

## **Transcript of CC Conversations: Rising Indigenous Liberation**

*This webinar was held on August 6, 2020.*

>> Thank you for joining us. We are waiting for people to enter the webinar portion. It will take a few more minutes. Thank you for joining us. We will begin momentarily when enough people have entered the webinar. Thanks.

Christina Leza: Hello, welcome to today's conversation on Rising Indigenous Liberation. With statues being toppled and critical decisions affecting Indigenous peoples, today really does feel like a moment in which centuries of racism against and the recognition of Indigenous rights is finally something that the nation is coming to terms with. Today we'll be addressing a number of critical issues that address the rising Indigenous liberation that we appear to be seeing today.

My name is Christina Leza Associate Professor at Colorado College, member of the CC Indigenous community and Adviser for the Indigenous Studies Program Here at CC, honored to be joined by some wonderful Indigenous scholars. And I will let them all introduce themselves in turn.

Anna Tsouhlarakis: Hi, my name is Anna Tsouhlarakis. I'm Navajo and Greek. Grew up between Lawrence, Kansas, and New Mexico in the Navajo Nation in New Mexico. I'm an assistant professor in the art and art history department at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Last year I was the artist in residence at Colorado College. My background is in studio arts as well as Native American studies. Thank you.

Christina L.: Natanya?

Natanya Pulley: (Speaking non-English language). Hi, everybody, I'm Natanya. My clan is through my mom. I'm an English professor at DC and writer and editor, editor of a literary journal and I write both fiction and nonfiction. I'm teaching classes in fiction-writing, literature by Native writers and poets, and literature by American ethnic writers. Thanks for having me.

Dwanna McKay: Hello. I'm Dwanna McKay, and I'm a citizen of the Muskogee Creek Nation, Assistant Professor in the Race, Ethnicity, and Migrations Studies Program at Colorado College, Co-adviser of the Indigenous Studies Program. I grew up in Oklahoma, right smack dab in the middle of the Muskogee Creek Nation's jurisdictional boundaries. And so I think that's about all you need to know about me. You can look me up on my website. I guess I could talk about what I teach or what I study.

I basically study – I'm a critical race theorist and a sociologist but I really look at Indigenous identity within – and how it's framed, how it's formed, and the impact of the federal Indian policies that have really, you know, had a large influence on how identity gets manifested and used in the contemporary world.

Christina L.: Great. Thank you. I guess we'll just jump into our conversation for today. One of the recent important events that many of our audience may be aware of is the Washington NFL team's decision to change its mascot. After many, many decades of controversy. Anna, I know that the issue of native mascots is something that you have thought a lot about. We'll start with you and any comments that you have about this issue.

Anna T.: Yeah. I think one thing we need to kind of think about, knowing that this change just recently happened, four or five weeks ago, that the Washington football team decided that they were going to look for a new team name, this has been an ongoing battle of using Native American imagery and mascots within sports for over almost a century. but the fight's been going on since the '70s, even the '60s, starting out with schools like Dartmouth College, my alma mater, which originally used the Indian.

It was never officially a mascot of the college, but alumni and students got together to really have the college make a firm declaration that it was not a mascot. That was '68 or '69. Then we get into the real push of one of the pioneers of this movement, Suzanne. I was reading up on her again earlier. And her dedication that really started when she moved to Washington, D.C. in the mid-'70s.

And how she became very active within the protests and eventually became one of the, you know, petitioners to file a lawsuit and ongoing battle that was really nice to, kind of, see it come to fruition throughout this summer. And I think the support from the Black Lives Matter movement and that ongoing pushing of – usually marginalized voices to a much larger national platform was really helpful in that.

Anna T.: I think something to also think about is that, you know, when this first started around 50 years ago, there were around 3,000 – I think 3,000 high schools and colleges or schools that were using Native American imagery as a mascot. And that has slowly been cut away, but the Washington Post reported that as of July there was still around 900 schools or institutions that utilize the Native mascot imagery.

And I think that while this is a huge win for Native communities, there's so much further that we need to go. The Smithsonian had a great exhibition dealing with stereotypes, not just in sports but across all genres, from, kind of, the big chief notebooks to, you know, the land O lakes butter maiden and how those things are being phased out but they're still out there in our communities and we need to make sure that we are vocal in getting those, kind of, taken off the shelves, taken off sports uniforms, because the psychological effects have been, you know – it's been shown in research how detrimental it is to Native youth.

But then something we also don't think about is the flip side of the detrimental effect it has on non-Native youth and how it promotes cultural abusiveness from them and makes it seem as though it's tolerated within communities, which it never should be. So – but I'm happy to talk more about that. I just wanted to give my brief background about that.

Christina L.: Great. Wonderful, Anna. And on the issue of Native representation, I know Natanya Pulley, this is something you look a lot at in your work, in literature specifically. And I know that some of what you've looked at has tied to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. I want to go ahead and give you a chance to talk a bit about that.

