

May 20, 2021

Dear Commissioners of Cook County,

Today, it is with great pleasure that I offer my support for the proposal to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day in honor of the profound contributions and cultural heritage of Native American & Indigenous peoples.

With great pride, I acknowledge the significant cultural heritage, and critically important contributions made to American life by my Native American and Indigenous brothers and sisters.

As a proud black man, who has Cherokee blood running through my veins from my grandmother, I share a deep love, appreciation and affinity for Native American & Indigenous culture.

America owes a tremendous debt to Native American citizens as a result of the many extraordinary contributions made to our shared American heritage -- celebrated achievements in government, culinary arts, science, technology, sports and entertainment, heroic military exploits, agriculture and commerce, just to name a few.

From the first Europeans settlers who survived the harsh and brutal winter, to our shared celebration of Thanksgiving dinners, as well as the technological evolution and development of rubber, cable extension bridges and raise-bed agriculture -- America has benefited from the genius of Native American people.

Notwithstanding my pride for the many profound contributions made by Native Americans, regrettably, I'm also deeply saddened by the undeniable, horrific atrocities exacted on the lives of Native Americans by white supremacist policies.

The insidious nature of government supported policies like "Manifest Destiny" helped to deal a destructive blow to Native American culture--one of the great cultures of civilization that in so many ways helped to shape the evolution of American society.

It's important to mention at the convening of this session of county Government, that as for achievements in government, a noted scholar has acknowledged: the Iroquois nation's sophisticated, political structure had an important influence on how colonial leaders structured what evolved from colonies into our 13 states.

Furthermore, it's worth mentioning during this same time period, in the genesis of our nation, our founding fathers penned these words:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

Today, I sincerely pray your vote will make these sacred words meaningful in the lives and lived experience of our Native American & Indigenous citizens by instituting Indigenous Peoples' Day.

Sincerely yours for a better world,
Rev. Vance Henry, Minister
Mt. Vernon Baptist Church