

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S DAY 2017 DECLARATION

WE ARE GATHERED HERE AT THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY TO ISSUE THREE DEMANDS:

RENAME — Many U.S. cities have chosen to do what is just and renamed Columbus Day as Indigenous Peoples' Day. Why is New York not among them? There is no reason for holding out any longer. It's time for the Mayor and City Council to stand on the right side of history. New York City sits on the territory of the Lenape, and over one hundred thousand Indigenous people live on this territory today-- more than any other city in the United States! Let's honor the persistent presence of Indigenous Americans, despite attempts toward their elimination and reject the celebration of imperial conquest. This public holiday must be relaunched as an occasion to respect our Indigenous brothers and sisters and no longer commemorate a figure widely associated with exploitation and enslavement. American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) officials have told us that they will neither advocate for nor enter the public conversation about renaming Columbus Day. Their position of non-advocacy functions as an action against Indigenous peoples. Now is the time to reconsider and rename.

REMOVE — The equestrian statue of Theodore Roosevelt on Central Park West outside the AMNH has often been cited as the most hated monument in New York City. It's easy to see why. Flanked by figures that appear to be Native and African stereotypes in a position of subservience, the statue is a stark embodiment of the white patrician supremacy that Roosevelt himself espoused and promoted and is an affront to all who enter the museum. Statuary is not forever and a monument that glorifies racial and gender hierarchies should be retired from public view. The movement that began in the South with the removal of Confederate flags and generals from public display has come to New York. The statue is city-owned and sits on land managed by the Parks Department. The Mayor's commission to review "symbols of hate" should prioritize its removal and City Council members should all agree--it's time to take it down.

RESPECT — Why do Indigenous, Asian, Latin American, and African cultural artifacts reside in the AMNH, while their Greek and Roman counterparts are housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art across the park? Because New York's premier scientific museum continues to honor the bogus racial classification that relegates colonized peoples to the domain of Nature and the colonizers to the realm of Culture and Science. It's time to accept that the Hall of African Peoples does not belong in the same exhibition framework as the Akeley Hall of African Mammals, and that Indigenous or Asian peoples cannot be represented in ways that are akin to the display of fossils and meteorites. These arrangements should be reviewed and reconceived by representatives of the "exhibited" populations. Human remains, sacred things, and objects of power stolen from Indigenous peoples should be placed under the authority of their descendants. The museum, which receives \$17m of public funding annually (a sum greater than that allotted to the entire borough of Queens), has long been an embarrassment to New Yorkers and tourists. It needs a serious renovation, to be undertaken by a diverse range of curators drawn from the populations featured in the museum.

Recently, the museum leadership announced plans to renovate the Northwest Coast Hall, its first cultural gallery, largely untouched since it was built at the turn of the twentieth century. While we welcome this long overdue initiative, the false and degrading representations in the rest of the culture halls remain as a present reminder of inaction and colonial violence. AMNH must immediately begin a formal institution-wide decolonization process that addresses the saturated colonial infrastructure of the museum as a whole. An independent Decolonization Commission must be established to assess the colonial mentality, past and present, that presides over the institution. A full-time Decolonization Officer must be appointed, an internal decolonizing working group must be established, and town hall meetings must be scheduled to allow those affected by the racisms perpetuated in the culture halls to speak publicly.

Moreover, the educational guides provided to teachers and docents fail to properly acknowledge present day peoples. They perpetuate racist stereotypes and demeaning representations, which inevitably reflect back on the exhibits themselves. It is shocking that, in 2017, school children are still subjected to this level of institutional violence in the name of education. This kind of violence should no longer be tolerated. With more than 2 million children visiting the museum annually, the NYC Department of Education should initiate its own independent assessment of the AMNH. This review should evaluate how the museum is addressing, and trying to rectify, the harmful effects of misrepresentation, incorrect information, and structural racism upon New York's diverse school populations. As a publicly-subsidized educational institution, the AMNH must be required to uphold the dignity of all peoples in this city.