Natanya P.: Sure. Thank you. You know, as an English professor and writer, I enter literary activism as a way to be a part of these conversations. And I think that Indigenous liberation requires literary activism, which is about raising voices and supporting diverse voices, and even diverse voices within diverse communities, too. And one thing that happens with Native American literature, what it ends up being called rather than literature by Native American writers and poets, is a kind of glossing over these texts as if their purpose is to only educate or provide some kind of awareness of an issue, or a type of lifestyle, or identity.

And so one thing we do in the classes that I teach is investigate these representations looking at White supremacy in the craft of writing as well as publishing, and how these authors are negotiating with Western forms and structures in their work. And all of these things are an act of restoration and resilience. This is not necessarily about trying to tell a story to a non-Native audience, but restoring one's self and showing resilience, creating spaces for resilience for other Native people through representations and forms, and the kinds of voices that we support.

Natanya P.:

I think that all writers are responding to colonization in their work in one way or another. I think it's impossible to create something as a Native person that doesn't involve -- isn't now defined by or working against colonization, especially if we're using the colonizer's language. And so I think what it comes down to, to colonizing a course or a syllabus or some kind of reading list by Native readers, it means understanding that those representations as Anna pointed out are far-reaching and it's not necessarily just that something affects a Native student.

But it also begins to allow society to treat Native people in a certain way. It gives permission to brush off the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women, which is a movement -- which started as a movement as well to look for these missing women, and also children and vulnerable communities. And the statistics show that Indigenous women are twice as likely to experience sexual assault, and half of those kinds are committed by strangers.

And that they also are ten times as likely to be murdered. And so when we think about what kind of representations of Native women are appearing in text, the ones that people gravitate around, they tend to be things like Halloween costumes and older texts, Native texts or texts by white authors about Native characters. And these speakers are often romanticized or sexualized and it allows the readers to imagine that women are these objects.

And, you know, I think what happens is that the conversations then shift towards what these women are doing in those moments, what these women -- how are they vulnerable rather than looking at all of the systems that continue to oppress them. So I think that one thing that we have to do is to look at those representations, like with the mascots, but also in literature and look at the voices that we raise up in literature and really be critical of some of these texts that show Native Americans without much complexity and allow us to de-humanize and allow anyone that's seeking any kind of dominance over vulnerable people or a claim to the land or some kind of ownership or power over the history of the land, right, is empowered when they see these representations as well.

So, yeah. I think that rather than -- of course, on Native American literature, looking at themes only, or looking at the awareness it provides, should be investigating and really pointing at the kind of critical moves that are being made in those pieces towards restoration and resilience.

Christina L.: Thank you, Natanya. We'll return to this issue of representation later in the conversation. But now I would like to turn to another very important recent event, which was the Supreme Court decision regarding tribal lands in Oklahoma. And Dwanna, I know this is something that on a personal level, is very significant to you and the Muskogee people. You just wrote a fantastic piece in the conversation about this issue. So, I'd like you to share some thoughts.

Dwanna M.: Yes. So what you're talking about is the Supreme Court of the United States, their McGirt decision, right. So, the background of that is that there was – there is a Seminole member, Jim McGirt, who committed some terrible crimes against children, and did so on Creek land, or Muskogee land, right, Muskogee Creek Nation.

So – but was tried by the state, was given the death penalty – wasn't given the death penalty, but could have been on the death penalty. Went up, got an attorney. The attorney argued that because these crimes were committed on an Indian reservation, that only the federal government could have actually tried this individual. And the federal government doesn't have a death penalty part. So, this has been going on for years.

It reached the Supreme Court. Excuse me. (Clearing throat) It reached the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court came back, the state of Oklahoma said not only is it not still a reservation, it never was a reservation. And so some of the arguments that they put forward were typical of state's rights. And why it's important – the Supreme Court came back in July, July 9th and said nope, it is a reservation, we hold the government to its promise. It said it would be and it is.

The Muskogee Creek Nation's jurisdictional boundaries were reestablished within the state of Oklahoma. The reason that's important is because it's that expression of sovereignty. Most people aren't educated about how many sovereign nations there are within the United States in North America, but particularly within the United States, sovereign, Indigenous nations. These nations were here long before European invasion or settlers came.

And have maintained their sovereignty, and maintained their dignity, and their cultures through the most horrific of circumstances. And so the Supreme Court is not usually good to Native nations, is not usually the best place for us to go. But they happened to come forward with a rule that said no, we recognize the self-governance and the sovereignty and the government-to-government relations between Native nations and the U.S. federal government.

Dwanna M.: So, federal Indian policy waivers back and forth on whether it's beneficial, this time it came out. The big deal for us on the – for me, one of the points I want to make – I have two. What sovereignty is, it's the self-governance of the members or the citizens of that Native nation and other Natives that live, work, and come into their political jurisdictional boundaries, right. So – and the second point is that the idea that non-Natives cannot be trusted to police within their own jurisdictional boundaries is steeped in hypocrisy.

