complicated if the artist is still living. Often, removal requires coordination among multiple city agencies and legal counsel. In some cases, it may even require persuading a state legislator to sponsor enabling legislation. Regardless of the specific path required, it is important to become familiar with the most common

policies and laws governing public artwork.

Key Policies and Legislation

Deaccession Policies — Artwork held in a public or institutional collection is typically subject to a deaccession policy. This policy outlines the circumstances and procedures under which an artwork may be removed from public display or a permanent collection. Even when a deaccession policy exists, additional agencies may still have oversight authority over the artwork or its location.

Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) — Passed in 1990, VARA protects an artist's work from being removed, modified, or destroyed during the artist's lifetime unless they have signed a waiver. In 2006, the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that VARA does not apply to the location of a site-specific work. This means that artwork located in public space may be relocated, provided it is not damaged or destroyed in the process.

California Art Preservation Act — Enacted in 1979, this law is similar to VARA but extends an artist's rights for 50 years beyond their death.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) — This federal law established the National Register of Historic Places, which includes properties deemed historically or artistically significant. Sculptural works, including monuments, may be covered if they meet these criteria. Section 106 of the NHPA is triggered if a contested monument is located on federal land or if federal funds are used for its removal or alteration. In these cases, agencies must demonstrate that removal will not adversely affect the historic property and must engage in a public consultation process. In addition to the NHPA, state and local preservation laws may apply and can further complicate removal. If an artwork is located within a designated historic district, approval from a local historic preservation body may be required. This typically involves demonstrating that the artwork is not a contributing element of the district and that its removal will not compromise the district's overall design or integrity.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) — When artwork is located on federal land or federal funds are used for removal, NEPA requires an environmental review to assess potential impacts. This may involve an Environmental Assessment (EA) or, in some cases, a more extensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). These processes are frequently used by opponents to delay removal.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) — CEQA expands upon NEPA by requiring environmental review for projects undertaken by public agencies that may have potential impacts on the physical environment, including cultural resources. Unlike NEPA, CEQA does not require that a cultural resource be listed on a state or national register to trigger review.

Research

Significant time should be dedicated to researching the artwork in question. While municipalities may have staff assigned to conduct historical research, it is critical that communities conduct their own research to ensure that dominant myths and incomplete narratives do not obscure the truth. Government agencies may be required to provide historical records related to the artwork upon request. Information may also be found through agency websites, public records requests, libraries, and independent research into the artist, benefactor, or circumstances surrounding the artwork's commission and installation.

- What is the subject of the artwork? If it depicts a historical figure, who were they, and why were they memorialized? Consult diverse sources to understand both their achievements and the harm they may have caused.
- If the artwork depicts Indigenous Peoples or other marginalized communities, were those communities consulted or involved in its creation? Did they consent to how their images or cultural practices were represented? Are the portrayals accurate and respectful?
- Who commissioned and funded the artwork, and for what purpose? Was it tied to a specific historical event or political agenda?
- Who was the artist, and how were they selected? Was there a community process? What does the artwork's location signify, particularly for Indigenous or marginalized communities?
- Has the artwork been the subject of public controversy in the past? What arguments have been made for or against it?
- Does the artwork reflect current community values, or have those values shifted since it was created?

Identifying Opposition

Understanding who opposes removal is essential for developing an effective strategy. Opponents may include historical societies, preservationists, conservative politicians, educators, artists, political groups, or provocateurs. In some cases, opponents may also hold decision-making power. Opposition can be vocal and hostile. Take precautions to protect yourself and your supporters. Do not share personal contact or employment information publicly. Attend events in groups and look out for one another. Be prepared for smear campaigns that may target your reputation, workplace, or family. Remain calm, stay focused on the issue, and do not engage in personal attacks.

Working with Public Officials

Building alliances with public officials is often critical to a successful campaign. Officials can help navigate bureaucratic systems and bring removal requests before the appropriate governing bodies. Before meeting with an official, research their background, priorities, and constituency to assess potential support and tailor your approach. Develop relationships with legislative aides, who often play a key role in shaping policy decisions. When meeting with officials, respect their time and come prepared. Bring a small, informed group—typically two to three people—unless the context calls for a larger public presence. If possible, include constituents from the official's district. Provide a clear agenda, concise materials, and space for dialogue. Avoid overwhelming officials with excessive documentation. Listen carefully for competing priorities or concerns. If an official is receptive, offer concrete ways they can support your efforts, such as sponsoring legislation, providing public testimony, or speaking at events. Conclude meetings by clarifying next steps and timelines. Follow up with a thank-you email or handwritten note to reinforce the relationship and maintain momentum.

07 Building Movements

Building Movements

Once you have completed your research and identified the entity responsible for the artwork, the next step is to build a campaign. Those with oversight and decision-making authority rarely move to remove contested artwork without sustained public pressure. Depending on the complexity and sensitivity of the artwork, your campaign may vary in scope, duration, and intensity. Although this framework focuses on artwork in the public realm, many of these strategies can also be effective in pressuring private entities to remove harmful imagery. While private landowners and businesses are protected by trespassing laws and may not face the same political accountability as public officials, campaigns that threaten reputational harm or financial loss can still be effective in compelling action. The following strategies can help build a movement that raises awareness and mobilizes public support.

Include Indigenous Stewards

Even when a campaign is led by Indigenous Peoples, it is essential to intentionally include representatives of the local tribal nation. They should be engaged early and meaningfully in shaping the campaign. As the original stewards of the land where the artwork is located, their voices and leadership must be centered and elevated.

Appoint Spokespeople

To ensure consistency and accuracy, identify two to three individuals to serve as official spokespeople. Ideally, at least one spokesperson should represent the local tribal nation. These individuals should be prepared to speak with the media, decision-makers, and the public. They must be knowledgeable about the history of the artwork, the arguments for and against removal, and capable of remaining calm under pressure. Individuals with public relations or media training are especially well suited for this role.

Develop Fact Sheets and Talking Points

Create a one-page fact sheet outlining the most compelling reasons for removal, including rebuttals to common opposing arguments. These materials help ensure that your message is clear, consistent, and accessible, and can be shared with the media, public officials, and community

members. (See Appendix 2) Build Alliances — Engage other community organizations, leaders, artists, and advocates—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to support your campaign. These allies bring their own networks and can help amplify your message. Collective action strengthens credibility and visibility.

Engage Policymakers and the Public

Identify and meet with relevant policymakers, including agency representatives, elected officials, and influential government staff. Request in-person meetings to clearly explain the issue and provide supporting materials. If officials are supportive, invite them to take visible action, such as speaking at a rally or offering public testimony. If they are opposed, document their concerns and use this information to refine your messaging and counterarguments. Begin building an email list using your own contacts and those of allied organizations. Use this list to share updates, calls to action, and event invitations. Develop a media contact list and distribute concise press releases. Create social media accounts dedicated to the campaign, develop consistent hashtags, and share research, updates, and calls to action. Launch online petitions to demonstrate broad support.

Letters, Calls to Action, and Events

Develop a letter-writing campaign by providing fact sheets and inviting influential individuals and organizations to write Letters to the Editor or direct communications to decision-makers. Offer draft letters that supporters can personalize, sign, and submit. Create a concise email template and share it widely on social media, encouraging supporters to customize and send it to targeted recipients. Include names, email addresses, and a clear deadline to create urgency. Not everyone can attend meetings or events, but many still want to help. Develop a list of simple, quick actions supporters can take, such as sending an email, making a phone call, or sharing campaign materials online. Consider creating a calendar of actions and releasing a daily or weekly call to action.

Organize an Event or Direct Action

Rallies and peaceful demonstrations can draw public attention and media coverage. When possible, time these actions

holding them at or near the contested artwork. Invite compelling speakers, including community members, artists, and policymakers. Make the event visually engaging with signs, banners, and art. Send a press release several days in advance with event details and speaker information. Support civic engagement by preparing attendees for public comment processes: keep remarks timed, state your position clearly, focus on one or two key points, share personal experiences, end with a clear request, practice beforehand, and submit written remarks for the record. Encourage supporters to arrive early, assist with logistics, and be prepared for vocal opposition while remaining calm and focused.