NYC Stands with Standing Rock // Decolonize This Place // Black Youth Project 100
South Asian Solidarity Initiative // Eagle and Condor Community Center

2ND ANNUAL ANTI-COLUMBUS DAY TOUR

DECOLONIZE THIS MUSEUM



RENAME THE DAY
REMOVE THE STATUE
RESPECT THE ANCESTORS

WE HEAL

#notmyhero

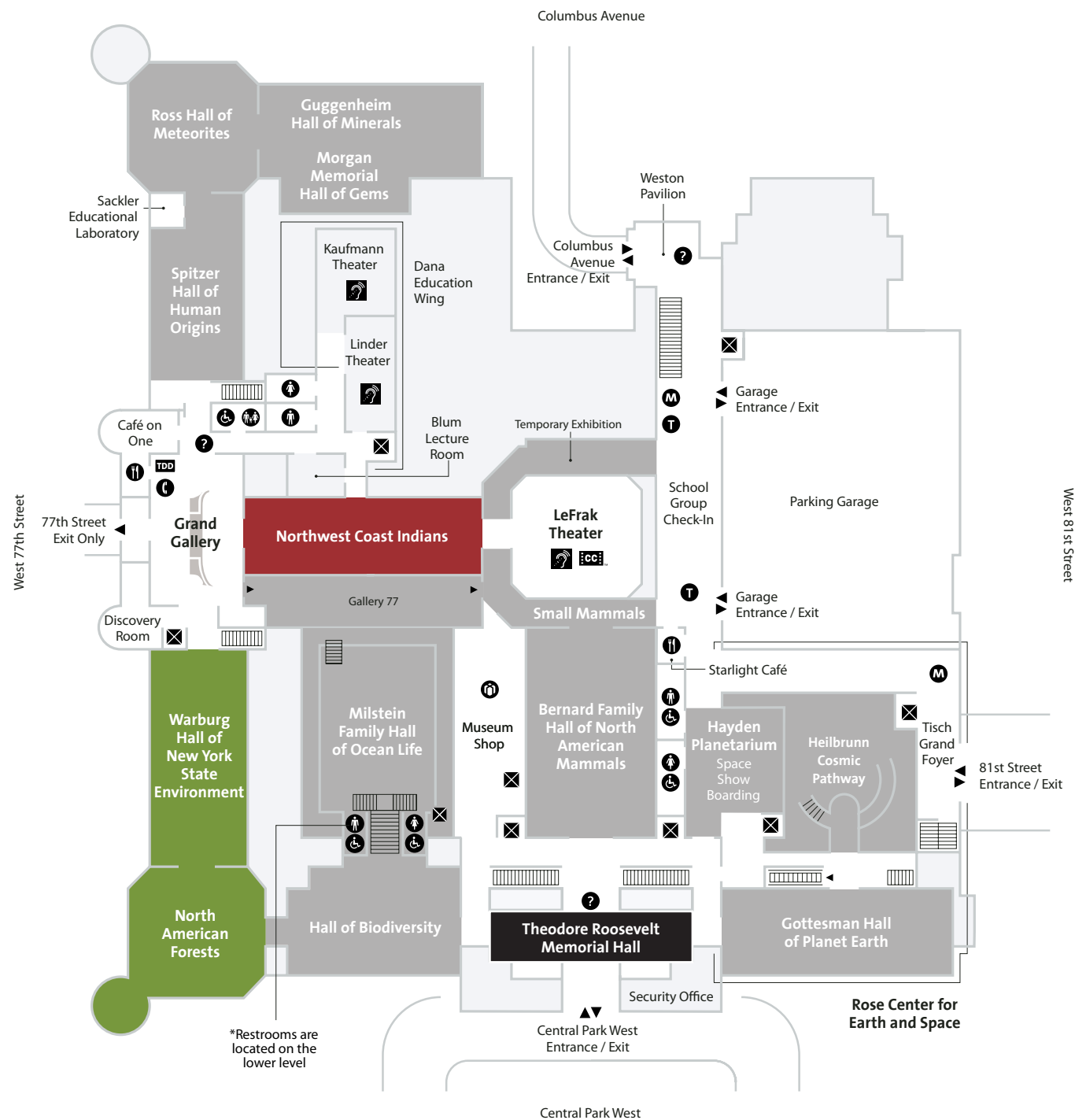
#decolonizethisplace

We begin today by acknowledging that we are standing on the ancestral territory of the Lenni Lenape. This was, and is, their land—a reality that all of us who have come here must acknowledge. Our action today, at its most fundamental level, stands in solidarity with the Lenape, and all Indigenous peoples, whose land was stolen to create the settler states and who continue to live under siege, surveillance, and colonial structural violence on their own occupied land. We stand with our comrades advancing Indigenous resurgence and decolonization through ongoing settler colonial oppression. We stand in support of the return of their lands. This is where we must begin.