That's like saying Native people are supposed to just trust non-Natives to police them. And it smacks of White supremacy, that somehow only someone who – only White people or only White folks, the White systems are going to be fair and we know that through the histories of Indigenous peoples, we have used restorative justice and other means. So most of us did not – most of the 573 nations that currently exist do not and did not have a specific death penalty.

It had to be decided amongst both families, both victim and perpetrator on what was going to happen with that. So, you know, it's just interesting to me that – the feedback I've gotten from people about, like, oh, my gosh. Are you going to tax us now? Do we have to get off the land? And that's not the issue. This is about criminal acts by Indigenous people within those boundaries, those jurisdictional boundaries of the Muskogee Nation now. It's not about non-Native people who live within that.

There might be some interesting things in the future, though. That would be great, right.

Christina L.: Thank you, Dwanna. On a different but related topic of Indigenous rights within Indigenous territories, my own work has focused on Indigenous issues in the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically for Indigenous peoples who have traditionally occupied this region, but have now been split by the enforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border. I've worked with a number of activists in the Tucson Sonora region, specifically, looking at how various indigenous constituencies have managed to negotiate their ability to occupy their territories to still maintain traditional relationships within their territories despite the presence of the U.S.-Mexico border.

But also, groups who have been very vocal in trying to get both the U.S. government and the Mexican government to recognize their rights to be able to move with some level of freedom across the U.S.-Mexico border in order to freely maintain the types of relationships they need to maintain with family members, with social groups across that border, to protect their territories in terms of protecting the most important areas and their traditional territories as a whole, being able to maintain their traditional spiritual practices, protect the most sacred areas of this region.

Christina L.:

And many people don't realize that there are dozens of tribal nations that are impacted by the U.S.-Mexico border who have traditionally occupied this territory and have had to find ways to still maintain their important relationships in those territories with increasing enforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border. What has received recent press coverage recently has been a resistance against a border wall in the Tohono O'odham nation. This is one of many nations that are impacted by various forms of border enforcement, including construction of the U.S.-Mexico border.

But certainly within the Tohono O'odham nation, as we have seen in some areas of the country such as in California with the construction of border barriers in areas that are sacred, what we also see in the Tohono O'odham nation in Arizona is border wall construction that has impacted traditional burial sites, sacred areas for the Tohono O'odham Nation as well as other Indigenous peoples that have traditionally occupied these areas. So we've seen some significant level of protest that has risen recently in response, specifically to the Trump administration's very, very strong desire to construct border barriers, to construct the strongest walls possible within these traditional Indigenous territories.

And of course this issue definitely proceeds the Trump administration. This has been increasingly a problem for Indigenous peoples on the U.S.-Mexico border since the 1990s, since 9/11. We've seen increasingly this concern about the need or desire on the part of many Americans to protect the U.S.-Mexico against the flow of movement from Latin America. And we are in an interesting moment in terms of – even though this has been an issue for many decades, with the Trump administration's very strong movement for border wall construction, we have seen Indigenous nations become much more vocal, band together.

We have recently seen border summits organized by the National Congress of American Indians, Tohono O'odham Nation, bringing together other nations to talk about what can we do to protect Indigenous sovereignty on the U.S.-Mexico border in order to really have that relationship between the federal government and sovereign tribal nations be recognized, and thinking about what to do about the U.S.-Mexico border.

Now, despite these recent movements on the part of Indigenous peoples and lots of solidarity on the part of other Americans who are very concerned about Indigenous rights on the border, we certainly do still see a lot of non-Native Americans who really don't understand issues at the border when it comes to Native American rights. So in my own talking about this with the public, a question that I get a lot is, don't Native Americans care about national security?

Christina L.:

And my response to that is that there is certainly a lot of diversity in the Indigenous population on the U.S.-Mexico border. There's diversity in thought on a lot of issues within Indigenous communities, but certainly when it comes to the U.S.-Mexico border, there are a diversity of opinions. So taking the Tohono O'odham Nation as an example, we do have communities who live closest to the border who are most directly affected by the funneling of immigrant movement into the desert regions and directly into their backyards.

And not just immigrant movement or migrant movement, but also the movement of drug smugglers coming through their lands. And what I've heard from some families who are closest to the border, who unfortunately have to deal with migrants, for example, coming through who are desperate, who sometimes steal things out of desperation as they're coming through, who are very concerned about tribal resources being used to deal with the monitoring of immigrant movement as well as drug smuggling movement, who are put into danger from drug smugglers moving through their lands, I certainly have heard individuals say that they want border construction – or at least some form of increased border enforcement, even though they are aware also of how this impinges on their rights on their nation.