08 Reparations

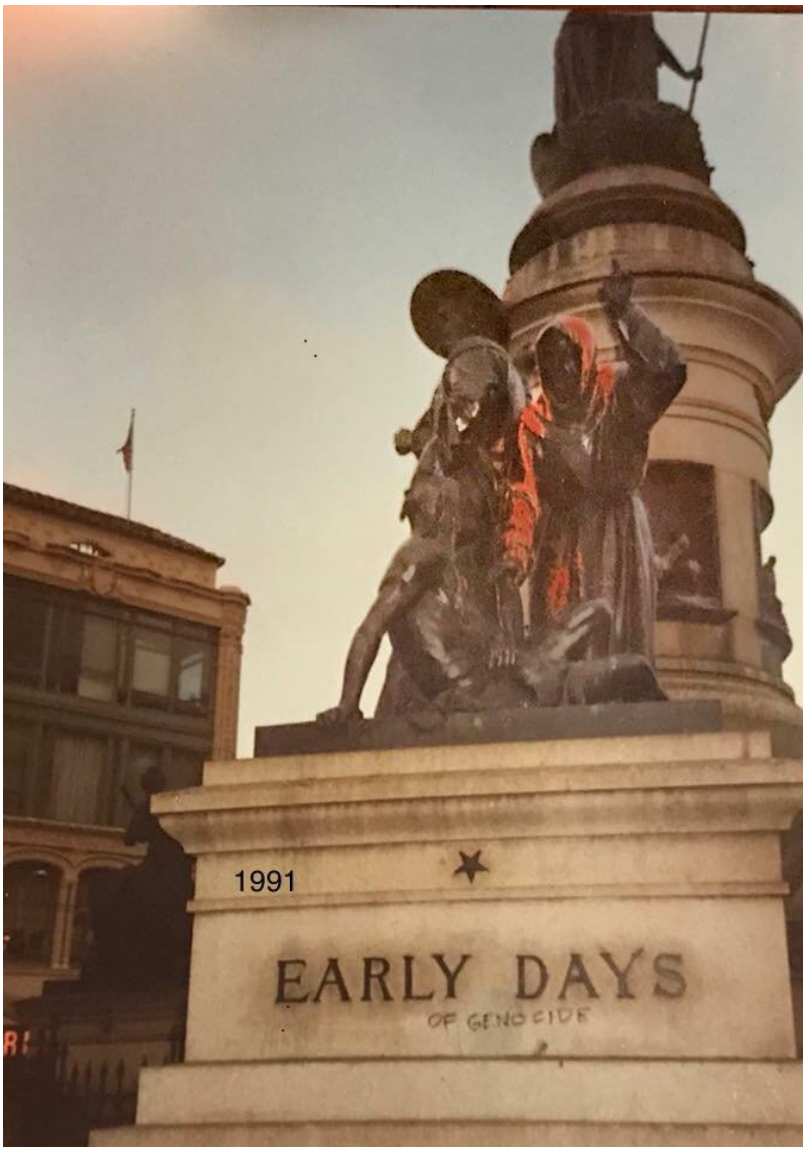
The Continuous Thread: Celebrating our Interwoven Histories, Identities and Contributions.

by Barbara Mumby Huerta

Previously published in Stanford Humanities Center ARCADE: The Humanities in the World

SUMMARY: In September 2018, the Early Days sculpture was removed from San Francisco's Civic Center in response to decades of community objections to its racist and historically inaccurate depiction of Indigenous Peoples. On April 5 and 6, 2019, over 150 members of the Bay Area's Indigenous community stood on top of the empty plinth in a symbolic act of reclamation while photographed by three artists, Britt Bradley, Jean Melesaine, and Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie. The two-day event turned community celebration was conceptualized and implemented by former San Francisco Arts Commission's staff, Barbara Mumby-Huerta. The Early Days photo project empowered the local Indigenous community to challenge the perceptions of the way that they are seen in the public realm while correcting and shifting narratives about Indigenous Peoples. These photographs inspired San Francisco's first ever citywide American Indian Initiative, the foundation of which was the San Francisco Arts Commission Galleries' exhibition The Continuous Thread: Celebrating our Interwoven Histories, Identities and Contributions. This exhibition, timed with the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Alcatraz, sparked a series of events over a three-month period throughout the city.

Growing up in a small rural migrant farming community, the only monuments or museums I had ever seen were in books or on television. Moving to San Francisco as a young adult, I often walked through the city in awe of the tall buildings that blocked the sun, the sculptures and moldings that decorated the edifices, and the bronze sculptures that loomed over me. The first time I saw the Pioneer Monument in the city's Civic Center, I was overwhelmed by the behemoth of metal and stone that rose in the middle of a busy roadway. As I moved closer, I could see that someone had doused red paint over the missionary in the "Early Days" sculpture. A visceral reaction came over me and I began to cry. I felt overwhelming sadness and fear as I looked at the representation of a Native man, defeated and demoralized beneath the weight and might of Catholicism. If there was ever a single moment that defined my future trajectory and politicized me, this was it.



Over the next twenty years, I joined many efforts to right historical wrongs. My journey brought me full circle back to the Pioneer Monument, where once again I stood in front of the “Early Days” sculpture: this time as an employee of the Arts Commission and steward of the monument. In my role, I was determined to use my sphere of influence to shift the narratives around the Native American community and bring their needs and desires to the forefront.

By the fall of 2017, the removal of the “Early Days” statue came to the forefront as efforts to remove confederate monuments heated up in the south. This was an opportunity to mobilize the community and work with city officials to ensure that this time we were successful in removing a degrading piece of public art.

Over the course of two years, the decades long battle to have the “Early Days” statue removed came to a victorious end. The grotesque state sanctioned genocide that took place in California during its formative years and the ongoing harm and trauma that racist public art inflicts upon marginalized communities were repeatedly shared with the City’s decision makers and the public during the numerous hearings. Sharing collective trauma in public forums comes with a price: the Native community had been emotionally stretched as they faced the continued ignorance about the existence of Native Americans.

Many of the arguments against the removal of monuments lay in the idea that once they are removed, their history is forgotten. I began to ask myself, how can a city that has inflicted harm upon marginalized communities support the healing of ancestral wounds

How do we use this removal as an opportunity to continue dialogue and support learning that is authentic, accurate, and empowering to Native Peoples?

As we solemnly gathered in song and prayer the morning the statue was removed, some community members mounted the empty plinth, standing atop the pedestal with their fist in the air. This image of defiance and victory was the spark that ignited the first American Indian initiative for the city of San Francisco.

What started as a small photo project with a single photographer and about thirty people, grew into a two-day production with three photographers and more than 150 members of the Native community. The removal effort had become such a unifying force, both for the Native community as well as city government, that the idea to photograph modern Native peoples on top of the empty plinth received overwhelming and unprecedented support.

Over the course of the next six months, I met with the Native community and began to curate various photo groupings that would showcase the beauty, vitality, and contributions that Indigenous people make to society in the present day.

Some of the groupings consisted of Native lawyers, educators, city employees, artists, musicians, dancers, and families. Each individual chose how they would be portrayed: either in traditional or modern clothing, or a combination of both.

On the morning of the first day of the photo shoot, we were met with a steady down pour of rain. Undaunted, community members excitedly climbed to the top of the plinth and embraced the weather conditions.

Photographer Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie took great care and consideration in taking the group photographs on top of the plinth, while Jean Melesaine used their documentarian eye to capture the essence of each person in individual portraits. A third photographer, Britt Bradley, introduced an antique wet-plate collodion process: a process that has been considered exploitative of Indigenous people when photographed at the turn of the century by white photographers. In this setting, the process was reclaimed by Indigenous people who were now in control of how they were portrayed.

On the Plinth

by Jewelle Gomez

They installed a temporary handrail

on the steps going up for the sake

of we older ones ascending to the platform

where ‘the Indian’ used to lie

awkward on his back, beneath

the hooves of manifest destiny.

I wonder where they put him

once protests about celebrating

subjugation made the Pioneer

Monument embarrassing?

I surprise myself—wishing

they’d let us take him home,

both forefather and son.

Might his bronze knees unbend

and he could stand again?

His back would be firm and straight.

His hair thick with sheen; his muscles

supple enough to command the smiles

of both women and men.

He’s probably somewhere resting

after trying for so long to appear

dignified and not hopeless.

And here we stand—

four elder women

from disparate tribes

but united as we lift

his spirit to the sky.

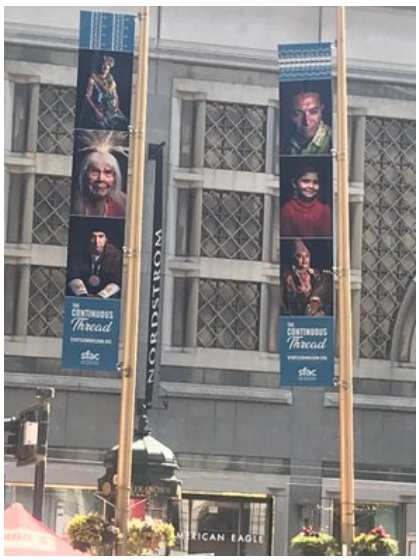
We witnessed the determination, beauty, and power of the Native community as they gathered and waited their turn to climb to the top of the plinth. The sound of laughter permeated the area as the sun broke through the clouds. Reunions took place and new connections were made. Many were moved to tears by what they were observing.

What was once a place of great distress and harm had now been reclaimed and transformed by the Native community into a place of healing and celebration. The large production spurred the interest and support from other leaders throughout the city and created partnerships across municipal government, the National Parks Service, and local non-profits. Jill Manton, the Director of the Public Art Trust and Special Initiatives at the San Francisco Arts Commission was so inspired, she was adamant that the faces of the Native community should be projected onto the buildings that flank the empty pedestal. Working with the Public Library and the Asian Art Museum, for one week, from dusk to dawn, the faces of the Native community looked down on to the area where the statue once resided.

