



Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians  
*Historically known as "San Juan Bautista Band and San Juan Band" Indians of California*  
PO Box 5272 | Galt, CA 95622

July 21, 2015

Office of Governor  
Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Symbolism of Junipero Serra

Dear Governor Brown,

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our Tribe is comprised of the descendants of the indigenous peoples taken to Missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz. We are writing to ask that you join us in opposing the canonization of Fr. Junipero Serra and to help bring justice, dignity and truth to the surviving descendants of California's mission period. We also request your support in calling on Pope Francis to rescind the papal bulls that legitimized the establishment of Spanish missions in Alta California and the virtual enslavement of the indigenous people whose land was appropriated without consent or compensation.

In January of this year Pope Francis announced that he would canonize Fr. Junipero Serra. This announcement surprised and disappointed our Tribe. Prior to this announcement, our Tribal Council discussed very favorably the openness that His Holiness seemed to bring to the papacy. It was with this understanding that we wrote Pope Francis two letters to introduce our Tribe and to request that the Church work with California Indians to address the issue of wellness, healing and historic trauma of both California tribes and the Catholic Church. We received no response to our letters.

Following the announcement that Serra would be canonized, we have written three letters to Pope Francis. The first letter, dated February 24th, expressed the reasons that our Tribe vehemently opposes the canonization of Serra. Our second letter, dated May 9th, requested a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican so we may present the history and impact of the missions on our ancestors. The third letter, dated July 1st, presented our Tribal response to Pope Francis's Encyclical Letter on the Environment. To date no response has been received to any of these letters. As information, all letters are posted on our website at: <http://amahmutsun.org/news/opposition-to-serra-sainthood>.

In addition to sending letters to Pope Francis, on April 23rd of this year I spoke before the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In my speech I spoke of our opposition to the canonization of Junipero Serra and our request that Pope Francis rescind the papal bulls. A video and text of the presentation is available at [www.amahmutsun.org](http://www.amahmutsun.org).

The Amah Mutsun were very disheartened when we read that you publicly supported the canonization of Serra. Serra established the missions in California based on the influence and dictates of the Papal Bulls of 1452, 1493 and others bulls that pertained to all indigenous peoples. These Papal Bulls claimed that all indigenous peoples were pagans, savages, heathens and that they had no soul. The Papal Bulls specifically granted the pope's blessing "to capture, vanquish, and subdue the Saracens, pagans, and

other enemies of Christ and put them into perpetual slavery and take all their possessions and their property." These Papal Bulls provided the legal and religious justification for Christian nations to enslave non-Christians world-wide, not just in the Americas and not only in Alta California. These Papal Bulls have never been rescinded.

These papal bulls provided Serra and the Catholic Church with the purported moral authority to conquer, enslave, exploit and dominate California Indians. Serra himself established the mission system practice of capturing Indians, separating families, enslaving our ancestors, ordering the whipping and torture of the Indians for extended periods of time, and appropriating native land.

Under Serra, the mission system initiated the destruction of the California environment, beginning with the raising of vast numbers of livestock (e.g., cattle, sheep, horses, pigs) for profit, the grazing of which caused the diverse native plants to be replaced with selected European grasses. The missions and Spanish further hastened this ecological transformation by exterminating the large predators and ungulates: bear, elk, deer and antelope so they would not compete with the domesticated livestock.

Prior to the missions, native plants and animals had provided our ancestors with food and medicine as well as materials for basketry, clothing, shelter and so much more. Yet once Serra's missions were established, Indians were prevented from following their diverse economic strategies and instead were forced to labor at the mission compounds on tasks assigned them. No longer could the Indians practice their traditional methods of land use and resource renewal. Instead, they became forced laborers in a system that degraded the environment by the introduction of non-indigenous plants and animals. The Indians themselves suffered as well since their diet, once rich and diverse, was limited to the nutritionally deficient rations that mission overseers distributed. The death rate of Indians soared as they literally were starved to death.

Serra also intentionally destroyed our culture. Serra believed that if our indigenous culture was destroyed, then our ancestors would have no choice but to accept the Catholic faith and become citizens of Spain. It is for this reason that our members were prevented from speaking their language, singing their songs, holding their ceremonies or returning to their villages and sacred sites when they wished. By separating men, women and children, our ancestors could not pass on indigenous knowledge to next generations. This information was needed to fulfill their obligation to Creator, to keep balance in their life, and to provide the path for their own as well as their descendants' future.

On June 18th of this year, Pope Francis issues his Encyclical Letter regarding the environment that unambiguously declared that destructive behaviors against the environment, cultures and peoples are sins. There is no doubt that Serra and the mission system are guilty of committing these sins. It is for these reasons that our Amah Mutsun Tribal Band is opposing the canonization of Junipero Serra.

On June 30th, a meeting was held with: Bishop Quinn - Sacramento Diocese, Retired; Bishop Clark - Los Angeles Diocese; and Fr. Lavaroni - Sacramento, Franciscan Priest. We had asked for the meeting, hoping to discuss how the Church and Native people can begin the process of healing from our past. We learned the following:

- Bishop Clark said 10% of California Indians died during the mission period. This percentage contrasts with a soon-to-be-published article by Dr. Kevin Starr, former California State Librarian, 1994 - 2004, and author of "America and the California Dream," a series of books on the history of California. According to Dr. Starr, there were 300,000 Indians at the time of first

contact and that population was reduced by 50% when the mission system was secularized by the civil government of Mexico starting in the mid-1830's.