REMOVE THE STATUE • RENAME THE DAY • RESPECT THE ANCESTORS

Decolonize This Place

First Floor



THEODORE ROOSEVELT MEMORIAL HALL

Theodore Roosevelt was not a noble man of science. He viewed land, territories, animals and people as his to be tamed, to be controlled and sometimes to be destroyed. As a "frontiersman" he proclaimed "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indian is the dead Indian, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth." His devotion to conservation is celebrated in this hall, but it was driven by a desire to dominate Nature. His ethnically cleansed wilderness parks were conceived as places of refuge and recreation for elite White Anglo Saxon Protestants. As governor and as a president he expanded U.S. empire into the Caribbean and the Pacific with Big Stick diplomacy. He justified direct U.S. intervention in the affairs of other American nations if it was in this country's interest. He advanced white supremacy in the domain of law, science and state power. Today, this museum still stands as a testament to his vision, and the statue outside is its embodiment. It cannot be separated from the museum. It causes daily damage by perpetuating stereotypes of the Indigenous and African figures obedient at his feet. The public celebration of white male imperial rule has no place in this day and age.

DIORAMA OF CHIEF ORATAM & PETER STUYVESANT

In 1500 there were 7000 Lenape Indians in what is now Manhattan, what they called "Manhatta." By 1700 there are 200. Where did they go? Rather than account for their death, relocations and current lives, this diorama represents a meeting between the Chief Oratam and Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant in 1660 and refers to what is now the Bowery as a "meeting place." Oratam signed the peace represented here after two years of the Dutch waging a vicious war against the Lenape and the British. The Lenape are denied their history, their present, and their role as caretakers and owners of this territory. Why is the diorama here in this Hall? Because Roosevelt's family can be traced to their Dutch ancestors who came to New York around the time this supposedly amicable meeting took place.

VIVA PUERTO RICO LIBRE!

Roosevelt ascended politically as a General in the Spanish-American war. He was crucial in establishing the United States as a colonial overlord of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, Hawaii and Guam. Let us acknowledge the people of Puerto Rico, a colonial territory of the United States annexed by Roosevelt. And, let us honor their work of mutual relief and collective resistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria as the colonial government leaves them to fend for themselves. Viva Puerto Rico Libre!

PLAQUE FOR HENRY FAIRFIELD OSBORN

Osborn, the most formative of the museum's presidents, was central to the community of eugenicists who met regularly within these walls to plot how to "save" the national gene pool from dilution by lesser breeds of men and women. A close associate of Roosevelt, Osborne's belief in the racial superiority of Nordic peoples helped to close the immigration "door" in 1924, and it has shaped the arrangement and display of the museum's collections down to this day.

GIANT SEQUOIA TREE

The rings on this cross section of an ancient Sequoia tree, felled by settler-loggers in 1893, are correlated here with the Eurocentric marking of 1400 years of human history. The museum finds it important to highlight that Napoleon seized power in France in 1800 A.D., Yale was founded in 1701, and Columbus "discovered" Orinoco River in South America in 1500. In a decolonial museum, these dates would tell a different story and different histories. It would acknowledge Indigenous life in the forests of California, the clear-cutting of Redwood trees by agricultural speculators, the ransacking of lumber for settler homes and towns, and the growing threat to these and other trees of drought stress from global warming. Where fire management in forests was once a sustainable pre-contact practice, forest fires in California are "fought" today by incarcerated people who are predominantly African American and who are compensated a dollar per hour. As we look at the rings of this Sequoia, let us also think of the genocides and ecocides, and movements and struggles, that we hold within our skins like the bark of a tree.

AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT

Indigenous people! We were here in "The Forest Primeval," cultivating and communicating with the land in ways that left no scar. We raised forests and planted corn. The land was not 'untouched'; we were here. We were here in 1790 when settlements spread; we were here in 1840 and 1870 despite broken treaties and forced removals. We were here in the 1950s when agriculture was 'perfected', as a calculation for converting land into the purest profit possible. Like the land, we have been cut apart, colonized, commodified. But we are here still.

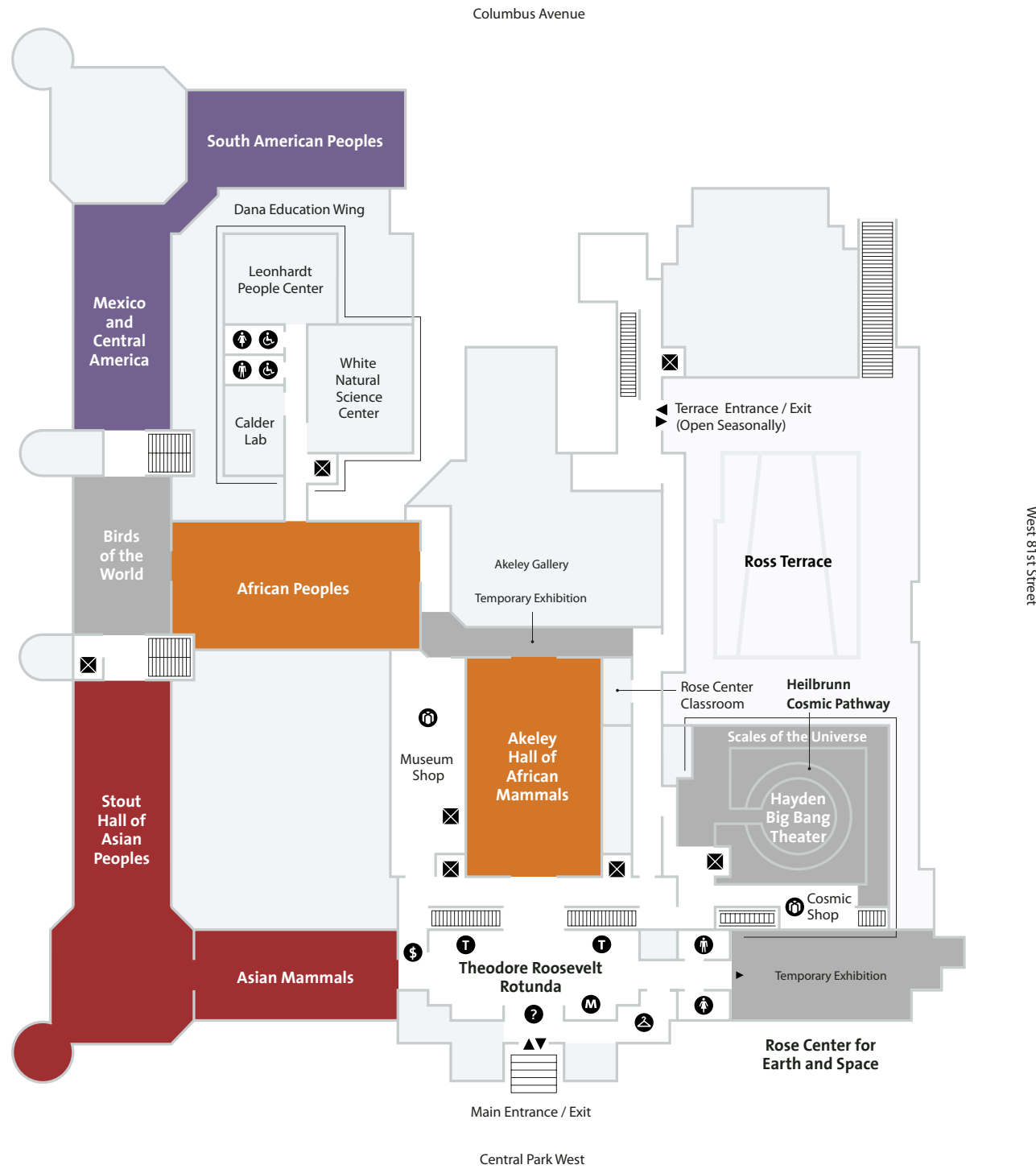
HALL OF NORTHWEST COAST INDIANS

Next to the Hall of Human Origins we stand outside the doors to the "Hall of Northwest Coast Indians." This is the museum's first cultural hall, built around the turn of the twentieth century. Museum curators recently announced that they will renovate it, in consultation with Indigenous groups whose possessions are displayed there. It took them more than a century to decide to address the harms done by these exhibits. How long will it be before they conclude that the whole museum needs to be overhauled? If and when they do, how can the harms generated over the course of the last century be recognized and recorded? Will they retain any of these mannequins, which have only served to denigrate and dehumanize? How will they acknowledge their role in ongoing colonization? What will it take for them to recognize the right of Indigenous advocates and curators, not simply to be consultants, but to make real decisions about how they will be represented.

**REMOVE
THE STATUE**

Decolonize This Place

Second Floor



was reactivated when US forces swept through their homelands during the initial stages of the "War on Terror". They are continuously subjected to lethal drone attacks by the U.S in both Pakistan and Aghanistan.

Palestine, the museum amplifies the non-indigenous Zionist claim to a land while simultaneously ignoring the indigenous Palestinian population - whether Jewish, Christian, or Muslim - who have always been there, long before the violent creation of the State of Israel.

INDIA

This exhibit is devoted to what is now known as India. The British are sometimes praised for uniting India through colonial rule. As a colonizer, the British actively fostered the conformity of sexual and gendered roles to religious orthodoxy. So called unification was carried out to more efficiently extract massive amounts of wealth for the Empire. They also used the tactic of divide and rule to control the people, and exploited fault lines between castes, classes, religious, linguistic, and ethnic communities.

Mahatma Gandhi is heroized here as a leader of India's independence struggle against the British. But as with the "founding fathers" of other nation-states--including the United States--the heroization of Gandhi ignores his reinforcement of structures of oppression. He is often cited as an inspiration for civil rights advocates, but Gandhi's legacy of racist attitudes towards African peoples is well documented, and he was an upholder of the caste system in India.