San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery Director, Meg Shiffler and her team agreed to an exhibition of the photographs, timed with the 50th anniversary of the occupation of Alcatraz and Native American Heritage Month. Working with a local Native American/Native Hawaiian curator, Carolyn Kuali'I, the exhibition launched the larger citywide initiative that ran from October through December 2019.

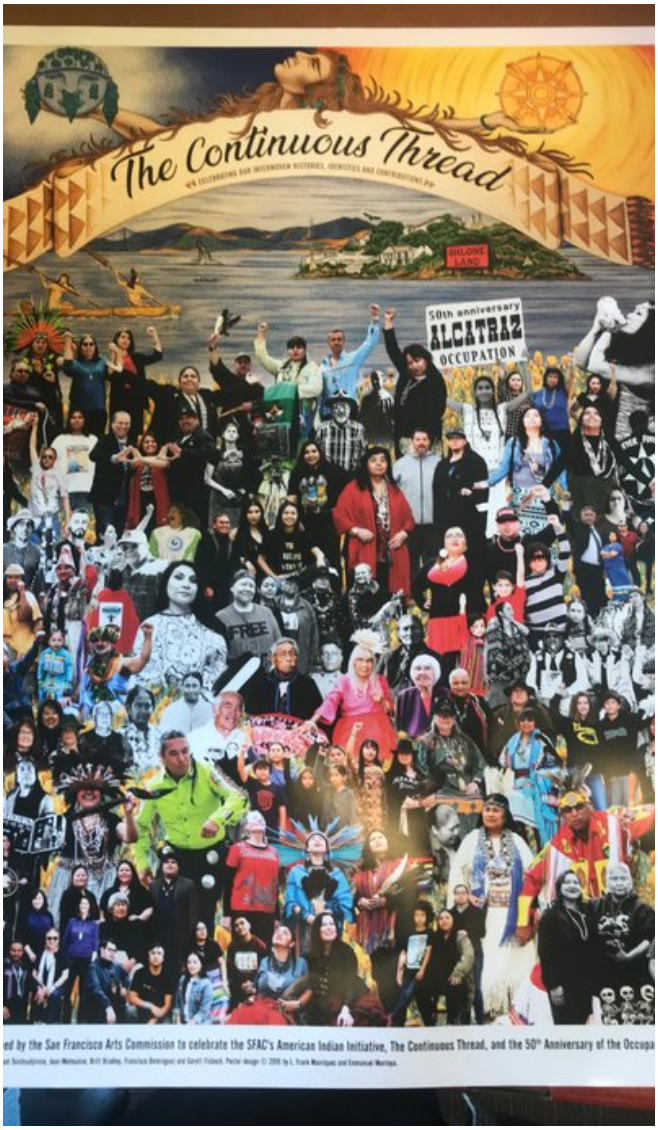
The Continuous Thread: Celebrating our Interwoven Histories, Identities and Contributions portrayed the Indigenous community as modern people rather than relics of a forgotten past.

Using a comprehensive marketing campaign featuring various portraits from the photo shoot, the initiative aimed to reclaim space, challenge perceptions, and shift narratives about Native Peoples. The faces of Native community members adorned city buses, the kiosks that ran along market street, and on the banners flown over the cable car turnaround on Powell Street.

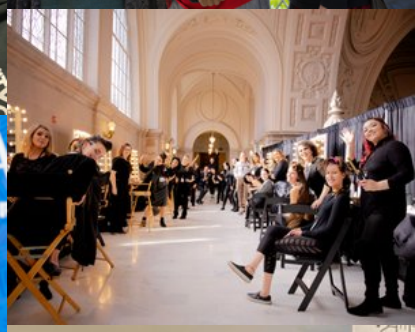


A commemorative poster was created by artists L. Frank Manriquez (Tongva) and Emmanuel Montoya (Apache).

Exhibitions ran simultaneously at the Airport, the main branch of the Public Library and on Alcatraz Island. The community celebrated the 2nd annual Indigenous Peoples Day music and art festival at Yerba Buena Gardens and the 44th annual American Indian Film Festival. To honor those that occupied Alcatraz Island fifty years earlier, a free concert was held at the Herbst Theatre with welcoming remarks by the original organizer of the occupation, LaNada WarJack. To close the three months of events, an Indigenous fashion show took place in the rotunda of city hall, featuring Patricia Michaels (Taos Pueblo), Leah Mata Fragua (Chusmash), and Sho Sho Esquiro (Kaska Dene, Tlingit).



Many changes have taken place in the city since the initiative concluded. Ohlone leadership has been recognized, land acknowledgments are now commonplace and a designated American Indian Cultural District has been established. Contrary to the beliefs held by those against monument removals, the removal of the “Early Days” statue wasn’t the end of the story. The removal was the opportunity to write a new chapter narrated by a community that had been historically silenced.




INDIGENOUS♥LAND

Monuments to the Past and Future: Reclaiming land and space with Sogorea Te’ Land Trust

by Jewelle Gomez and Inés Ixierda

As people grow more open to discussion of the exploitation that is the history of this country, it’s become clear that the contemporary landscape is dotted with reminders of the colonialism and racism that have suppressed the cultural expression of Indigenous people. Removal of statues and other monuments to oppression are a necessary step to creating a healthy, balanced nation. We’ve seen the shadow that ubiquitous Confederate monuments have thrown over the lives of African Americans. They also provide rallying points for believers in ‘the Lost Cause’ of the institution of slavery. Political uprisings of recent years have shown a variety of multi-racial approaches in responding to monuments to racism using strategies ranging from grassroots organizing, ballot measures, to direct actions to remove statues, names of institutions and reclaiming public space. Removing anti-humanist monuments is necessary for real democracy.

Concomitant with that work it is vital to support efforts by Native American tribes and Indigneous people to restore the cultural heritage that undergirds the healthy growth of any community. There are many places in which the lives and accomplishments of Native people might be commemorated. Tourists and sports enthusiasts are often surprised by the tribute found on King Street in San Francisco. Giants ballpark. Embedded in the sidewalk are 104 bronze plaques engraved with the remaining known words of the Rammaytush language spoken by people Indigenous to the area realtors now call Mission Bay. Like many representations, the content of the installation has been reconsidered by some as time passes, The accuracy of the translations has been called into question, as has the appropriateness of tributes that are trod on by pedestrians.

Back east Sachem (Chief) Massasoit of the Mashpee Wampanoag was revered for his peaceful welcome of the colonists who invaded the U.S. The state of Massachusetts was named for him, however, there appear to be fewer than three monuments to that actual Founding Father in the entire country.

In New Mexico, which is home to 19 sovereign Pueblo nations, the dismantling of monuments to colonial rule continues after decades of protest. The word ‘savage’ was scratched out of the marble on the Soldier’s Monument in Santa Fe which honoured Civil War Union soldiers who battled ‘savage’ Native tribes. Then, in 2020, on what has been called Columbus Day, October 12, demonstrators celebrated as they toppled the offending obelisk.

> “
> ***"In that time there was no concept of homelessness, the land was all free."***

Across the country these monumental removals recognize the modern impacts of historical and contemporary inequalities. On Indigenous Peoples Day 2020, five Indigenous and two-spirit protesters were arrested in a demonstration in which a statue of a Junipero Serra was toppled at Mission San Rafael in Marin County. As the statue of the notorious mission founder fell one of the women was reported to have yelled “This is for my mother, this is for my grandmother.” All five are facing felony charges.

In the face of these ongoing challenges and beyond the physical monuments of brick and bronze, Native communities across the US are developing projects that contribute to the reconnection of Native people with the land and culture that has fed them for a millennium. Revitalization of cultural practices and lifeways are emerging across Indian Country. Several years ago, a Wampanoag scholar who graduated from MIT, Jessie Little Doe Baird, used a Christian bible published in the Wampanoag language in 1663 as a kind of dictionary to recreate her language and started a reclamation project which holds language classes and other programs. Native food and plant knowledges, sciences, and land care practices are re-emerging across Indian Country and urban Indigenous areas as the Indigenous people continue to return to their ancestral practices.

2011 prayerful resistance camp at Sogorea Te'

Back in what is now known as California, the Ohlone and Miwok made their home along the Pacific Coast for thousands of years despite the colonizing domination by the Mission system in the 1700s which violently destroyed homes and enslaved tribes. In that time, there was no concept of homelessness, the land was all free. While nations in other parts of the country were given treaties and land none of the treaties made with California tribes was passed into law and many of the Ohlone were deprived of Federal recognition giving their descendants little legal recourse for fighting off development and rebuilding their world. Most went into hiding.