But there are others who feel we need to prioritize a recognition of Indigenous rights, including the ways in which increased border enforcement impinges on the ability for most of the Tohono O'odham nation citizens to be able to freely occupy those areas in the ways that they have always occupied them. Also, concern about environmental damage in those territories as a result of border wall construction or other forms of border enforcement.

And I think the key issue there is, even though there is diversity of thought on this, overall Native Americans on the U.S.-Mexico border – yes, concerned about their community security, concerned in a broader sense about national security. But they want to have their concerns recognized because they are the most invested in protecting those areas that their peoples have occupied since time immemorial. And certainly nations like the Tohono O'odham nation are the most deeply impacted with the movement of people from the Latin America when certain border enforcement measures result in the channeling of people through their specific territories.

So, this is the type of response that I've given to people who don't really understand that issue very well. They don't understand the Native perspective because they haven't experienced the border, and border enforcement in this way.



Christina L.: And something certainly on all of the issues that we've discussed already, to say, is that there are a lot of people who are not Native Americans and therefore haven't experienced these issues in the same way as Native Americans have experienced them.

The mascot issue, for example, I know there are many non-Native Americans who have never been particularly concerned about Native American mascots because they always see mascots as a positive thing. They think mascots are a way of recognizing the historical presence of Indigenous peoples in the United States. One way in which non-Native Americans can honor Native Americans by making them an important symbol of certain types of institutions and organizations.

What is your response to that type of feeling about Native American mascots?

Anna T.: I think we've seen that as an excuse throughout the decades, that honoring Native Americans is the big thing and it makes me kind of question. Like when we set up other ways of honoring people – I'll use veterans. It's usually because there are veterans within that conversation. And when we talk about a lot of these issues about reputation and stereotype, it tends to be because Native Americans have never been part of that conversation. It's the greater society trying to decide and dictate how we are meant to be honored, how we are meant to be represented, how we are meant to be defined.

And I think that, in essence, is the problem. They try to do it legally. They try to do it through imagery. In all sects of this world – of the United States – they've tried to do that and tried to pigeon hole us in different ways. And the sports imagery is just one – another kind of way of doing that. I think something that kind of came up in the questions that I see rolling beside us are about the example right in Colorado Springs, Cheyenne Mountain High School has the Indian mascot.

While I was living in Colorado Springs my young children went to the elementary school, one of the feeder schools that goes into Cheyenne Mountain High School. They were not the Indians, that was not their mascot, it was a bear, which was nice. But it really made me think about that, about how could I ever possibly have my kids go to a school where they would be wearing uniforms like that?

And there were a couple of things that came up in thinking about that. The idea that their identity as people, as children, is being dictated to them by this high school, that they could possibly go to, that the way that they interact with their peers on a sports team would be reduced to a chant or face paint, that my daughter, who was in fourth grade was in the band.

Anna T.: And their nickname was the Tribe. And so of course I refused to let her get the t-shirt, but those were the things that I was confronted with last year on a very personal level. And I just think that it's unthinkable in this day and age, and especially after the movement that's happened in the past couple months, is that I think we're seeing as a country, you know, that all voices need to be heard, that every, kind of, race, every ethnicity needs to be a stakeholder in these conversations where representation matters when it's about us.

And if we're not at the table then they should not be decided for us.

Dwanna M.: I'd like to add something to what Anna just said. She, you know, I think that she really expressed all of our feelings eloquently and passionately. And I really appreciate that. This is something that I've really worked on my entire life before I became a scholar. I was an activist and trying to change this. I dedicated my life to changing these mascots. And not just mascots, but the imagery and the cultural appropriation and the racialization of Indigenous peoples from the beginning.

The United States was birthed in playing Indian. And that's something that Philip, a historian termed playing Indian. And we see that with the Boston Tea Party, which everybody celebrates as look, this rebellion. And the rejection of tyranny. They think that's the way the United States was birthed. The truth is during that Boston Tea Party, those supposed rebels went and put, you know, dark – smudged their face with coal dust and things and put blankets on and feathers around and went and dumped that tea into the harbor, Boston Harbor, but they dressed up as Indians so if they got seen it wouldn't be really, you know, English people doing it.

So, playing Indian is something that's socialized into children's psyche like Anna was talking about with her kids, with my childhood, my daughter, all of us, you know, learning how to count with the one little, two little, three little Indians song. And all of the appropriation of Indigenous symbols, Indigenous languages and names. It's been from the beginning, right. And so what that really all comes down to is legitimized racism.

It's been legitimized to be overtly – not covertly, not under my breath, but overtly racist toward Indigenous persons and Indigenous nations, taking people's – an Indigenous nation's name, design, or whatever.

So the legitimization of that happens through the law, like Anna was saying, through legislation, through the education, through religion, or the declaration of Independence has merciless Indian savages.