The Hindu caste system is a hierarchical ranking of people where so-called "lower caste" communities are regarded subhuman, undeserving of basic rights. Dalit today is a term of empowerment claimed by oppressed communities formerly called "untouchable." "Lower caste" communities have used the term Bahujan as they represent the actual majority of the population. Although caste discrimination is outlawed in the Indian constitution, Dalits and Bahujans are often persecuted, forced to live separately from the rest of the population, sexually assaulted, and killed while the upper caste perpetrators of these acts remain unpunished. Refusing this systemic oppression, a massive movement of Dalits now exists in India. As Dalit anti-caste revolutionary Babasaheb Ambedkar said, "caste is not a division of labor, it is a division of laborers."

HALL OF ASIAN MAMMALS

The people indigenous to the lands in this Hall have always co-existed with these animals. They shared the fields, the forests, and the waters. When wealthy conservationists like Theodore Roosevelt created national, or "wilderness," parks they actually displaced and dispossessed indigenous people. The parks were exported to Africa and Asia as "wildlife preserves" that elites visit and admire, to view and hunt charismatic mega-fauna undisturbed by people whom they consider to be social inferiors. And look around! Just like a wildlife preserve, this hall is also made for spectacular consumption. Yet, contemporary struggles of Adivasis (the indigenous of people of the land) against resource-extraction and land-confiscation have no place in this way of looking at nature.

AZTEC STONE OF THE SUN

While some artifacts in the hall of Mexico are "authentic," others are skewed replicas with inaccurate and outdated attribution, and some are not named at all. One example is the Stone of the Sun. We are told that it is "mistakenly known as a calendar stone." Yet this is what the Mexica know as a "sun stone," and an obsidian circle is used to view eclipses, the sun and meditate on our own reflection. The replica in the exhibit is of the sacred Aztec Calendar that tracks time through the balance of interdependent elements and energies that sustain life and order in the cosmos. It is still used today for this purpose, and, contrary to what the exhibit suggests, it has never been associated with the worship of a sun "venerated above all things" and "sustained through blood sacrifice." By rejecting the agency of a sacred culture, the museum as an institution negates the reality and genius of a humankind that uses time to balance the interdependence of all beings. It instead, reproduces a narrative based on a supremacy rooted in insecurity and fear.