While some nations were successful with treaties, none of the treaties made with Californian tribes were enacted. As a result, tribes like the Ohlone were deprived of federal recognition, leaving their descendants with little legal recourse for fighting off development and rebuilding their world. Realizing this, most went into hiding. Fueled by the Gold Rush, California's statehood was founded on genocide that decimated the Indigenous population. Indigenous villages, Sacred Sites, Shellmounds and burials were razed for development. It was centuries later that the first laws attempting to include Indigenous people in what happens to Indigenous cultural and ancestral remains went into effect. In the Bay Area, this meant that when the tech boom led to massive redevelopment, disturbing countless cultural sites and burials, Sogorea Te's founders started getting phone calls about the burials. And the Ohlone and Intertribal people started organizing to protect them.

In 2011 a grassroots group, Indian People Organizing for Change (IPOC) led a prayerful take over and reoccupation of a sacred site at Sogorea Te', known today as Glen Cove, in a 109-day encampment to protect it from development. Led by Corrina Gould (Confederated Villages of Lisjan) and Johnella LaRose (Shoshone Bannock/Carrizo), the direct action resulted in an easement, sparking the idea of using a land trust as an entity to access land for urban Indigenous people.

As working Indigenous single mothers, activists and organizers in Oakland, they had long dreamed of a way to return land to intertribal and Indigenous people in the East Bay, and above all, the people whose ancestral land it is. Gould attended a land trust conference and connected with a few other Indigenous people... but overall the “alternative land” uses were a continuation of the old boys’ clubs. They needed something different. In 2012, Sogorea Te’ Land Trust was formed as an urban Indigenous women led land return entity. A land trust is an organisation that takes legal stewardship of property to protect it and can be in charge of management and maintenance of natural resources or housing or other community purposes. Land trusts may be private or municipal in nature and often create protections that stay with the land in perpetuity. Forever.

The Bay Area is second only to Los Angeles in the number of Native Americans who make their home here, and most do not own or have access to land of any kind. While the land trust has access to land for gardens and ceremonial uses, they do not currently “own” any land and without federal recognition, local tribes couldn’t protect the land without traditional ownership deeds. Local governments are emergently co-operative in part because this area has the most expensive real estate market in the country. But of course, for every element of work on the land there are municipal and state fees to be paid, permissions to be asked.

The first piece of land was rematraited by Planting Justice and returned through easement access in East Oakland, right along a waterway of Gould’s ancestors. Here at Lisjan, the women began building an arbor, a ceremonial site and prayer space for Ohlone people, which is the first in centuries. They’ve also begun planting tobacco, echinacea and vegetables and developed language classes and cultural revitalization efforts. They are working to build alterative land bases, sovereignty, and wellness for urban Indigenous people.

While this work is based in the territory of Huchiun, the trust is collaborating with other nations to build land return and Rematriation movement resources. The Land Trust wants to help other Indigenous people establish access to land. Those interested in pursuing the land trust dream need to become familiar with their local land use regulations and rules, survey the parcels of land to discover who holds them and to understand the tax base of the “properties.” In addition, environmental research is vital to be certain the land is suitable for sustainable planting.

Legal consultation is also crucial. Sogorea Te’ collaborates with Sustainable Economies Law Center which is a legal collective that offers collective and people-centered approaches to help navigate the tangle of laws that must be faced. Any group embarking on a land trust project would need to engage with some legal consultants, real estate research and engagement with local regulations. While this can seem daunting, there are resources available and new strategies and approaches in fields of legal and property studies are emerging around Indigneous land return.

Rematriated Indigenous land in East Oakland

A unique support for the land trust’s work is a voluntary honor tax called "Shuumi" paid by supporters and allies. Beyond a mere charity donation, Shuumi specifically recognizes there is a living legacy of colonization and asks allies to engage with this history and support Indigenous led land work. The land tax goes directly to support the Sogorea Te’s rematriation work. In addition, as a nonprofit, Sogorea Te’ operates under numerous grants. Funding is an element of the project that has to be considered by anyone considering a similar work and wherever you are, engage the tribal people whose land you are on.

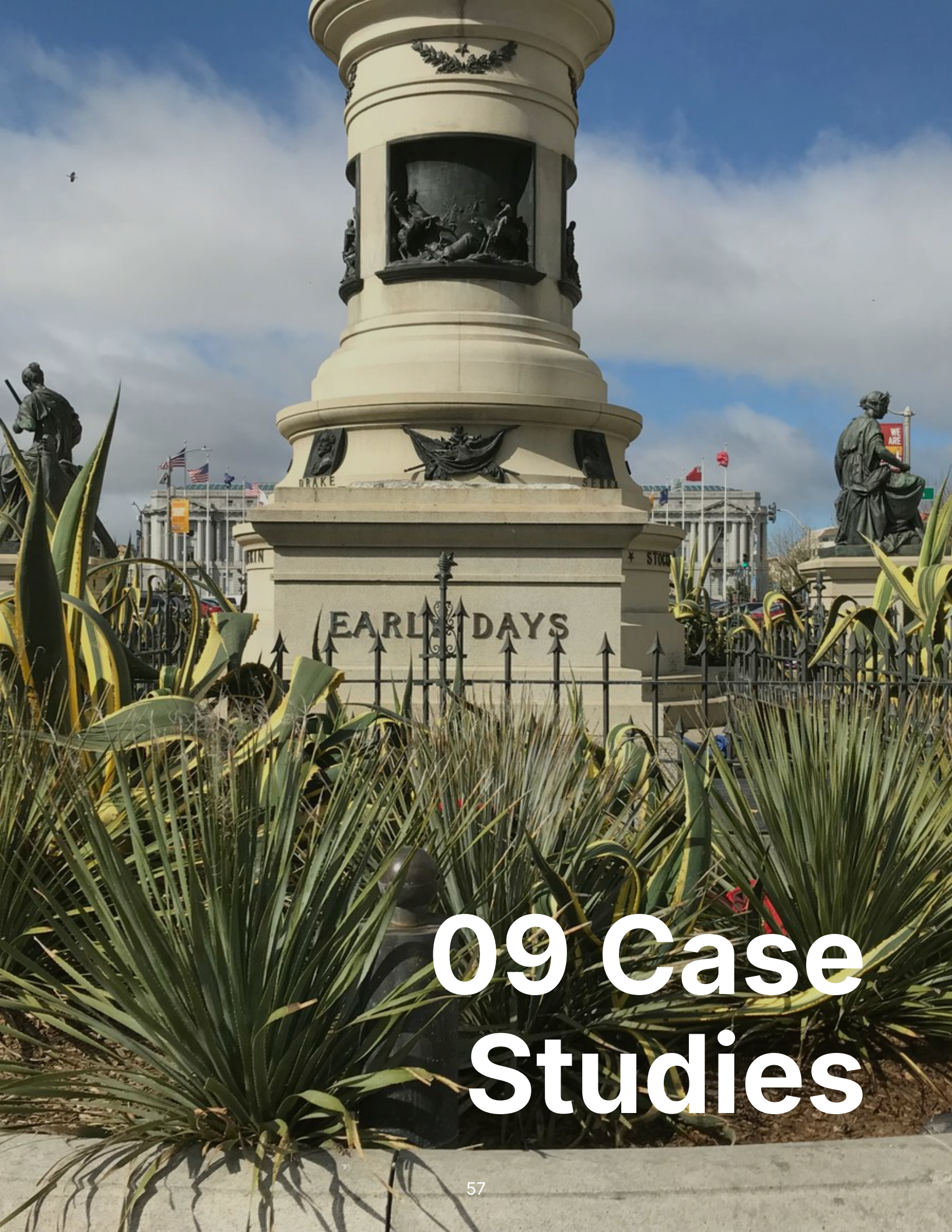
Sogorea Te’ is fully cognizant of the historic undermining of the prosperity of Native nations. The Mission system claimed Indigenous land and enslaved its people in ways that have made it almost impossible to create ‘generational wealth,’ that is land or funds to be passed down as inheritance. At the same time, it’s important to remember that the problems from a hundred years ago are also the problems of right now. Tribes are still working today to protect the local remains of ancient Shellmounds which are sacred burial places from developers determined to dig up Native American remains turning sites into commercial properties.

Where the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust has planted and built people are given a place to mourn, ancient medicines are grown and the butterflies come back. The philosophy behind the Trust’s work is to be not accumulative but rather transformational, utilizing small land parcels around the area to empower Indigenous residents. This work is seen by the Collective members as a part of a personal healing journey as well as a path to learning a different way of being in the world.

Recognition of Native people and land acknowledgements at the opening of events and meetings is significant but it is only a start. Mere acknowledgement without action or connection supports erasure. Healing historic harms requires tangible steps towards real transformation. Ultimately, non-native people and projects need to begin shifting access to resources and actually return land. And it's beginning to happen. While some monuments are falling, others are being built. The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust is among those creating living tributes to Indigenous peoples survival, resilience, and hope. Its tangible, everyday practices offer a glimpse into the possibilities of repair, rematriation, and Indigenous led futures.

Contributions to this piece were made by Sogorea Te’ Land Trust members Nazshonni Brown And Vick Montaño. Photographs by Inés Ixierda.