Dwanna M.: But the Constitution of the United States did say that we were Indian nations and so from that point they've really been trying to revise history. And no one brings that up when they're having those conversations on the Hill, right. They're like oh, those casinos – no one remembers nations during that time. But we are. And we have been here. And we feel just like you said, Christina, we feel invested – not just invested, it's like this is our duty to protect our homelands.

These are our homelands. We don't have any other homelands in some far-away place, someday I'm going to go visit the lands of my ancestors. I'm going to go down to Alabama where they forcibly removed us and walked us across the country forcibly on foot. And there's going to be a Sam's built there. I don't know if Sam's is around anymore. But maybe there will be Walmart or something. So these are our homelands. We're the people that were here.

It wasn't some desolate, unpopulated area. We were – we had advanced civilizations. Read *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. There's a lot of other great books out there. But Indigenous peoples telling their own story, being part of the conversation. You know. Mascots are just one of the many. But it's not the big ones. I'm so sorry. It's not the big, like the NFL, even though they're a union and should be able to have just taken care of this by saying no, that's not allowed.

It's not just major sports, it's in the high schools and the elementary schools. That's where the largest number of racist Indian mascots are in the United States today. Natanya.

(Laughter)

Natanya P.: You know, I'm always amazed when somebody says to me, either in class or after a reading I give, or wherever I am, they'll say why didn't I learn about this history, about Native people history, or Native history? I think, you mean why don't you learn about U.S. history is the real thing there. And to be aware that when asking those kinds of questions, we shouldn't be directing it towards Native people to say why didn't I learn this thing, but to say what did I learn?

How many of us have driven by streets that are named after Indigenous tribes? They're just right there all the time. And so to say that you don't know Indigenous history means that you can just see this word daily and it means nothing to you. And that's about trying to take some responsibility in learning about that, right. And mascots are a part of that as well, right.

Natanya P.: We create these kind of safe spaces for individuals to say well, I'm not racist, I learned about Native people from my mascot and a play we did, and this little tourist trail we took. And we heard this tale, you know. And that becomes their story of Native history. So to push that away, I think that's one of the things that mascots – the attempt to get rid of these mascots, one of the things it's trying to do is not just for Native students, but it's for everybody in order to take a step back and say what is the history I know?

So somebody else has said to me before, my school was named after this tribe. And it was to honor them. I'll say really, what do you know about that tribe? You know. Where are their significant sites? Who are the people there? Really drill somebody and they don't have those answers. And that's the point, right, is that to say you're honoring somebody, to say that we are learning something about a culture but then to really not be at the table as was discussed and to not have that history at all within us is the problem.

Christina L.: Thank you, Natanya. Now I want to return to the topic of the terrifying epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women. And this is an issue that has been receiving more attention recently, both among politicians as well as in the media. But this still isn't quite national news and of national concern. Why do we think that that's the case?

Natanya P.: Sure. There's a number of reasons there. One is simply the data, right, that individuals want to know what the data is in order to really call it an epidemic. But those numbers are hard to get. In 2016, it was reported to the National Crime Information Center that 5,712 women were missing and murdered, Indigenous women. But only 113 of those women were cases in the Department of Justice. That's a huge disparity.

So what's happening there? What's happening between families and communities knowing somebody is missing and then where that information goes and who's in charge of doing something about it. And a lot of these cases go cold. A lot of these cases aren't followed up on. A lot of the cases – maybe the local enforcement thinks that these are vulnerable people who in the wrong place at the wrong time, that there's no method to what's happening there.

Evidence gets lost. It doesn't get made a priority. And then also, it ends up hitting into this real web of who has jurisdictional power here, right. Is it the tribal government, is it the state government, city, is it the feds, what – where does this information go and how does it all come together. And there is an act right now – or a bill that's at the House that seeks to start to kind of create a centralized place for the information to go. It's been there on the desk for a while, since spring.

Natanya P.: But I think that's another part of why we don't hear about it is because we don't know who's in charge of doing something about it. And the ways in which different people feel that those things should be taken care of. So predators within a tribe are treated a specific way between tribes, but so are people outside of tribes, right. And that's going to be different from state to city to country as well.

So I think some of this kind of weird place of we don't know how many, we don't know how, allows people to step back. It allows people to not look at this vulnerable group and to do something about it. And then also, we have these representations that say, you know, that's not really a Native person, this is a Native person. And that's a girl wandering on a highway, why was she out there anyway.

And then there's this removal of responsibility to do something about it. And I'm sure there's many other reasons why. Those are the ones that I concentrate on in my classes. And there are plenty of movements – there are a lot of different websites, a lot of different groups that are interested in finding ways to report, to keep track of, to push government towards, to get community involvement, as well as art movements and literary movements doing all of that work.

It's kind of one of those things, as soon as you start looking for it you'll realize that it's everywhere. And I don't know, years ago, one day I just realized that even though my Facebook feed showed missing girls all day long regularly, that nobody else was seeing it. For some reason, I just assumed that this was how everybody interacted with Facebook, not recognizing that this is because I'm following those pages and I know these people and I know these communities and that's how that information gets around.