- Both Bishop Clark and Fr. Lavaroni gave no credence to our oral history. When I recounted an incident passed down within our Tribe, Fr. Lavaroni said he did a complete internet search and there was no evidence of the incident ever happening.
- When we mentioned the recently released book, "A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Mission," by Elias Castillo, the clergy quickly dismissed it, ostensibly because it was written by a journalist and not an historian. However, Castillo's book has over 300 footnotes that provide citations for the archival materials and published sources he discusses and quotes. This documentation contains numerous examples of the brutality and inhumanity of Father Serra and the mission system. In one letter, in Serra's own handwriting, he recommends to the Spanish Governor that the Indians be whipped and shackled for up to 30 days and that he himself could provide the shackles, if the local official lacked them. Serra also refers to the death of thousands of Indians by an epidemic as a "harvesting of souls."
- During our meeting we presented a lot of information regarding the impact of the missions upon the Indians while both Bishop Clark and Father Lavaroni focused on Serra's "intent." In response to several ramifications, the clergy claimed that the Church never "intended to do that," ignoring documentation that Serra did intend that the Indians be whipped, shackled, kept in isolation and prevented from leaving the missions.
- When I said Father Serra was a perpetrator in the destruction of California Indians, Father Lavaroni attempted to blame it on the Spanish soldiers or the colonizers who were there. Again the clergy ignored the fact that, in depriving the Indians of their independence and ability to come and go as they pleased and pursue economic strategies for their families independently of the mission, that Serra enabled the Indians to be victimized in myriad ways. Sexually, the women and children were preyed upon by soldiers because they were virtually imprisoned at the missions under the supervision of the soldiers that raped them. The dormitory sleeping quarters ensured that European diseases would cut a quick and deadly swath through Indians who slept lined up next to one another. Their deficient rations lowered their immunity as did the physically hard labor that they were forced to perform, under the penalty of daily lashings
- When it was mentioned that two miracles were required for sainthood, Fr. Lavaroni said that there was one miracle attributed to Fr. Serra and they were waiving the requirement for the second miracle. He admitted that the miracle attributed to Serra was very weak.
- Finally, when we talked about historic trauma and the need for both Indians and the Catholic Church to heal, the clergy asked how the Church can help us heal. It was quite clear that they believed that the Church had committed no offense and therefore there was no need for it to heal.

On June 22, Governor Nikki Haley of South Carolina called on the state legislature to remove the Confederate battle flag from the state Capitol grounds. Governor Haley said South Carolina has held tight to traditions while continuing to grow and change in ways that moves the State forward. She also said her state responds by residents talking to each other and putting themselves into other people's shoes to find common ground.

California needs to follow South Carolina's lead. It is time to remove the symbol of Junipero Serra and the missions from places of honor and respect in California history. It is time to recognize that Serra and

the missions represent Indian suffering, slavery and death and that it is cruel to perpetuate the myth of the missions as religious sanctuaries where Indians could come and go as they wished.

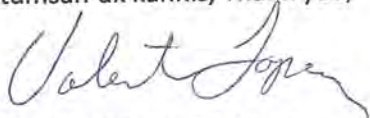
On February 2, 1820, Father Mariano Payeres, the last Padre Presidente of Alta California, wrote that when asked what happen to all the Indians along the coast of California they would have to answer, "the missionary priest baptized them, administered the sacraments to them and buried them." This is the history of the California missions.

Today we call on you, Governor Brown, to publically denounce the canonization of Junipero Serra and to insist that the papal bulls be rescinded prior to your meeting with Pope Francis. We also ask that you apologize to all California citizens who learned about the mission system in the fourth grade and were never taught the truth regarding the brutal treatment that Indians received at the missions. Finally, we ask that you follow Governor Haley's brave stance regarding the Confederate flag and recognize that the statue of Junipero Serra is not a neutral symbol of "heritage," but instead represents enslavement, brutality, death and domination to California Indians and must be removed. In addition, what Indians experienced at California missions must be accurately described in State literature and classrooms. For the State of California to continue to portray Serra and the missions as symbols of Catholic and historic pride, is to evince a complete lack of insight, empathy or regard for the State's indigenous people. The State of California needs to acknowledge the well-documented facts of native experience at the missions, facts that are antithetical to the canonization of the missions' architect, Junipero Serra.

As in all our letters, it is important that we emphasize that our opposition is to the canonization of Junipero Serra and the Papal Bulls; not to the Catholic Church. We have tribal members who are Catholic and we will not interfere with their religion. Our Catholic members fully support our Tribal position on this issue.

Finally, we request a meeting with you to discuss this letter and to find ways to teach the truth so that our people and the State of California can heal.

tumsan-ak kannis, Thank you,



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Amah Mutsun Tribal Ethnohistorian, Dr. Christine Grabowski, assisted in the writing of this letter.