Overlooking Oakland, the territory of Huchiun



09 Case Studies

San Francisco, California — The “Early Days” Statue

The “Early Days” statue was one component of a larger sculptural grouping titled the Pioneer Monument. Located in San Francisco’s Civic Center, it was the subject of sustained community dissent for more than two decades before its removal on September 14, 2018. After the removal, the City of San Francisco faced a lengthy legal challenge that ended on February 1, 2021, when the court ruled in the City’s favor. In the early morning hours of September 14, the sun rose over an empty plinth for the first time. A small crowd gathered in quiet celebration. A few people climbed onto the pedestal and raised their fists. Photos were taken and quickly posted online, announcing that a symbol of white supremacy had fallen. This was a hard-won battle decades in the making—a fight that required Indigenous community members and allies to confront white supremacy in its many forms. For some, it was a first entry into politics. For others, it was a continuation of a lifelong struggle to humanize Indigenous peoples.

Background

In January 1848, a wealthy carpenter and piano maker named James Lick arrived in the small village of San Francisco with his tools and a large sum of money. Soon after his arrival, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, sparking an economic firestorm. Lick invested heavily in real estate, buying up property across the growing city and surrounding areas. While he became one of the richest men in California, California Indians were being hunted and killed by government-funded militias. When Lick died in 1876, he bequeathed part of his fortune to the City of San Francisco to fund a large monument honoring the "history" of California, as well as a memorial to Francis Scott Key. In 1894, the Pioneer Monument was erected at the intersection of Hyde and Grove Streets, in front of the original City Hall.

Created by artist Frank Happersberger, the granite-and-bronze monument weighs approximately 800 tons. A central column rises 47 feet, topped by Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and war, alongside a grizzly bear. Around the column are inlaid bronze portraits of white men credited with "founding" California: Sir Francis Drake, John C. Frémont, Junípero Serra, John Sutter, and the monument's benefactor, James Lick. Arguably, each profited from the subjugation, exploitation, and devastation of California Indians. Surrounding the central column are four large bronze sculptures mounted on tall granite plinths. Two—Plenty and Commerce—feature idealized female figures in a classical style. The most controversial works—In '49 and Early Days—promote a narrative that erases people of color, relegates Native people to a submissive position, and perpetuates harmful stereotypes, while celebrating the violent conquest of the state.

The In '49 sculpture depicts three white gold miners, presenting the Gold Rush as a heroic origin story for California statehood. Notably absent are the contributions of Chinese, Mexican, and Native miners—along with the catastrophic impact the Gold Rush had on Indigenous communities. Even at the time of installation, the monument was not universally celebrated: local clergy and their congregations criticized the deification of figures they believed symbolized the moral degradation and violence of the city. Their concerns were ignored.

The Early Days sculpture embodies the Spanish missionary period. It depicts an Indigenous figure lying submissively beneath a looming missionary. Happersberger described the scene as showing “the dawning of intelligence” across an “ignorant savage.” The artist chose to sculpt a romanticized “Plains Indian” figure instead of accurately representing the local Ohlone people. In the background, a vaquero stands in a threatening posture, holding a lariat that disappeared years ago. Twelve years later, City Hall was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, but the Pioneer Monument remained largely intact. For the next 85 years, the monument sat largely ignored as the surrounding streets deteriorated into the city’s seedy underbelly.

Rise of American Indian Activism

In the early 1990s, the monument returned to prominence. With the construction of the new San Francisco Main Library, the Pioneer Monument was relocated from its original location to a more visible site between the library and the Asian Art Museum—directly in front of City Hall, at the center of Fulton Street. Surrounded by government buildings and cultural institutions, it stood as a towering reminder of San Francisco’s settler-colonial beginnings. The relocation coincided with a nationwide surge in Native activism leading up to the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’s arrival—an event that marked centuries of genocide and near-decimation of Indigenous peoples. While preservationists opposed moving the monument, many Native community members argued it should be removed entirely.

At that time, the Native community was met with little empathy from the Arts Commission, while Mayor Willie Brown openly expressed annoyance about the controversy. A compromise was reached: a plaque would be installed to contextualize the statue. A small committee—Native representatives, the Catholic Church, and the Spanish government—argued over the wording for years. The final text was watered down, avoiding responsibility for the genocide of California Indians. Over time, landscaping obscured the plaque, other issues took precedence, and the monument faded again into the background of tourist photos.

Twenty Five Years Later

The Arts Commission, under the leadership of Tom DeCaigney, entered a period in which racial equity became a priority. As Director of Community Investments, I was determined to shift narratives and bring Native priorities forward within my sphere of influence. Using the Human Rights Commission report “Discrimination by Omission” (2007) as a foundation, I hosted focus groups and met with Native leaders to identify priorities within my scope.

Over the next five years, I worked to increase funding and visibility for the Native community—particularly the Ramaytush Ohlone—including efforts to re-establish an American Indian Cultural Center, establish an official Indigenous Peoples Day, and pursue removal of the Early Days statue in Civic Center, Junípero Serra in Golden Gate Park, and Christopher Columbus at Coit Tower. I

n preliminary conversations, Director DeCaigney acknowledged the harm embedded in these monuments and was willing to explore removal processes. Meanwhile, our agency undertook deep equity work—training, dialogue, and policy development—to build a shared understanding of white supremacy and structural inequity within government practice.

The Arts Commission became one of the first city departments to adopt a formal racial equity statement that included a land acknowledgement, along with an in-depth racial equity work plan. This foundation proved crucial for what followed.


Columbus
WAS LOST
PEDOPHILIA

Removals Move West

After the August 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville—where Heather Heyer was killed and many others were injured—the San Francisco community began contacting the Arts Commission about removing the Early Days statue. Unlike the 1990s, the Commission’s governing body was now more representative of the city’s diversity and more informed about systemic racism embedded in public collections. Local activist Mari Villaluna helped mobilize public support through a Facebook page, press releases, and an online petition. In my role, I helped guide staff and commissioners in understanding the issue’s impact on the Native community while liaising with community members to keep them informed about a complicated bureaucratic process.

As a chartered agency with authority over public art, the Arts Commission often relocated or removed artworks for conservation without needing approval from other departments. But in this case, the Early Days statue was part of a larger monument located in a landmarked district, which complicated the legal path forward. It was unclear whether the Arts Commission needed a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to remove the statue. After extensive internal discussions involving city attorneys, the decision was made to seek the COA rather than risk future litigation. That decision required multiple public meetings as follows:

1. The Arts Commission heard the recommendation and voted to approve removal.

2. The HPC held a public meeting, approved removal, and issued the COA

3. The Arts Commission held a final meeting to accept the HPC recommendation and vote again.

All three meetings resulted in overwhelming public support and unanimous votes in favor of removal. Opponents numbered in the single digits. The final recommendation stated the statue would be moved to storage due to “significant adverse public reaction over an extended period of time” (Resolution No. 035-18-057).

The Board of Appeals

As staff prepared to remove and store the statue, a Petaluma attorney, Frear Stephen Schmid, filed an appeal on March 19, 2018 to stop the removal. He argued that removing the statue was comparable to “book burning by the Nazis” or “destroying statues by the Taliban,” and insisted that even if the statue was “unpleasant” to some, it was “California history” and must remain (Case No. 2017-015491 COA Appeal #18-035).

The Arts Commission and HPC submitted a joint rebuttal addressing Schmid’s six arguments:

1. Standing: The Arts Commission had standing under the Charter and Administrative Code to apply for a COA for public art

2. Illegality of destruction/alteration: The proposal was not to destroy or alter the statue, but to remove it from public display and place it in secure fine-art storage.

3. Symmetry and alignment: The monument’s footprint and the placement of remaining sculptures would remain intact.

4. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards: The proposed work maintained the character-defining features of the Civic Center Landmark District and met applicable standards

5. First Amendment: The monument constituted government speech; the City had the right to choose what messages it publicly conveys and whether to continue displaying the statue.

6. CEQA/EIR: The project qualified for a categorical exemption.

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“It is the turn of white people and those trying to uphold “tradition,” people who want to keep things the way they have been for 500 years, to take a back seat and let other voices and perspectives lead.” — Ana Delgado, Email to BOA dated April 20, 2018

Schmid's appeal went before the Board of Appeals on April 18, 2018. He claimed to be a "Native Californian" and a proud descendant of a founder of San Francisco's Committee of Vigilance—a militia-type organization similar to others that rose during the Gold Rush and were compensated for massacres of California Indians. We were confident the Board would affirm the permits. Instead, they upheld the appeal, blocking removal. The Board did not meaningfully engage the actual question before them—whether the permits were issued legally and according to standard process. Commissioner Rick Swig aggressively questioned the Arts Commission's Senior Registrar, demanding a quantified definition of "ongoing, adverse reaction." He claimed there were not enough supporters for removal "to fill a comic book," and asserted expertise because his family name appears on buildings and museums across the city. The Board's official reasoning was that the HPC rarely approves removal permits; therefore, approving this one was "out of the ordinary" and thus incorrect. The decision was demoralizing for Arts Commission staff and the Native community, both of whom had worked for consensus. San Francisco Poet Laureate Kim Shuck (Tsalgi) responded by writing one poem a day for 50 days, expressing collective grief and anger while raising awareness. We would soon learn that shared struggle can also generate unity.

