

Indigenous Day as a Legal City Holiday
by
Duane Champagne

Many American cities already celebrate Indigenous Day instead of Columbus Day. Perhaps the day should be characterized as the historical event of the Great Encounter of New World and Old World. In my own Ojibway tradition, the Indigenous world is known as "Turtle Island" rather than the New World. More recently, we believe that many peoples before Columbus had encounters with Turtle Islanders. These early encounters include: the Vikings, Pacific Islanders, Basque fishermen, and possibly encounters from antiquity with Egyptians, Chinese, Africans, and others. However, the encounter with Columbus is highlighted because it led to the sustained, if not checkered, history leading to the present.

The establishment of Indigenous Day would recognize and give voice to the original Indigenous peoples of Los Angeles: the Fernandeano Tataviam and the Gabrieleño nations. The people of both nations have lived in the Los Angeles area for thousands of years. Furthermore, more than 100 American Indian nations from all over the US and with their distinct cultures now make their homes in Los Angeles. At the same time, Indigenous peoples from Mexico, Latin and South America, as well as many Indigenous Pacific Islanders also make their home in Los Angeles. Indigenous peoples from the Pacific Rim and other parts of the world are also represented. There are probably several hundred thousand Indigenous persons living in the Los Angeles area.

Each indigenous nation has its own culture. There are hundreds of Indigenous cultures active and engaged in Los

Angeles life. The establishment of Indigenous Day as a Los Angeles City holiday would validate and extend the reputation of Los Angeles as a great city of global cultural diversity and of freedom for cultural expression and identity.