So, I think – and this was a question that I think came up somewhere else before is how do we engage in these concerns. And the first place is to start looking for it because it is out there. It's everywhere. It's not hidden. Obstacles that Native people face are not behind a door somewhere. They're all right there.

Dwanna M.: Can I add to that, Christina?

Christina L.: Sure.

Dwanna M.: That's another issue for racism because the hypersexualization of women has been going on since Columbus, that somehow Indigenous people, Indigenous women particularly are promiscuous. And then there's also the invisibility of Indigenous women. And Indigenous people – you're the first Native person I've ever met. How many of us have heard that over and over?

Dwanna M.: Oh, there's still Indians? That sort of thing. So it's like, first we're invisible from the U.S. social narrative, and then when we are, it's through racialized, you know, a lens of, like, well, they're drunks. They're all on a reservation somewhere. They're lazy, they're hypersexual. If something happened it's because they're not taking care of themselves, right.

We don't look at these man camps that go and are part of the pipeline. We don't look at how it's not just where women are somehow out somewhere they shouldn't be. They are taken from their homes. And I also want to make the point that 90% of all assault on Native women is by non-Natives. So it's not other Native people. There are, of course perpetrators in every group, but missing and murdered Indigenous women – if you ever look for MMIW, you'll see it everywhere and you'll never be able to just let that go again. It will haunt you.

And we hope it does until we no longer have this issue.

Natanya P.: Just to clarify, MMIW is kind of the short term, but we are also talking about children, two-spirit individuals, trans people, queer people, a large group of vulnerable people that are taken and assaulted, and murdered.

Christina L.: Thank you. So, we have a little time before we move into questions from the audience. So I'd like to ask a big picture question. We have seen moments in U.S. history where it seems like the country was turning to a truer recognition of the struggles of Indigenous peoples and a recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples. So, for example, in response to the American Indian movement in the '60s and '70s, we had some really important decisions on the part of the federal government.

We had the return of House Blue Lake. We had a clearer recognition of the self-determination and sovereign rights of tribal nations. We had the reversal of some termination decisions that had been made in previous decades. And it seemed like this was a real turn point for Indigenous peoples and nations. It wasn't long after, perhaps a decade, suddenly the mainstream U.S. population forgets and everyone thinks Native Americans are rich from casinos and Native Americans have more rights than they should, because they seem to have more rights than other American citizens.

It's clear that some momentum needs to be kept, even though this is an important moment in terms of a turning point for recognizing Indigenous rights. What do we need to do to keep up the momentum of this moment so we really do see, ultimately, Indigenous liberation in our country?

Anna T.:

I think, in my opinion, that we are at a culmination of all those kind of things that our relatives or ancestors have been working towards this entire time, and realizing that we have camaraderie with other people of color, with other marginalized communities, and that this is our moment. I think that we've been preparing for it for a long time. I mean, when we look back at what happened at Standing Rock a few years ago, that started with a small group of youth in North Dakota and it expanded to become an international news story, and wonderful way to bring all Native nations together.

But that started off of social media. I think that the savviness of our Native youth and the younger college-age people that are coming up to know who they are, to really be honest about who they are in terms of, you know, tribal mixtures, sexual orientation, gender fluidity, all of those things. That lets people know that Native people aren't just one thing, that we are very complex people just like any other sect of the population.

And I think bringing all that honesty and that voice together makes our voice as a whole stronger and it makes us be able to kind of reach across the board and across to different people to make our platform stronger. And so I think in some ways we're in the best possible place we can be in terms of working together. And I think that we'll continue to do that because you see that with our youth, with Instagram influencers that are transgender, multinational artists and musicians speaking their truths and talking about all the different issues.

And that's just one example. (Chuckling) But I love seeing that, and that vibrancy and that energy.

Natanya P.:

Yeah, I love that answer. Thank you for that. I also think that we need to have our own kinds of Native-led initiatives and institutes and things like that. I recently taught at the emerging Dine writers institute, a week-long creative writing extensive for Navajo students of all age from the all over the place, and just simply the way that that entire week was structured, the kinds of conversations we had, the way in which we could talk about writing without talking about somebody outside of our culture trying to understand it, how quickly some of the things were being conveyed in our work, right.

Like that created an amazing space, a life-changing space for me, and also for all of the students there, some of which were our elders and some are in high school school. So by creating and supporting, and acknowledging the work and effort that Native people do, is part of that as well, right. It's the momentum of building things and there are things to be built. And there needs to be a way to – or we need people to support us when we do them.

Dwanna M.:

So I love both of the previous answers. Thank you, both of you – all three of you inspire me, and I'm grateful. I'm just really grateful to know you and to have you three in my life. We have to survive first. Our people are killed at a greater proportion than any other racialized group. And we have to be kind to ourselves and to others. We suffer from depression, and anxiety at astronomical rates. And so do other peoples of color.

