



**Public Statement Rejecting a Racist, Sexist, and Eurocentric Depiction of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo
March 22, 2021**

On March 18, 2021, Cabrillo College held its first in a series of educational events exploring the namesake of our college, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. The series, seeking community education and engagement, is part of a larger effort to consider whether our college should continue to be named after him. To kick-off the series, the Name Exploration Subcommittee invited Dr. Iris Engstrand, Emeritus Professor of History from the University of San Diego to be our first presenter, to inform our community on the life of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo—a 16th century soldier and explorer serving the Spanish Empire, famous for his expedition along the coast of California in 1542.

Dr. Engstrand was invited to present an unbiased, historic portrayal of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, to help our community better understand who he was—from the controversy over his origin between Portugal and Spain to his expeditions as a soldier in colonizing Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, and finally to his exploration of the Pacific Coast in search of a water passage to China through North America. While Dr. England shared a portrayal of Cabrillo that painted a portrait of him as an historic savior and explorer, her portrayal neglected to give credence to widely-held historic beliefs that his roles in Cuba and Mexico led to what would be the modern-day equivalent of cultural genocide, sex trafficking, and slave ownership. Further, when asked questions about these aspects of Cabrillo’s role in the conquests of Cuba, Mexico and Central America, Dr. Engstrand not only denied these categorizations of his behavior, she defended these aspects of Cabrillo’s behavior specifically, and Spanish rule in general, through a lens of white supremacy and Eurocentrism.

While our college respects academic freedom in general, and the freedom afforded to Dr. Engstrand to express her long-studied and deeply held views of history, the views expressed by Dr. Engstrand do not reflect those of Cabrillo College’s leadership and board of trustees. We affirm this clearly because silence is too often equated with agreement. We reject those statements made during her lecture that fail to give credence to the pain caused by cultural genocide, slavery, and the subjugation of women and indigenous people—not only in Central America and Mexico at that time, but anywhere and in any period of history. We reject them as Euro-centric, anti-indigenous interpretations of history that lacked cultural humility.

Aside from cutting the lecturer’s question and answer period off well before the planned end time, we acknowledge that our Name Exploration Subcommittee fell short of our goal to begin this series as intended—with an unbiased, fully formed, nuanced and sensitive portrayal of the life of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. While informative, Dr. Engstrand’s portrayal of Cabrillo left too much unexamined, denied and deflected. We offer a heart-felt apology to members of our broader community who were harmed by the speaker’s presentation and share the anger that our first speaker defended cultural genocide, enslavement, and the sex trafficking of women.

It is our intent to ensure a more balanced approach in each of our upcoming educational panels and discussions. We hope that despite any misgivings unintentionally conveyed from the first in our educational series, you will attend our upcoming discussions and showcasing of student works. You can learn more about attending these educational events, here: <https://www.cabrillo.edu/governing-board/name-exploration-subcommittee/>.

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