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"As a Japanese American incarcerated in an American concentration camp during WWII, I personally experienced the humiliation, degradation, and continued racism against my family and community. We as San Franciscans cannot tolerate any form of hate symbols or actions against any people – especially those who are indigenous to this country." — Janice Mirikitani, Co-Founder, GLIDE, Email to BOA dated June 8, 2018

Community Mobilization

The Board of Appeals decision rippled across City Hall and through the community. Many were confused; many were furious. Mobilization began quickly online, and on April 25, 2018, more than 23 community members unexpectedly packed the Board's hearing room. I was moved by their dedication—especially those who had never testified before and carried deep mistrust of government settings.

I helped prepare people for the process and reminded them: this was their time to speak, and the commissioners were required to listen. For more than an hour, speaker after speaker demanded a rehearing. The commissioners were unprepared. Some were visibly affected. One commissioner, Daryl Honda, repeatedly rolled his eyes and made snide remarks.

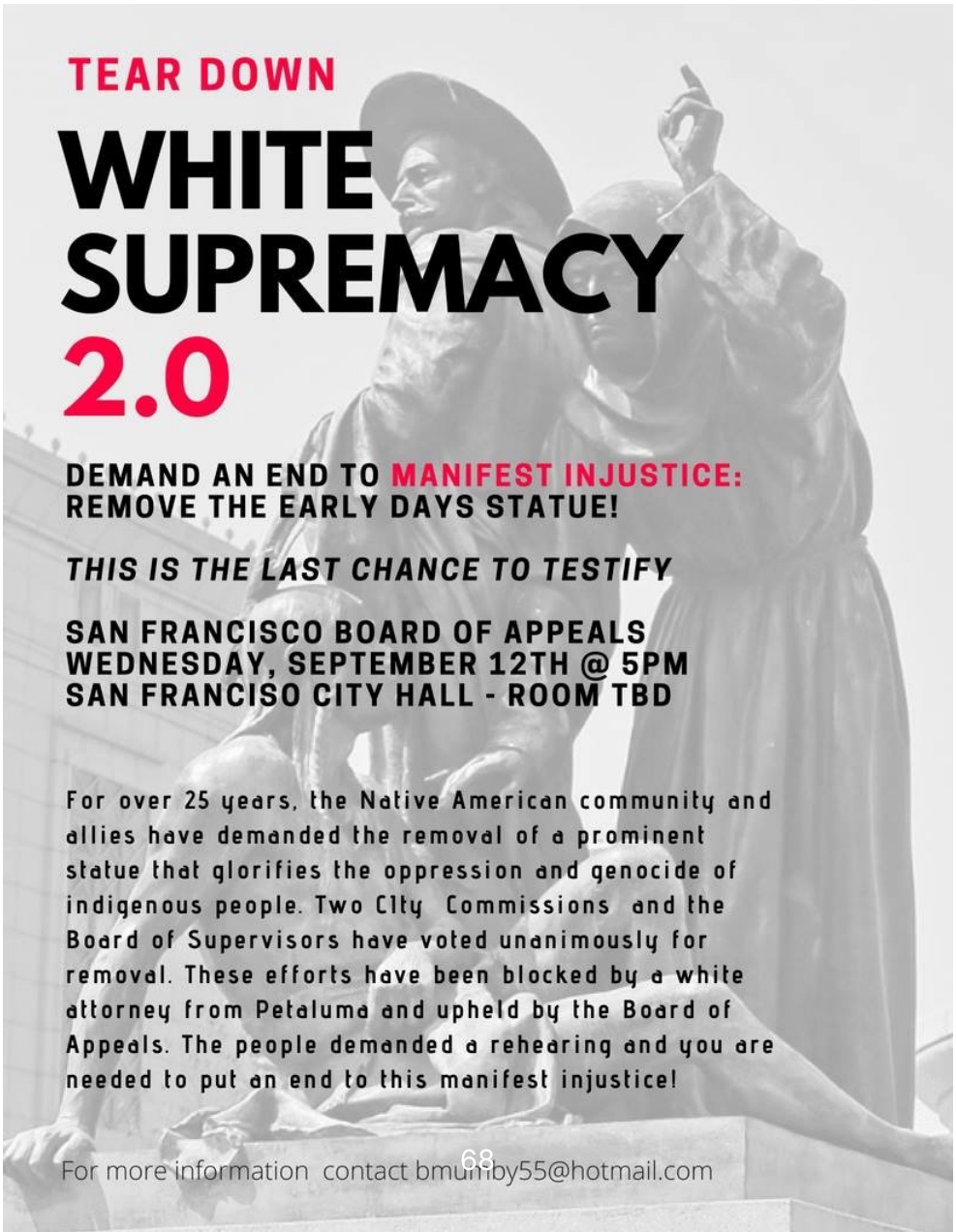
Two days later, the Arts Commission and HPC jointly requested a rehearing, which was scheduled for June 13. A broader mobilization effort intensified: social media calls, email templates, contact lists, letter-writing to influential community figures, and press outreach. Media coverage grew. Criticism spread across city government, including a public rebuke from Acting Mayor Mark Farrell and dissent from every member of the Board of Supervisors. Every elected official in San Francisco supported removal.

On May 1, 2018, the Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a resolution urging the Board of Appeals to rehear the appeal. That same day, the Human Rights Commission sent a letter imploring reconsideration.

On June 13, 2018, the courtroom was packed. The Board underestimated turnout and placed our item last—likely hoping people would leave. Instead, an overflow room was opened, sheriffs were brought in, and the crowd stayed. More than 40 people testified—only three in support of keeping the statue. The Board also received more than 90 emails and letters supporting rehearing and removal, compared to only seven supporting the statue's retention. We distributed flyers with talking points on one side and the words "Tear Down White Supremacy" on the other. Schmid appeared visibly rattled and expanded his argument to claim the agencies were discriminating against Caucasian people. Under mounting pressure from the public and city officials, the Board agreed to rehear the issue on September 12, 2018.

> ***"Mr. Schmid has denounced the removal of this statue as a form of Fascism. This entire monument is a tribute to Fascism. It is a prime example of how propaganda being allowed to exist in such a prominent location can distort history and alter the way individuals are viewed." — Barbara Mumby-Huerta, April 18, 2018 public comment for the BOA***

For the next three months, we continued educating the public and organizing for the final hearing. As national attention grew, some of us were targeted: personal phone numbers and home addresses were posted on conservative websites. Many of us were concerned about the safety of our families. We stayed focused. The crowd on September 12 was even larger and included media and several supervisors. KPOO radio provided live updates. Hours of testimony followed, including an emotional speech by my sixteen-year-old child. Only six people argued for keeping the statue. When the Board delivered its final statements, Commissioner Rick Swig issued a public apology for his earlier remarks. The vote went in our favor. Cheers erupted. Schmid left in defeat, vowing to take the case to the Supreme Court if necessary.



Removal Day and Postscript

Anticipating a favorable outcome, Arts Commission staff had planned removal for Monday, September 17, 2018. Director DeCaigney worried Schmid would seek another injunction if we waited. The day after the hearing, staff quietly advanced the removal date to Friday, September 14, at 5:30 a.m. We kept the new timeline quiet to prevent obstruction or violence—and to ensure the Native community and allies could be present for the removal as part of a healing process. Avoiding social media, we called, texted, and emailed supporters: the statue would come down at dawn. As morning broke over Civic Center, about forty people gathered in silence. Ohlone elder DeeDee Manzanarez Ybarra led the women in song as the Early Days statue was lifted from its pedestal and placed on a truck. Victory rose in our throats as the statue disappeared into the horizon on its way to storage. Standing beside my child—on the same ground where I had stood more than twenty-five years earlier—I felt my work come full circle. Today, the empty pedestal remains: a reminder that collective will is powerful enough to tear down white supremacy.

True to his word, Frear Stephen Schmid filed a lawsuit against the City, Director Tom DeCaigney, and the company hired to remove, refurbish, and store the statue. On February 1, 2021, the First Appellate District ruled in favor of the City in Schmid v. City and County of San Francisco. The court found that under San Francisco Administrative Code, Schmid should have appealed to the Board of Supervisors—the elected body with oversight of the Historic Preservation Commission—rather than the Board of Appeals.