CHINESE WEDDING CHAIR

These are the words museum educators have students learn before they take class trips to the Hall of Asian Peoples: "Dynasty", "divination", "dowry", "ancestor worship", "shamanism". This hall showcases the museum's imagination of life in Asia before European contact. It ignores the violent history of the United States in the region and its continued military occupation of many Asian nations. In these dioramas, you see a small selection of the Museum's 60,000 cultural artifacts plundered during colonial expeditions in Asia. One such object is the Chinese Wedding Chair. It depicts a Chinese bride with her face and body hidden within the confines of the ornate carriage. Curators explain Chinese matrimony as a sexist tradition rooted in the superstition of bad luck. This framing omits the role of Western patriarchy in creating the stereotype of East Asian women as exotic and submissive. Such portrayals incite the ongoing sexual violence against and exploitation of Asian women.

HALL OF SOUTH AMERICAN PEOPLES

Welcome to the Orient of the Americas! Here, among the sacred gold artifacts, mummified heads and replicas of Indigenous elders, shamans, and warriors, you will find a spectacle of mysticism to match your fantasies about ancient civilizations and Indigenous cultures. Pizarro described Cuzco, the Inka capital, as Rome's equal, yet the metal trinkets and ritual funerary garbs on display do a poor job of expressing the sophistication and beauty of a culture that far surpassed the achievements of Europe at the time, and whose linguistic refinement is a living legacy among the Quechua peoples of the Andes today.

SHUAR PEOPLES

This exhibit gives priority to the name (Jivaros, or "Savages") the Spanish gave to the Shuar people after they successfully resisted the conquest of their Amazon lands. The Spanish were driven out, but the predators keep coming back. Today they lust after the reserves of gold and other precious metals that are in contention between the national government and Chinese mining corporations. We are the Shuar peoples, Guardians of the Amazon, protectors of Mother Earth, her sacred medicines and ancestral truths. We rise, we reclaim, we rename, and we heal.

HALL OF ISLAM

This hall presents an extreme 'othering' of Islam as seen through a whitewashed colonizer's lens. This perspective is characterized by a particular obsession with, and dehumanization of, the "women of Islam" who, in many Westerners' minds, can solely exist within the confines of heteropatriarchy. The Muslim community is not a monolith, especially along the lines of gender and sexuality. This hall fails to recognize the complexities of these experiences and cultures. There is also the notion that warriors are constructed in Islam and such a narrow classification of an entire religious culture is what has legitimized Islamophobia. This is the same belief system that justifies surveillance, drone strikes, and the 'War on Terror.'

PATHANS

The Pathans, also known as the Pashtuns, have historically been portrayed as a warlike people. Why is that? For almost 200 years they have had to contend with a series of invading forces--from the British, the Soviets, and, most recently, the Americans--all aimed at suppressing their efforts at autonomy. This community's traditional homeland is in the mountainous borderlands straddling Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their community remains fractured because of a line drawn by Sir Mortimer Durand in 1893 while negotiating the end of the second Anglo-Afghan War, another example of a colonial wound that remains open. Pathans' practice of resistance to foreign occupations is deeply ingrained, and

JERICO BEFORE JOSHUA AND JEWS IN ASIA

Here, we see a diorama about archeological digs in the world's oldest city, Jericho, in Palestine. It references the biblical figure of Joshua. His alleged military conquest of ancient Canaan and destruction of the city is used today to advance the settler colonization of the West Bank. Archeological digs are routinely used to "prove" that the Biblical narratives are historically accurate, and to support that claim that all of the Occupied Territories belong to the Land of Israel. The nearby display on "Jews of Asia" also upholds the historical continuity of the Land of Israel by recounting the story of Mizrahi Jews as a way of normalizing Israel's right to "ancestral lands." In most of the other exhibits on this tour, we see how the museum relegates indigenous peoples to the past tense. By contrast, in these exhibits relating to historic

SECOND FLOOR TOUR CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

SECOND FLOOR TOUR CONTINUES

HALL OF AFRICAN PEOPLES

Look around, the vast multiplicity of African social and cultural life is positioned outside of modern time, in the past tense. With such a cacophony of sounds and colorful costumes, there is little space to ask: How did all these artifacts and costumes arrive here? And how do they perpetuate primitivist stereotypes which continue to feed discriminatory treatment of diasporic African populations today? Consider the German genocide of the OvaHerero/Mbanderu and Nama people from 1904-1908. 100,000 people died -- half of the Nama. Heads of victims were severed and sold to collectors of race science and medical students. Just last month, it was reported that one such collector later sold four skulls to this museum, where they were just discovered. In storage. Currently, representatives of the OvaHerero and Nama are calling both for a genocide memorial in the museum and repatriation of the remains. This is what a decolonial demand looks like.

