

6 July 2020

Plea for the Removal of the Junipero Serra Statue on I 280

Dear California State Department of Transportation,

The Association of Ramaytush Ohlone requests the removal of the Junipero Serra statue on I 280 for the following two reasons. First, the Serra statue violates the separation of Church and State, and, second, the statue honors the founder of the California missions that destroyed Native peoples and cultures.

The State should not place the statue of a religious figure in a position of honor on State property. Such an act could easily be perceived as the State advocating for the interests of a particular religion, which is a clear violation of the separation of Church and State. While Serra is an important historical figure, his accomplishments as Catholic missionary, as you will see below, are not worthy of honoring in statuary. Such an honoring offends many Indigenous peoples of California, especially the Ramaytush Ohlone who are the original peoples of the entire San Francisco Peninsula.

Serra was an evangelist and a colonizer. 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. It should be noted that the Franciscan's efforts—to convert, to Hispanicize, and to create self-governing colonies—failed in California. Usually, we do not honor persons who founded failed institutions, and we certainly should not honor colonizers of Native peoples.

Mission San Francisco de Asis, where most Ramaytush Ohlone were taken, was a particularly destructive mission. Of the roughly 1,500 Ramaytush Ohlone who lived along the San Francisco Peninsula, only one lineage is known to have survived the missions and subsequent genocide. Our ancestors lost not only their lives, but we lost nearly all of our traditional culture and language as well.

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. Neither should the State participate in the veneration of a Catholic missionary who was the principal architect of the mission system. Let us work together to remove the statue of Junipero Serra from the rest stop along I 280.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Cordero
Chairperson, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone



Gregg Castro
Principal Cultural Consultant, Association of Ramaytush Ohlone