

Testimony of Melanie Moniz
North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission
Jan. 12, 2022

Honorable Chairwoman/Chairmen,

Tashkanito'sha miinehanitak'shish
(*How are you all, it is good to see you.*)

Relatives, I am here today to inform you about a growing collective of multiracial North Dakotans that have aligned in vehement opposition to the long-term loan of the Theodore Roosevelt statue. Displaying this statue in North Dakota is a misguided action that will cause more tragedy, discord, and will significantly set back racial healing.

I'd like to respectfully ask that you support this endeavor by adding your voices to the opposition, either via official letter or any other communication, to the Roosevelt Library Foundation and the NYC Public Design Commission.

The idea to bring this statue to North Dakota began in 2020 when a man by the name of Alex Moen started a petition on Change.org called Bring Teddy Home, his goal was to save this statue and prevent erasing history. "Please consider using your positions of influence to save something that is near and dear to the residents and State of North Dakota, and to give it a place of honor and recognition. Help bring Teddy home!" Alex stated in his petition that he issued to then President Donald Trump, Congressmen Armstrong, Senators Hoeven and Cramer, and Governor Burgum. He gathered a little over 2,500 signatures and Governor Burgum along with the others answered his call.

I have been following this issue for some time and have held conversations with both the NYC Public Design Commission and Edward O'Keefe of the TRPLF. Through dialogue with Mr. O'Keefe I have come to learn that it is possible a recontextualization / reconsideration of the statue may not happen at all. Once he explained this to me and with the experience I've had working on a similar effort with a committee on a city level, I could not sit by and do nothing. There is a large possibility that this statue will indeed be on display in our homelands, and that is not a risk we should take.

If the goal is to create dialogue that cultivates better relationships, sheds light on systemic and institutional racism and provides better understanding to those that do not understand its inherent oppressive depiction, what it represents and how harmful it is to any community and our state, then we do not need this statue to meet this goal. We can do all of those things in a number of ways without adding to the harmful oppressive symbolism that already exists here.

It is not the responsibility of Indigenous leaders, advocates, and/or artists to do this type of emotional labor and intellectual work for non-Indigenous North Dakotans, regardless of if it is

well intentioned or not. Non-Indigenous individuals who have done that inner work know that consultation with Tribal leaders is of the utmost importance before decisions like this are made and are also very aware that an ask such as this is highly inappropriate and only takes time away from addressing much more pressing issues.

Statues are not made to teach history. They are created to commemorate and elevate individuals in an era of time. For these reasons statues like the TR statue and it's place in any public sphere is highly problematic. The same individuals working to remove racist oppressive symbolism from communities throughout North Dakota are the same ones helping to bring forward accurate historical truths and pushing to change the narrative for a better, stronger, more inclusive North Dakota.

People have worked tirelessly to remove this statue from public viewing for several decades. Let us note that the statue we are discussing was repeatedly defaced and at the center of countless actions for racial equity and equality. Since the 1940's people have called for it's removal. That information alone provides us with a visible record of how the people have responded to, interacted with, and contested racist historical narratives in public spaces.

Indigenous, Brown, Black, and other people of color in North Dakota are regularly met with discrimination, persecution, and widespread disenfranchisement. Bringing New York City problems to North Dakota will only exacerbate inequities and harm the peaceful community culture that many, like you, have dedicated their lives to building.

Honorable Chairwoman/Chairmen, if the proven racist history of former President Roosevelt isn't enough to compel you to support us, we also have an ongoing petition with hundreds of signatures, at the time of this writing, that support our request for NYC's Public Design Commission to reconsider this decision and dissolve this agreement.

Please support us in this endeavor, racism is a public health issue, and symbolism contributes to a communities culture. Please do not allow for more racist symbolism to come to North Dakota. NYC must address the issue and not send this statue off to harm other communities.

Wááshiraharanito'sh, Thank you all for your time and your service to the people.

Here is a link to the petition: [North Dakota Is No Place for Hate](#)

Respectfully,

Melanie Moniz (MHA Nation)
Grassroots Organizer
>> Kaa're Kixee'nista <<