Public Comment Excerpts

“My ancestors were beaten, raped and forced into slavery and Christianity as the statue very clearly depicts. ...our Ohlone women sang at night to cover up the screams of the young girls being raped so as not to frighten the other children. Can you hear them singing?” — Dee Dee Manzanares Ybarra, Email to BOA dated April 23, 2018

“As we collectively come to terms with right and wrong, we must demand that this statue be removed and put in a proper place (ie. A museum) to house this city’s collective history where it can be stored, discussed, and examined in a balanced and appropriate way, not publicly displayed where white supremacy and colonial powers are celebrated at the expense of California’s First Nation’s people.” — Tisina Parker, Email to BOA dated April 22, 2018

“I would hope that commissioners recognize that when we listen to and center the experiences of the most marginalized, it creates better outcomes for all of us. It is not erasing history to remove a statue. Rather, it is facing the difficult truth of history while simultaneously working to minimize the amount of harm that these reminders have on people who are still living with the legacy of genocide every day.” — Claudia Leung, Email to BOA dated April 20, 2018

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“The Early Days statue, which depicts a historical narrative where native people are frozen in time, crouching at the mercy of its ‘saviors’ – well, who is telling this story? It is NOT the story that helps understand the complexities of this era but a story that DIVIDES us even further by its presence. For some, it is history, for native people and communities of color, it’s genocide.” — Gisela Insuaste, Email to BOA dated April 23, 2018

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“Monuments are erected to commemorate a victory and it is time for us to acknowledge that acts of genocide do not make a country victorious.” — Barbara Mumby-Huerta, Public Testimony to Arts Commission October 2017

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“The pioneer statue reminds me of the control the Priest and Nuns had over us (in boarding school). I remember my Grandfather telling us not to tell anyone we were Indian because they would take us from our family. We grew up with that fear as did many of our people. Looking at this statue brings back the fear installed by the church.” — Louise Miranda Ramirez, Chairperson Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation, Letter to BOA dated April 24, 2018

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“It is true, we should not run from our history or ignore it. Likewise, we must educate everyone about all of our history, even the blights in our past. However, placement and context is important. This type of statue warrants proper contextualization, including input from Native Tribes. Without proper contextualization, like in a museum, statues like this - appearing at the seat of government – stand to celebrate a period and activity most of us agree was brutal and wrong.” — Alex Wilson, Email to BOA dated June 12, 2018

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“Have any of you felt like you never belonged? It feels like you’re all alone, like you have no one to hold onto, like everyone looks down upon you. This statue was made to show us that we are subhuman, nothing, useless. It makes me feel, as a 16-year-old Native American, subhuman, like nothing, like I’m useless. All of the hate causes my people to despise our heritage, to assimilate into the culture that made us hate ourselves, to blend into a culture that killed our ancestors, our ancestors’ children, and our ancestor’s children’s children and that’s horrible. When I see this statue, I think that you still believe we are nothing, that we are worthless, that we don’t belong in a society and that we should forget who we are and the ancestors that made us who we are today. If you want your citizens to be happy in your city, take down the statue that tortures us every time we walk past it.” — H. Mumby-Ward, age 16, Public Testimony to BOA dated September 12, 2018

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“As a Chinese American, it’s important to empathize with the plight of others, since we ourselves faced state sanctioned discrimination when the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was made into law. Can you imagine a statue glorifying Japanese internment or the mistreatment of Filipino migrant field workers being allowed to stand in Civic Center today? There would be public outcry because we understand that though that was in the past, it was wrong and does not reflect the values of our Sanctuary City.” — Debbie Ng, Letter to BOA dated April 20, 2018

10 The Contributors











Adriane Tafoya is a member of the Tejon Indian Tribe. She has been working in museums as a registrar/collections manager for almost twenty years. She currently works at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville as the Senior Collections Manager at the McClung Museum of Natural History and Culture.

Barbara Mumby-Huerta is a multi-disciplinary artist, curator, and cultural worker. A recipient of a 2019 Open Society Foundations' Racial Equality Fellowship, Barbara works to shift narratives about Indigenous Peoples, uplifts stories that have been silenced, and disrupts the status quo. She is descended from the Powhatan Confederacy (Patawomeck, Pamunkey, and Mattaponi).

Christian L. Frock is a writer and public scholar focused on art, politics, and public life. She has taught as visiting faculty at California College of the Arts, University of California, Berkeley; San Francisco Art Institute, and New York University's Washington D. C. Global Academic Center. Her writing has been featured in several publications, including GuardianUS, KQED, and San Francisco Chronicle. She is based in Washington D. C.

H. Kai Mumby is an artist, activist, and college student. He is an enrolled member of the First Nations Liard Band of Kaska Dene and descends from the Taku River Tlingit and Powhatan Confederacy.

Inés Ixierda is an interdisciplinary Mestizx artist and media maker with a background in youth work, decolonial nonprofit administration, and community organizing. She leads STLT's art and media, coordinates projects, organizes events, and works on the land with plant medicines.

Jewelle Gomez (Cape Verdean/Wampanoag/Ioway) is a playwright, novelist, and poet. She's the author of eight books including the first Black Lesbian vampyre novel, THE GILDA STORIES, which has been in print continuously for more than 25 years. Her essays, poetry and short fiction have been published in more than 100 anthologies while her trilogy of plays exploring the mythology of African American artists in the first half of the 20th century premiered in New York City in 2018. (photo credit: Irene Young)

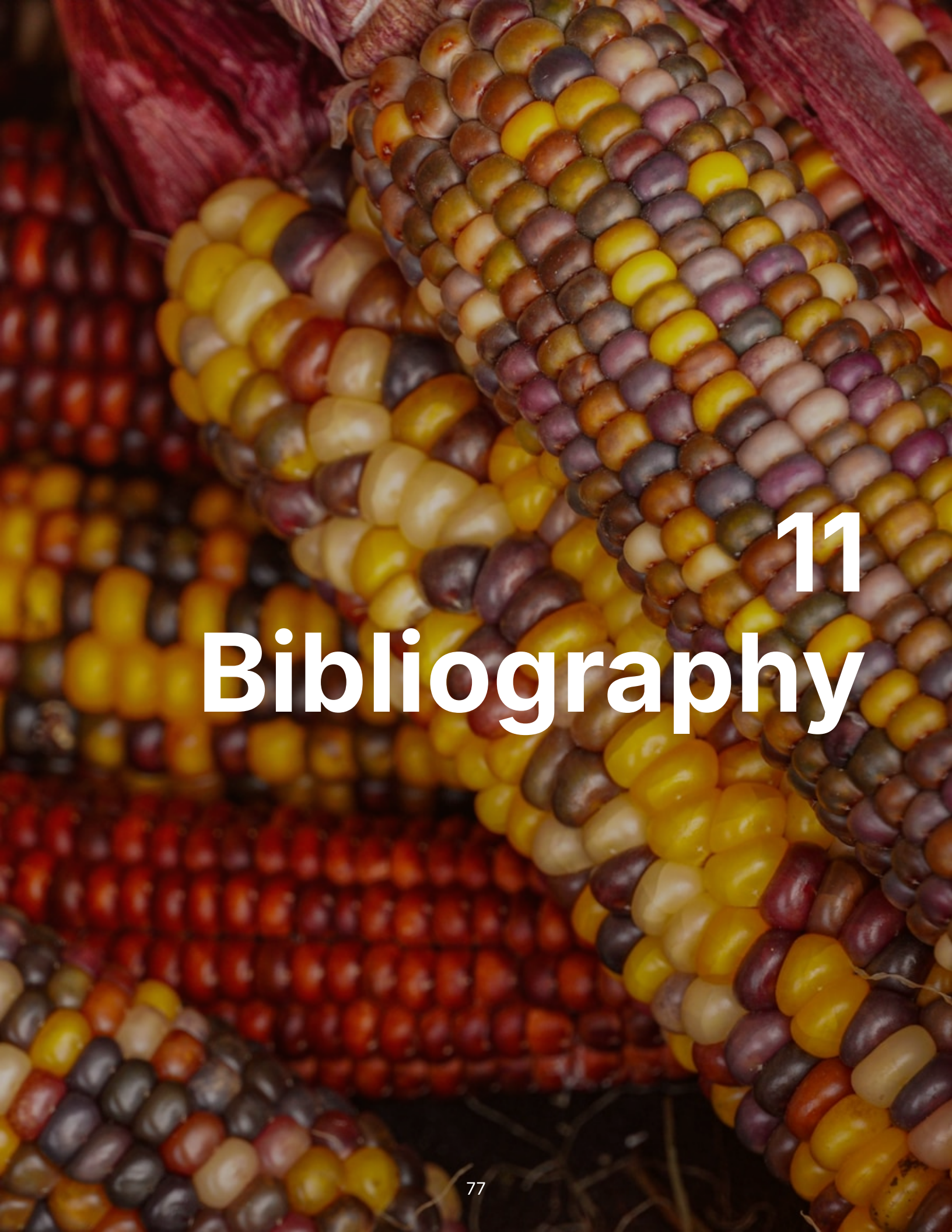
Kim Shuck (Tsalagi) is the 7th Poet Laureate of San Francisco Emerita. Shuck has won awards, done degrees and is the solo author of 7 books. In 2019 Shuck was awarded an inaugural National Laureate Fellowship by the Academy of American Poets. (photo credit: Doug Salin)

Mariposa Villaluna (They/Them) is a mixed Indigenous feminist descended from Mohawk/Southern Taglalog ancestors. As a two-spirit birthkeeper, poet, and organizer living on Ramaytush Ohlone lands, they have worked towards inclusive racial justice within public spaces and education systems for over twenty years. Their life's purpose is to serve the people and honor their Indigenous ancestors by creating a better world for their child and the future of all children.

