

## **40 Students Study the Myth of the First Thanksgiving and the Role of Gratitude in Civil Rights and Social Change**

### **Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center Annual *Days of Gratitude* 3-Day Intensive with Members of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation Nov. 26-28**

November 27, 2021

While many Americans took a long weekend after enjoying a day and a meal with family and friends, 40 high school students got together to dig deep into understanding the myth of the Thanksgiving story and learn the truth about Native American history and culture from members of Yolo County's Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation.

Yocha Dehe members partnered with the Oakland-based Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center for its annual *Days of Gratitude* this Thanksgiving weekend in Guinda, CA, November 26-28. Students from the San Francisco Bay Area, Yolo County, Sacramento and Kent and Tacoma, Washington, spent time with Yocha Dehe Language and History Associate, Dillon McKay and Cultural Resources Manager Laverne Bill to learn about the importance of Native Sovereignty and the role of cultural values in American democracy.

McKay and Bill spoke to the group about many aspects of Yocha Dehe culture, including preservation of its language and oral history, governance, dance, food and agriculture, cultural resources/archaeological sites and the roles of tribal members in community.

Dillon emphasized that, "Our cultures may be diverse, but we share values. We all have one thing in common: we all want to make this a better place."

Bill added, "We're no longer living in a world where we are isolated from each other based on our color or our culture—we're are evolving from that--and people need to understand each other. Your family and your community raised you to be who you are and to express yourself through your culture and heritage."

The Freedom Center's dynamic *Days of Gratitude* course accomplishes three significant goals. First, students, staff and community members study the history of "Thanksgiving", deconstructing false narratives of "the first Thanksgiving." In addition, the group studies Native Sovereignty and self-government. Finally, participants dig deep into the psychological, political, economic and cultural value of gratitude and particularly its fundamental role in the Civil Rights Movement and in making positive social change.

"We are honored, humbled and deeply grateful to the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation and to Dillon

McKay and Laverne Bill,” said Dr. Roy Wilson, Executive Director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center. “They generously shared their cultures, histories, traditions and explained the concept of native sovereignty and self-governance. We have much to learn as a democracy from their generational examples of sovereignty, community and civic engagement.”

In addition to spending Friday with McKay and Bill, the students and staff studied the role of gratitude as a fundamental principle of self-transformation, and civic engagement as part of traditions of nonviolent social change and civil rights.

For more information about the Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, visit [www.mlkfreedomcenter.org](http://www.mlkfreedomcenter.org) .

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Photos courtesy Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center

Pictured: Dillon McKay in tan shirt wearing blue mask, Laverne Bill in Blue shirt with abalone shell necklace, Martin Luther King Jr, Freedom Center Executive Director Dr. Roy D. Wilson in black jacket and blue mask with Freedom Center students.