SLAVERY IN AFRICA & THE AFRICAN TRADITION IN AMERICA

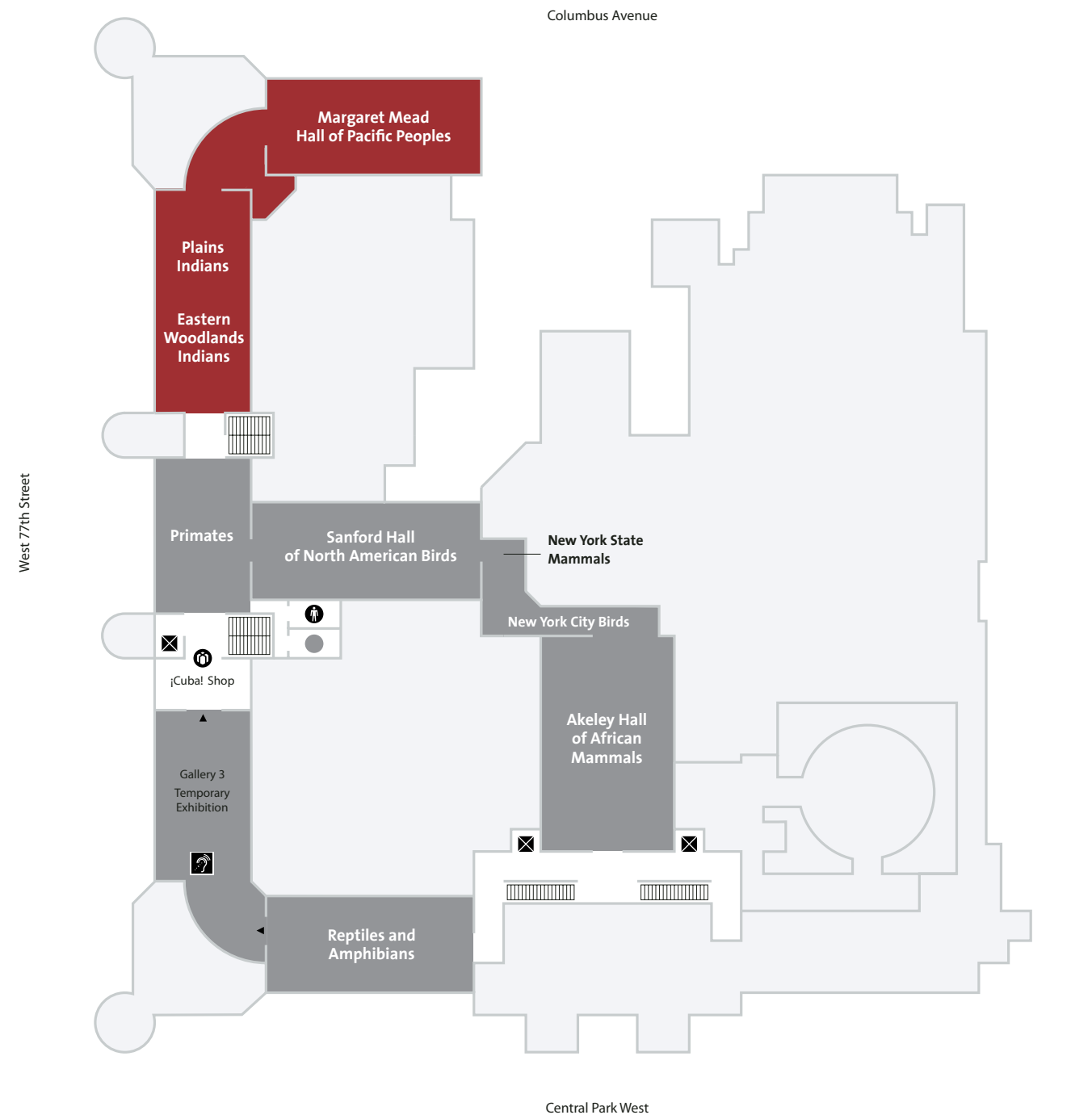
This short corridor, which occupies less than .003% of the entire space of the museum, leads to nowhere. This is where the museum accounts for slavery in Africa and the African Tradition in America. Here we are offered a scant overview of how slavers coerced pre-colonial African communities into participating in the trade of captives. Yet absent is any reference as to how slavery on the African continent inflicted harm on indigenous ways of living and weakened resistance to the coming European colonization. Here, slaves are recognized as human only insofar as they carry over some African cultural practices into their new countries of captivity. There is no mention of the millions of Africans who died on enslaved ships en route to the Americas or how they were forced into work upon arrival. No mention that those who survived and their offspring built the economic backbone of the United States and other settler-colonies throughout the Western Hemisphere.

