

Indigenous Rights from the GA

Candi Tomlinson – October 11, 2020

Good Morning

(Drew hold up book)

There were three major resources that were referenced throughout all of the Indigenous workshops. “*An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*” is the main one, and Carol will talk more about that later. All three will be listed in the archives with my talk.

So, let’s begin.....

As many of you know, I have a particular affection for the American Indian, because I lived with, and planned to marry, the son of one of the Hopi Tribal Chiefs. So, at this year’s General Assembly, I attended as many of the workshops as I could on Indigenous Rights; and, I chose just one of the many themes that were intertwined throughout all of the workshops, to discuss with you today, about the Native American.

Now, you might have noticed—I have already used two terms to describe Indians. Which one is correct—American Indian or Native American? As stated in the Fahs Lecture, both of these terms are legalized governmental terminology, which were designed to ethnically and racially identify Indigenous Peoples. Many Tribes were represented who think of these terms with contempt and disapproval. In fact, they prefer “Indigenous Peoples”, but have popularized the term “Native”. Both terms were used throughout all the workshops.

America tends to think of itself as a nation of immigrants. However, the first white people who colonized America did not think of themselves as “immigrants”. Let me quote Michael Witgen, an Anishinaabe historian—“The United States imagines itself as a nation of immigrants. The United States aspired to be a colonial power. But the presence and persistence of native peoples forced the republic to become a colonizer.....To imagine the United States as a nation of immigrants devoid of an indigenous population is not only a form of erasure, it is historically incorrect.”

We are actually a nation of nations. Every tribe is its own nation, and the agreements the tribes have with the American government are actually International Treaties. So, the term “Settler Colonialism” is more correct than a nation of immigrants. This was defined as “an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression in indigenous peoples and cultures”, according to Lorenzo Veracini.

Now that I have established the self-identifiers of Natives, let me identify the particular theme I want to focus on today—the Genocide of the Indigenous Peoples. This includes political, social, and cultural erasure.

The Doctrine of Discovery, that was officially established in 1828 by the United States Supreme Court, but really started in the 1400’s, stated that since the United States was an extension of Great Britain, it had “inherited authority over all lands within our claimed boundaries”, thereby stripping the Tribes of their right to their own land. This is according to the website of the United Church of Christ, as part of their investigation of the Discovery Doctrine.

The land, however, is an integral part of the very nature of Indigenous Peoples. Their food, their religion, their very sustainability is through the land.

Let's consider a quote from *The Great Sioux Nation* published in 1977....."The *land* is the *body* of the native people. The land as a body is monetized, capitalized, as in the African body, not just African labor, that's only half of it. It's the human body. Land conquest and chattel slavery are so interlinked, that if you separate them, you end up with a distorted story. And that interlink has to be at the core of a complete revision of US history."

The Navajo Tribe is located in the corners of four different states that meet together. The Hopi Tribe was placed, by the US government, in the center of the Navajo Arizona Corner. It is so mountainous and rocky that it is virtually impossible to grow crops, or anything for that matter, which governmental authorities knew. Yet they grow their own crops, have cattle, horses, and chickens, make their own yarn, and make their own clothing. One grandmother, who was thought to have lived past the age of 120, gathered and carried her water to her Pueblo every day. And yet, they are a strong nation with great sustainability.

You know how we revere our National Parks? We appreciate their pristine, untouched, natural beauty, and the animals that are allowed to roam free. But did you know all of these lands were actually stolen from the Indigenous People, and belong to one Native Tribe or another.

Ecocide, a continued form of Genocide, refers to the killing of ecosystems, the destroying of environments in order to destroy the Native communities and their people. Again, completely intertwined with the land.

Another form of Genocide is through their names. My Hopi boyfriend's name was Mike Adams. You can tell his family was one of the first of the Hopi Tribe to be named because his last name begins with an 'A'. The "white man", as Mike referred to the government, named the Hopi's in alphabetical order.

To get one over on the "white man", the Hopi's gave their people humorous Indian names. Mike's was "Metsequa", which they called Horney Toad. In keeping with their sense of humor, his father's Native name meant "Vagina".

Many of our sports teams have used tribal names, such as the Central Michigan University Chippewas, that has since been changed to the Flying C. The Natives have been trying to change mascot names for two decades, and yet, one day last week I saw on the news that Lamar High School in Colorado is still known as The Savages.

It was stated during the GA that the collective "We" think we are honoring Indigenous people by using their names, but really, they feel dishonored.

Their land and spirituality are one, interconnected with their entire life. In one panel discussion, it was brought up that religion is actually Indigenous culture—food, how you eat, how you talk, where you are, ancestral heritage; the land IS their spirituality and the ancestor.

Even the form of handshaking is a spiritual practice. Men are greeted with a firm handshake; women with a gentler and softer handshake to honor their gentler nature.

When Dina Gilio-Whitaker, a Colville Confederated Tribes member, started talking about how the Native spiritual practices had been stolen by some people, I started to laugh because I knew exactly what she was going to say. She referred to the New Age phenomenon as saying they needed to incorporate the Indigenous practices into their own, and they felt they were honoring the Natives. And we did, too. But this gave the perception that the Native people gave their permission, which they did not. Before I met Mike, all of my spiritual training in Arizona was based around Native practices.

However, you have heard me refer to my metaphysics, my spirituality, and some of my tools. But you have never heard me speak of any of the spiritual practices we used in our family unit. I learned that we don't speak of them because it gives homage to the Hopis. That's for them to tell you about, not me.

What about language? How could they possibly commit genocide on a tribal language if the Natives are still living on Reservations? Through the children, of course. Here is a quote from Megan Leverage, a CMU Religion Professor, which supports the children's story Kendra read—"Through strict enforcement of the English language and the Christian religion, Native American children were expected to conform to a European-American lifestyle. In 1882, Congress passed a bill to fund more boarding schools on the Pratt/Carlisle model"..... This model was the first Indian School that was located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

She further goes on to say—"Boys and girls were taken (often by force) from all over Michigan, surrounding states, and Ontario. Upon arrival, they were stripped of all personal belongings, including the clothes on their backs; their hair was cut short; they were disinfected with alcohol, kerosene, or DDT; they were dressed in uniforms. They were given new English names to work, what was essentially, a child labor camp."

The same was true for the Arizona Indian School located in Phoenix. But the children there would run away to get back home, only to have the government come to take them back to the school.

The whole point is Genocide. Leverage states it as, quote, "Kill the Indian, Save the man."

What can we do? Well, Carol will talk about how we can begin to de-colonize at home.

As was stressed throughout all of the Native workshops at the GA, we *need* to rely on Indigenous Peoples for their knowledge, their philosophy, and their entire epistemological system, rather than commit genocide on their land, water, ecological systems, language, spirituality, political, social, and entire conglomerative culture because.....as they said many times....."Everything is Connected".

Thank you.

Here are three major resources referred to throughout the various workshops.....

[An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States \(REVISIONING HISTORY\)](#)

UUA recommended Common Read for 2020
By Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

["All the Real Indians Died Off": And 20 Other Myths About Native Americans \(Myths Made in America\)](#).....By Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Dina Gilio-Whitaker

[As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock](#).....By Dina Gilio-Whitaker