It's just about having to navigate and negotiate an everyday world that reminds you that, you know, it reminds you every day that people don't see you and when they do, they see you as a caricature, stereotype, or they don't mind hurling racist things at you. Because of the difference in all of these different nations and because we occupied an entire continent, we do look differently.

And so a lot of times we're also – we have the daily stress and the microaggression of what are you, who are you? I loved what Anna said about, be honest. Be you. Know who you are and be honest with everyone else. It just strengthens us. Sister Audrey said that it is within our personal differences – I mean, within those differences that our personal power is forged.

So for me we have to survive. We have to love ourselves. We have to love each other. And we have to give credit to Native women! Not just – we love our Native men, but not all – not every Native man is a leader. And there are a lot of Native women who have led us and brought us here. And our ancestors. And we need to start, like, decolonizing that as well. So, liberation doesn't just come from liberating Indigenous people, per se, or Indigenous peoples.

The liberation is the liberation from those colonized, westernized patriarchal ideas. We have to examine ourselves and try to get rid of those. But as we change personally, then our peoples change. And as we grow our networks, then of course it's just going to continue to happen. So that's what I think, bigger picture.

Christina L.:

Thank you so much. I think what we'll do now, since we just have a bit of time, is we're going to go to a couple of audience questions. One question I have here regards local issues. And what are some local issues for Indigenous peoples or hot topics? I think we've covered some of those. But what are some things people more locally in the Colorado Springs/Denver area should be aware of, and how can an interested individual who may not know much about these issues learn more and perhaps support – provide support to Native peoples?



Anna T.: One, somebody just posted on the Facebook Live a petition to change the mascot at Cheyenne Mountain High School. I think that is a huge issue very locally that needs to be dealt with. And another one is to learn more about these things, there's the Colorado Indigenous Facebook page, Denver Indian Center has one. They're collecting different goods and foods to ship off to reservations or to Native families in need.

And I think that, again, what Natanya was talking about even with the MMIW, anytime you want to help out Native communities there's a thousand different ways you can do it. You just have to take the work to Google it. Just do one Google. (Chuckling)

Dwanna M.: So, we're really so fortunate to have such an active community at Colorado College of Indigenous students and students who are part of the Native American Student Union. And they are on that petition as well. We also have, you know, non-Native high school students, children of faculty that have really, you know, spoken against this. You know, the school board -- the Cheyenne Mountain school board has been less than forthcoming on whether they should -- they've been forthcoming when they finally decide not to change it.

But there is still -- we're getting some pushback from them about whether they should change it or not. I think that's something that everyone can do. Another thing I think is buy local Indigenous artist's work, not the stuff that you see in the little boutique stores that are from another country that's been made up. We have so many amazing Indigenous artists and Indigenous writers. And we need to be supporting them.

We've got two right now on this actual panel with us that could -- that deserve to have their work supported. We have amazing people -- the Colorado Springs Indigenous community is pretty big. And we get out and do a lot. I haven't been able to do that for the last year -- nine months, I've been on sabbatical, but they are really active in supporting and in marching and that sort of thing.

But Haase is also a women's -- it's for Indigenous women survivors of domestic assault, abuse, or anything. Support them financially. Send them some cash, right? It doesn't always mean going out and even getting outside the comfort of your own home. But those are some easy things. The other thing is, like, educate yourself, just maybe, you know, I've got some articles you could read. I know Dr. Leza also has some articles -- books. We've got some books, Natanya.

Dr. Pulley. There's -- educate yourself. And let's talk about each other's cultures, not just mine. Let's learn about one another.

Natanya P.: I think those are all wonderful answers. And I just also want to say when it comes to artists and writers, Native artists and writers, that we do have so many. We have so many emerging writers. Those high school writers that I met two weeks ago, oh, my gosh! They're so amazing. It is out there and it is happening. And what tends to happen is sometimes these very specific names rise up as the epitome of what the work should look like or the storyline should be.

Just being aware of that. You may have your favorite Native author, but know that there are so many more that have influenced that author and are also being influenced by them. Just keeping mind of the kind of diversity that we have within our tribes.

Christina L.: Thank you. So I think we'll be going a little over time by maybe five or six minutes, but I do want to answer one question that came in before the panel that's specific to Colorado College. I also want to very briefly respond myself to a question that came up on the Q&A feed here about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and what is being done in terms of implementing the declaration in the United States.

Unfortunately, historically the United States has very rarely recognized, in its domestic courts of law and at the level of the Supreme Court any of the instruments that have come out of the United Nations in terms of considering those instruments in court decisions. There have only been a couple of instances in which that has occurred. But this is something lots of legal scholars are thinking about, how might we – more differently approaching Indigenous rights in the United States for tribal nations as well as Indigenous individuals, how might we incorporate the United Nations declaration into courtroom arguments so that language and rights – they are addressed within that declaration are better recognized within the courts in the United States.