HALL OF AFRICAN MAMMALS IN AMERICA

As they forcibly extracted resources from African peoples, so-called naturalists and explorers like Carl Akeley collected a variety of animals across the continent. Their activities led to species' endangerment, the flourishing of the fur and ivory trade, and widespread deforestation. Akeley was a hunting companion of Teddy Roosevelt and intimate of Belgian King Albert I, who succeeded King Leopold II as the arch-colonizer of the Congo. If you roll up this flyer and put it to your eye, you are looking down the scope of Carl Akeley's gun. This is a way of seeing. Each of the dioramas you have visited is a snapshot of domination: remember this when you look through the glass to see a human on display.

Decolonize This Place

Third Floor



HALL OF EASTERN WOODLANDS INDIANS

Ask yourself where you stand. You are in the Hall of Eastern Woodlands Indians: half a continent contained in an afterthought, dust settling and lights burning out on leftover real estate. You are standing over, above, looking down on things older and wiser than you: a hide robe with histories of Nations, a birchbark map of the world, a medicine bundle whose contents were not meant for your eyes. You are standing eye to eye with someone else's ancestors, and they are looking back. And above all, you are standing on what is still the territory of the Lenape people.

HALL OF PLAINS INDIANS

There is no greater insult than to display stuffed animals, petrified trees, fake humans, and sacred objects behind these glass displays. As with the Native American that flanks Theodore Roosevelt's horse outside, the "Indians" are presented here in an effort to recreate their "life" as death and to set the stage for their inevitable, destined replacement. The wall texts are not only historically inaccurate, they are hurtful. The Ghost Dance Prophecy did not fade away; it was violently suppressed through the massacre of three hundred men, women, and children at Wounded Knee. Indigenous people do not struggle to adapt to modernity; they are faced with genocidal techniques, coerced into treaties and then denied the rights pursuant to those treaties. Hundreds of treaties broken. Contrary to everything displayed here, the "Plains" was and is home to living beings and relations. The resistance at Standing Rock is a reminder of centuries of struggle for sovereignty over land, water and air, which continues to this day.

HALL OF PACIFIC PEOPLES

This island peoples of the vast Pacific Ocean were "offered" to ethnographer Margaret Mead, to classify and exhibit as she saw fit. The organization of the displays tells us more about her privileged viewpoint than they do about the complex lives of these peoples. How can one anthropologist's version of the cultural traditions of Polynesians, Melanesians, and Micronesians be so detached from the long history of colonization in Oceania? American visitors should reflect on the silence about the U.S. occupation of Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guåhan (Guam), Palau, and the Northern Mariana Islands, and how their residents fought to avoid being placed on the frontlines of Cold War militarism. Commenting on the fates of Marshall Islanders irradiated from nuclear testing, Henry Kissinger infamously said, "There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn?"



How to Contribute to the Snapchat Story!

1. Snap throughout the Anti-Columbus Day Tour
2. Post snaps to the public "Our Story: New York City" and/or "Our Story: American Museum of Natural History"
3. Wait. Snapchat will add all snaps to the Snap Map
4. After the tour, open Snap Map + enjoy!

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THE ANCESTORS**

**RENAME
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