

24 June 2020

## Plea for the Removal of the Portola Statue in Pacifica

Dear Mayor Martin, Mayor Pro Tem Beckmeyer, and Councilmembers Vaterlaus, Bier, and O’Neil,

The Association of Ramaytush Ohlone supports the removal of statues that memorialize Spanish colonizers, like Gaspar de Portola and Junipero Serra, whose actions led to the destruction of Native peoples and culture in California. While certainly contributors to California history, the historical figures honored in statuary reinforce the fantasy heritage of Spanish-Indian relations in California.

Conventional accounts, for example, portray Gaspar de Portola as a benign explorer who established a route for the Spanish settlement of California. That route, however, was based on already established Native trails. While contemporary accounts credit the Portola Expedition with the first recorded European sighting of the San Francisco Bay, Portola did not “discover” it. More importantly, Portola was a colonizer. The Portola-led expedition was conducted specifically for the purpose of colonizing California with military outposts, missions, and Spanish settlements, all of which required the removal of Native peoples from their ancestral homelands. In that way, Portola’s expedition marked the beginning of the end for Native peoples and culture in California.

The Portola Expedition paved the way, so to speak, for the establishment of the California mission system. In addition to attempting to convert California Natives to Catholicism, the mission system founded by Junipero Serra reduced the Native population to the missions in order to create self-governing colonies comprised of Hispanicized citizens in service of the Spanish Crown. Junipero Serra was not simply an evangelist as pro-Catholic accounts argue. Like the Spanish military and Spanish settlers, Serra and the Franciscan missionaries were colonizers. It should be noted that the Franciscan’s efforts—to convert, to Hispanicize, and to create self-governing colonies—failed in California.

Native peoples at the California missions died from the extreme living and working conditions at the mission, and from disease. Death rates in Alta California were higher in non-epidemic years than they were in Baja California, and the first major epidemic did not occur in California until 1806, 37 years after the founding of the first mission. Of the approximately 80,000 California Indians baptized between 1769 and 1834, over 75% died a premature death. Average life expectancy after baptism was only 9 years, and, at Mission Dolores in San Francisco, it was only 4.5 years.

Of the roughly 1,500 Ramaytush Ohlone who lived along the San Francisco Peninsula, only one lineage is known to have survived. Our ancestors lost not only their lives, but we lost our traditional culture and language as well. Only a very few fragments remain.

There is nothing to celebrate here. No person should be honored for their direct participation in the destruction of an entire people and their culture. Let us work together to remove the statue of Gaspar de Portola from Pacifica.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Cordero  
Chairperson, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone

Gregg Castro  
Principal Cultural Consultant, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone