

Religious Understanding and Practice

We call upon the churches and religious institutions of Hawai'i to acknowledge and respect Native Hawaiian rights to:

- A. Practice and participate in traditional ceremonies and rituals with the same protection offered all religions;
- B. Determine access to and protection of sacred sites and burial grounds and public lands for ceremonial purposes; and
- C. Utilize and access religious symbols for traditional ceremonies and rituals.

4.C.8.

Winona LaDuke

From “We Are Still Here: The Five Hundred Years Celebration” (1991)

An environmental and feminist activist, Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe White Earth) highlighted Indigenous efforts to mark the quincentennial anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas with renewed attention to the ongoing struggles of Native people across the hemisphere.

To “discover” implies that something is lost. Something was lost, and it was Columbus. Unfortunately, he did not discover himself in the process of his loss. He went on to destroy peoples, land, and ecosystems in his search for material wealth and riches. . . .

Columbus was a perpetrator of genocide, responsible for setting in motion the most horrendous holocaust to have occurred in the history of the world. Columbus was a slave trader, a thief, a pirate, and most certainly not a hero. To celebrate Columbus is to congratulate the process and history of the invasion. . . .

Although Columbus himself later returned to Europe in disgrace, his methods were subsequently used in Mexico, Peru, the Black Hills of South Dakota, and at Wounded Knee and Sand Creek. They are still being used in Guatemala and El Salvador, and in Indian territory from Amazonia to Pine Ridge in South Dakota. The invasion set into motion a process, thus far unabated. This has been a struggle over values, religions, resources, and, most important, land.

The “Age of Discovery” marked the age of colonialism, a time when our land suddenly came to be viewed as “your land.” While military repression is not in North American vogue (at least with the exception of the Oka-Mohawk uprising of the summer of 1990), today legal doctrines uphold that our land is your land, based ostensibly on the so-called doctrine of discovery. This justifies in

the white legal system the same dispossession of people from their land that is caused by outright military conquest. But in a “kinder, gentler world,” it all appears more legal. . . .

The devastation of the ecosystems and the people is relentless. In short, the problem or challenge posed by 1992 is the invasion, and the reality is that it continues.

We understand that “to get to the rain forest, you must first kill the people,” and that is why since 1900 one-third of all indigenous nations in the Amazon have been decimated, while during the same time one-quarter of the forest has disappeared. There is a direct relationship between how industrial society consumes land and resources and how it consumes peoples. . . .

Most disgraceful of all is the self-congratulatory hoopla under way in most colonial and neocolonial states. In 1992, the governments of Spain, Italy, the United States, and thirty-one other countries are hosting the largest public celebration of this century to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of “Western civilization” in the hemisphere. . . .

It is in the face of this celebration of genocide that thousands of indigenous peoples are organizing to commemorate their resistance and to bring to a close the five-hundred-year-long chapter of the invasion. indigenous organizations such as CONAIE (Confederation of indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), SAIIC (South and Central American Indian Information Center), the indigenous Women’s Network, Seventh Generation Fund, the International Indian Treaty Council, UNI [Union of Indigenous Nations, in Portuguese] (from the Brazilian Amazon), and other groups have worked to bring forth the indigenous perspective on the past five hundred years.

For several years, indigenous people appealed to the United Nations to designate 1992 as the “year of indigenous peoples.” They faced stiff political opposition from Spain, the United States, and other “pro-Columbus” nations. 1993, instead, has been designated as such. However, a number of indigenous nations are actively working on the United Nations Environment Program Conference in 1992 in Brazil and demanding, among other things, full participation of indigenous peoples in the “nation-state” agenda.

CONAIE and other groups hosted an intercontinental meeting of indigenous peoples in Quito, Ecuador, in July 1990. The meeting brought together hundreds of people from throughout the Americas to share common histories and strategies to mark 1992 and to plan for the next five hundred years. It was hailed by the Native people in attendance as a fulfillment to a traditional prophecy of the Runa people of Mexico.

The prophecy reports that many years ago the indigenous people of the Americas were divided into two groups, the people of the Eagle (those from the North) and the people of the Condor (those from the South). According to the prophecy, when the tears of the Eagle and the Condor are joined, a new era of life and spirit will begin for Native people. As the delegates joined together in work, prayer, and ceremony, they felt a joining of the vision and the people. Ac-

According to CONAIE, “The basic objective of the mobilization is to recover the dignity of our peoples and reject all forms of submission, colonial practices, and neocolonialism.”

A number of other meetings have been held, including a huge First Peoples gathering in June in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which was attended by more than five hundred representatives from the Americas. Other work continues among indigenous nations, internal in the communities, and in coalition with other groups. A series of tribunals on colonialism have been proposed in several locations in North America, as well as educational and cultural events. A number of Native writers, including Gerald Vizenor, M. Scott Momaday, Louise Erdrich, and Joy Harjo, are completing books and anthologies on the five hundred years. And a great number of indigenous peoples are calling on other groups—nationally and internationally—to mobilize around 1992 as a year to protect the Earth and the people of the Earth.

Indeed, the ecological agenda is what many indigenous people believe can, and must, unite all peoples in 1992. That agenda calls for everyone to take aggressive action to stop the destruction of the Earth, essentially to end the biological, technological, and ecological invasion/conquest that began with Columbus’ ill-fated voyage five hundred years ago.

Through it all, indigenous people will continue to struggle. It is this legacy of resistance that, perhaps more than any other single activity, denotes the essence of 1992. After all the hoopla and celebration by the colonial governments are over, the Native voice will prevail. It is like a constant rumble of distant thunder, and it says through the wind, “We are alive. We are still here.”

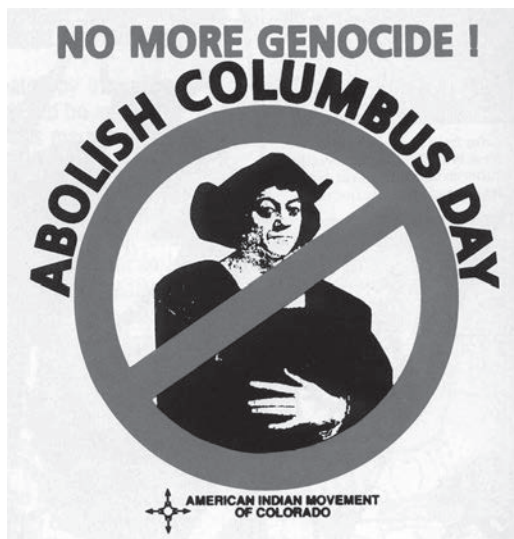


Figure 4.4. Glenn Morris, “Abolish Columbus Day” (1992). Image courtesy of and reprinted with permission by Glenn Morris.