

Statement on Mayor Walsh's Announcement of Educational Changes to Columbus Circle, by Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation

The members of Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) express our thankful appreciation to Mayor Ben Walsh for his [decision made Friday, October 9, 2020](#), to remove the Columbus statue from the center of our city; and reimagine the circle as an educational space to honor Italian-American neighbors and other peoples who call Syracuse and Central New York home. Our city leader's recognition that we must not continue to celebrate people and events which cause suffering to so many helps our community move towards healing.

Local politicians often follow the lead of collective grassroots efforts, as Mayor Walsh has done. He also included diverse and passionate community members in his action team whose recommendations helped the mayor a just decision after much deliberation. NOON respects that there are groups who are upset or confused by the decision to remove a figure of a historical figure from our public space. We believe that the continuing educational changes will benefit all people in CNY, especially our youth and future generations of Syracusans.

The removal of this statue is the fruit of decades of education and advocacy by Indigenous people, notably our friends of the Onondaga Nation and Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and allies. We appreciate the work of many to dismantle the flawed and violent ideologies of White Supremacy and Settler-Colonialism, and remove these values from education, public spaces, and governance systems.

We thank the following people and groups who played essential leadership roles in creating this change locally:

-Onondaga people who have sacrificed time and energy to work with their neighbors over many decades to increase education about the real history and experience of colonization against their people and others around the world.

-[Henninger High School Public Policy students who called on the Syracuse City School Board to recognize the celebration of Indigenous Peoples Day](#) back in 2017.

-Black, Indigenous, and other community activists of Color who publicly made the connection between the racist violence which promotes police murders of manifold souls including George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and the continued glorification of people who led genocides.

-The Federation of Italian-American Societies of Western New York for [their request](#) to move their statue in the city of Buffalo.

-The CNY coalition of women of Italian heritage who came together to [make a statement](#) in rejection of Columbus as a symbol of their cultural identity and share their stories with the mayor's action group.

We recognize that broad changes to public symbols such as monuments are meaningful. The re-use of Syracuse's space to facilitate education is a sign of positive values changes that redefine and preserve our future. Removing the statue is a nod to another significant task to accomplish: undoing the current influence of the [Doctrine of Discovery \(DOD\)](#), also called the Doctrine of Christian Domination. This doctrine is a series of decrees issued by the Catholic Church around the time Cristoffa Corombo (his true name) committed violent activity against the Taíno people. It encourages the subjugation of foreign peoples and land by European nations and is still used in US law. The DOD is a shameful

weapon still perpetuating violence against people and the earth. Now is the Catholic Church's time to [repudiate this policy](#) and begin the process of healing.

We are proud of NOON's work over the past 20 years to help amplify the public call to reject figureheads used to excuse violent domination of peoples globally. NOON looks forward to further supporting this redevelopment process with attention to truthfully recognizing the Onondaga as [legal stewards of this territory](#) and our CNY community members, whose stories include those of Indigenous people, refugees, slaves, migrants, and immigrants. Other work of great urgency for our shared livelihood includes [ending plastic production, oil/gas extraction](#), and nuclear energy use; [defunding and reimagining policing](#) and military; stewarding the earth- such as preventing more climate collapse; and protecting water, including [Onondaga Lake](#).

Signed,

Members of NOON, a committee of the [Syracuse Peace Council](#)

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