N**azshonnii Brown** is a STEM educator and mechanical design engineer working on both land and office projects. She is passionate about STEAM education and advocates for exposure and opportunities for underrepresented groups, especially Black and Native young women.

Theresa Harlan has worked as a curator, editor, writer, and consultant for various Native American organizations throughout her life. She is working on a restoration project on her family's Coast Miwok 19th century home at Point Reyes National Seashore. She is the adopted daughter of Elizabeth Campigli Harlan (Coast Miwok) and John Harlan and by birth is Jemez Pueblo and Kewa Pueblo of New Mexico.

Victoria Montaño was born and raised in the village of Huchiun, "so called" Oakland. They are a Yaqui/Mexikah, two-spirit visual/digital artist, Po scholar, and creator behind "Land Acknowledgements are not Reparations" graphic. They work on the land farming and cultivating traditional medicines.



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12 Appendices

APPENDIX A: EVALUATION CRITERIA FORM

DISMANTLING RACISM IN PUBLIC ART

ASSESSING PUBLIC ART

	EVALUATION CRITERIA	SCORING NO	SCORING YES
SECTION 1	**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**		
	1) The Subject		
	a) If the subject is a historical figure, are they associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave people?		
	b) If applicable, was the artwork created without the advisement or input of the subject community (ies)?		
	2) The Benefactor		
	a) Was the benefactor or commissioning body associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave people?		
	b) Was the purpose for the creation of the artwork to uphold the tenents of white supremacy, eitherly overtly or inadvertently?		
	3) The Artist		
	a) Was the artis(s) commissioned to create the work associated with efforts to colonize, exploit, oppress, abuse, or enslave other individuals?		
SECTION 2	**CULTURAL CONTEXT**		
	1) Cultural Appropriation		
	a) Does the artwork inappropriately take or draw from a culture's intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions and or sacred beliefs?		
	2) Stereotypes and Myths		
	a) Does the artwork uphold negative stereotypes or myths?		
	b) Is the artwork historically inaccruate?		
	3) Context		
	a) Is the imagery used out of context from its orginal meaning/purpose?		
SECTION 3	**PUBLIC IMPACT**		
	1) Has there been sustained adverse public reaction to the artwork? [two or more years]		
	2) Is the artwork situated in a prominate place that denies an individual's free choice to view the artwork?		
	3) Is there an adverse psychological impact of the artwork upon specific communities?		
	4) Does the artwork uphold outdated ideals and viewpoints that are no longer in alignment with current community values?		

No = 100 percent of responses	No Action
Yes =25-50 percent of responses	Re-contextualization
Yes = 50 to 75 percent of responses	Relocation
Yes = 75 pecent or more responses	Removal

APPENDIX B: Fact Sheets and Talking Points

Talking Points for the Removal of the Early Days Statue

Tips On Providing Public Comment

* If seated, please offer your seat to elders or folks that aren't able to stand for long periods.

* If providing public comment, you are not required to provide your name. You can simply put 'anonymous' on the comment card if you so choose

* This is being televised: try not to be nervous. They are required to listen to you. Speak from the heart.

* Watch the timer on the podium; it will count down your time. You will likely only have 2 minutes to speak.

* The Board should not ask you where you are from or if you live in San Francisco; and you can decline to answer, if you so prefer

* If you choose to volunteer where you live, we encourage you to say something to the effect of, "I am a guest on Ohlone land" or "I thank the Ohlone people for allowing me to reside in their traditional territory.

* Please refrain from verbalizing your disagreement with speakers. You can hold up this sign to express your feelings. * Please do not block the exits; when lining up for public comment, please follow the Board's instructions on how and where they want you to line up.

Manifest Injustice

* By supporting the Appeal to prevent removal, the Board of Appeals is upholding a Manifest Injustice against Native American residents as well as against all historically marginalized and oppressed members of the community.

* As a sanctuary city, this statue no longer supports the values of what San Francisco represents. To retain it sends a hypocritical and conflicting message. Certificate of Appropriateness

* The Arts Commission has Charter Authority over all public art, therefore, the were not required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness for removal.

* By upholding the appeal and preventing the removal of the Early Days statue, the Board of Appeals is impeding the ability of the Arts Commission to meet its core Charter functions, which includes approving the removal of works of art.

* The Pioneer Statue is not landmarked; it is a contributing feature to the landmarked district. Therefore, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards are interpreted broadly when applied to a Historic District as opposed to an individually landmarked property

* The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties are GUIDELINES – they are not regulatory and are meant to be interpreted flexibly to address specific circumstances at the local level.

APPENDIX C: PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE [Date]

Headline: [Community Leaders Launch Campaign to Remove [Name] Monument, Calling for Historical Justice and Healing]

Subheadline (optional): *Grassroots initiative highlights the need for inclusive public spaces that honor all histories.*

[City, State] — [Organization/Coalition Name] announced today the launch of its campaign to remove the [Name of Monument], a controversial statue located at [specific site]. The campaign seeks to address longstanding concerns about the monument's symbolism, its ties to [specific oppressive history], and the harm it causes to community members, particularly [affected group(s)]. The effort, led by [organization/coalition], comes at a time when cities nationwide are reconsidering public symbols that glorify racism, colonialism, and violence. Supporters of the campaign argue that public spaces should reflect values of inclusivity, healing, and shared history.

Who: [Organization/Coalition Name], including local leaders, activists, historians, and community members.

What: A campaign to remove the [Name] Monument.

When: [Campaign launch date or upcoming event/rally date].

Where: [Location of monument and/or press event].

Why: The monument represents [brief statement of harm/controversy], undermining the dignity and wellbeing of the community.

How: Through organized advocacy, community engagement, and collaboration with local government to ensure removal and replacement with more inclusive markers

“[Insert short, powerful quote from a campaign spokesperson—objective but passionate, e.g., ‘Removing this monument is not about erasing history. It’s about creating public spaces that reflect the truth and honor everyone’s stories,’]” said [Name, Title].

The campaign includes [list key strategies: public forums, petitions, educational events, partnerships with scholars/tribal leaders]. Organizers emphasize that the movement is rooted in facts, transparency, and dialogue, ensuring that all voices in the community are heard. Local residents have expressed support for the initiative.

“[Insert short quote from community member, e.g., ‘This monument has stood as a symbol of pain for too long. Its removal will help our community heal,’]” said [Name].

Organizers also plan to work with artists and educators to envision new markers and installations that celebrate resilience, diversity, and cultural heritage

“[Insert quote from partner, e.g., ‘This is not just about removal, it’s about reimagining our future together,’]” added [Name]. The campaign is open for public participation, with opportunities to volunteer, donate, and attend upcoming events.

For more information, visit [website or campaign page] or follow updates at [social media handles].

Media Contact: [Name] [Title/Role]

[Organization/Coalition Name]

Phone: [xxx-xxx-xxxx]

Email: [email@example.com] Website: [website]

APPENDIX D: EMAIL TEMPLATE

Subject: Urgent: Remove the [Name of Monument] by [Deadline Date]

Body: Dear [Official's Name], I am writing as a concerned community member to urge you to take immediate action to remove the [Name of Monument] located at [Location]. This statue does not represent the values of inclusivity, dignity, and justice that our community strives to uphold. Keeping this monument in place continues to glorify [briefly describe harm—e.g., racism, colonialism, or violence] and causes ongoing harm to [affected group(s)]. Removing it will not erase history — it will ensure that public spaces reflect truth and respect for all.

I respectfully ask you to:

1. Commit publicly to removing the [Name of Monument] by [Deadline Date]

2. Begin a transparent process that involves community members in deciding what should replace it. This is a critical opportunity to show leadership, heal divisions, and create public spaces that future generations can be proud of. I urge you to act before [Deadline Date].

Sincerely, [Your Name] [Your City/Neighborhood]

I**nstructions for Supporters (to post with the template):** Copy and paste the email above.

S**end it to:** * [Name, Title] — [email address] * [Name, Title] — [email address] * [Name, Title] — [email address]

Deadline: Please send your email by [insert deadline date here] to ensure your voice is heard. Share this post and encourage others to do the same.

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This publication was **authored by Barbara Mumby Huerta**, who served as the prime author and lead researcher. Drawing on decades of experience as an artist, cultural strategist, and public-sector leader, Mumby Huerta brings a trauma-informed, equity-centered approach to examining how racist narratives are embedded within public art systems—and how they may be dismantled through accountability, repair, and transformation.

This document is intended as a living resource to support artists, cultural workers, public institutions, and communities in critically assessing public art practices and advancing justice-centered approaches to stewardship, removal, recontextualization, and reparative action.

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