And I do know that several tribal nations are also incorporating some of the declaration's language into their own documents, into their constitutional statements. And so that is some of the ways in which we do see both tribal nations as well as others who are concerned about Indigenous rights moving to implement the declaration, better recognizing Indigenous rights within the United States.

So, before we close, I want to make sure we address this CC-specific question. You may have students who have never met an Indigenous person before arriving to Colorado College and may be completely unaware of U.S. history and impacts on systemic racism.

Christina L.: How do you bring them along in your classes? What are common misperceptions they have about Indigenous peoples? And I don't know, who would like to address that? It's a big question, I know.

Dwanna M.: I do a lot of Indigenous studies. I teach Intro to Indigenous Studies. I've taught at the University of Massachusetts, and Kansas State, and Oklahoma State University, and Smith College, and here in Colorado, Colorado College. To be honest with you, that's most of our students, either haven't been taught by or haven't met or had any friends or anything, and particularly – and a lot of Native students have never had a Native professor, a Native teacher.

So, to bring them along and understand the misconceptions are the same as all U.S. society, that we are either vanishing, no longer here, or stuck in some kind of a historical time capsule and we all wear buckskin and all the stereotypical tropes that are there. But what I find about students and young people who rock my world every day is that they want to know.

And they're the first to say, I didn't know this. Wow! Really? And just like we heard previously it's like, you know, why didn't I know this? Why didn't I hear about this? And they will dig in and really go get into the material and understand immediately that there's a difference between different nations, because there's a difference between different nations globally, right?

So the difference between Native nations. So the way that they come along is they really get to enjoy the different materials. I make sure in my classes that we read some literature, we read some sociological academic scholarship, we watch videos, and we visit Indigenous people. We have either Indigenous people come into our classrooms, either via some kind of a Zoom or something, or in person.

And we also – I took a class of students to Oklahoma last year and we went to different nations and learned about all of the contributions and the economic contributions, and the employment that is offered by Indigenous nations. And so we bring them along like that. But basically that's every student. And I find all students really want to learn and not be kept in the dark or be ignorant of this type of information.

Natanya P.: I agree with all of that and love that bringing diverse texts into that classroom and into that discussion is so helpful. And one thing I think that's really important is decolonizing education itself and recognizing that you don't learn these things in order to get an answer. You learn these things in order to develop better questions. And so one thing that students end up facing is this moment of I didn't have this information, I am somehow inferior now and now I have to get the answer.

Natanya P.: And when I have the answer I will then have the information and be in this solid place, rather than recognize that learning is always about some kind of adventure, always about some sort of invention of self every step of the way and it can be a beautiful thing. And wrong answers provide something just as important as the right ones do. And so there's a lot of that kind of interaction in my class of asking a question of now, why do we even think that question?

What is the thing that's bringing that question up for us? So that we step back and start thinking about what it is that we're trying to do in a classroom. Is it to learn all of Indigenous history and become experts of it? Or is it to become a better person and part of the world, and to find out how to support Indigenous peoples.

Anna T.: I taught for 15 years in Washington, D.C., where I was the only Native on campus where I was teaching. I never taught a Native student while I was there. But I think that my presence there was so important because I was the first Native that most of my students have met. I remember living in New York and somebody didn't believe that I was Native because they didn't think we existed any longer. They're like are you Peruvian? No, I'm Native.

That's the thing. We're always having to fight even to exist. And when I think about the role that I played being an art teacher to the students I had, it wasn't necessarily overwhelmingly educational of the American Indian experience, but it was the importance of them knowing and connecting with somebody who happened to be Native, to find those connections and within their own life they could find outlets as they've gotten older to working with other Native peoples or discovering that some of their family may have Native ancestry or different things like that.

And so I think that one of the biggest roles we can play as being in academia is bringing other Native academics up in all genres of study, not just in ethnic or Indigenous studies or art, but in the science field so that way it becomes a normal thing to have a Native teacher, an Indigenous teacher, whether it be in kindergarten, college, or graduate school. And I think that's how – in terms of the big picture scope of racism, is to normalize that experience of knowing a Native person.

Christina L.: Thank you for all of your wonderful responses. So, we are out of time. Actually, we are over time. So I think that we'll just end this conversation now with a tremendous thank you to our panel. Thank you so much for all of your wonderful words and all of the wonderful work that you do every day of your lives. I am very, very honored to have had you here for this panel, but also just to know you and to have you in my life.

Christina L.: And also a very big thank you to everyone in the audience who joined us today. I wish that we could have answered all 21 questions that came into the feed, but unfortunately we're short on time. But thank you so much for sending in questions and engaging in this discussion today. Thank you.

Natanya P.: And thank you, Christina, for moderating.

>> Yes.

>> Thank you so much.

>> Bye-bye.

>> Thank you.