

Eve Reyes-Aguirre - Environment & Creation

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SPEAKERS

Tanner Randall, Eve Reyes-Aguirre

Tanner Randall 00:03

We acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, Fire Keepers of the Haudenosaunee The indigenous people on whose land Syracuse University now stand. May the information you glean from this podcast motivate you to uphold indigenous values protect Mother Earth and honor indigenous treaties. workers rights and migrants are on the forefront of American policymaking and political discussion. But what are we really talking about? Workers especially migrants are often taken advantage of and made to economically produce for companies that do not treat them with human rights. What does this lead to, it leads to tragedy and abuse and even death. In more serious scenarios. When contracts require indigenous peoples to be removed from their land. It can lead to tragic actions, and even femicide. Welcome to the doctrine of Christian discovery. I'm Tanner Randall, your host from good faith media. We're producing this podcast at the religious origins of white supremacy conference in December of 2023, at Syracuse University in New York, this year is particularly special because it's the 100th anniversary of Johnson V. Macintosh, the supreme court proceeding that installed the framework of the doctrine of discovery within American government. We will be talking about the different ramifications of the doctrine of discovery and how it led to indigenous values and land being stolen as well as white supremacy and the general idea of revitalized indigenous culture. Have you ever wondered why you go to work, report to a boss are viewed by your superiors and then judged every day about your performance, sometimes even affecting your salary? Well, the Doctrine of Discovery, or as we call it, the doctrine of Christian discovery establishes a hierarchy in the workplace. It allows for the idea of prioritizing economic gain over human health. But consider workers rights for migrants, it's even worse. They're taken advantage of at a bigger scale. And I often hear the term people don't want to work, but the reality is companies don't want to pay. We would like to thank our sponsors who made this podcast possible. Many thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University, indigenous values initiative, American Indian law Alliance, American Indian community house good faith media tenets era and towards our common public life. We appreciate your support. I'm Tanya Randall with good faith media. Our guest on this episode is Eve Reyes-Aguirre is a good Evie is a major founder of one of our sponsors, Tonatierra she works with migrant farmworkers, indigenous peoples on both sides of the imposed border refugees. And she ran for us in 2018 with the Green Party. I'm here with Eve

Reyes-Aguirre. And we're going to be discussing environment and creation how it relates to Indigenous stories. This week, we're at a conference about the Doctrine of Christian Discovery. And as we know, that has caused a lot of damage to indigenous environments. So Eve can you just give me an introduction to I know that you've done work with farmworkers and migrants in particular? Can you give me an overview about kind of what your relationship is with the doctrine of discovery and where you see it in your field? Yeah,

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 04:02

absolutely. So I work for a nonprofit organization called Tonatierra and we serve as a cultural embassy for indigenous peoples. We're located in Phoenix, Arizona, on O'odham territory. And our work was founded by our elders, mainly in the farm worker movement. And so over the years, Donna theta has continued to work with farm workers. But one of the challenges that we started to see more recent in the more recent years, like everywhere else in the country and even the world is the detrimental effects on the environment due to climate change. And as you know, as I'm sure many people know, you know, a lot of the desecration and the kind of downfall of society now comes from colonization and in turn And the root cause being the doctrine of discovery.

Tanner Randall 05:03

So with your work in Phoenix, and I'm sure, are you working with the local communities there? Yeah,

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 05:10

so we're our work focuses with the Farmworker community, specifically on the west side of Phoenix. So that's mostly where the agricultural areas are on, right outside the city. So it's not in the central part of the city, it's a little bit further out where we have most of the farms. But as you can imagine, in the summertime, Phoenix already gets hot as it is. And so, in the recent years, we went from the norm been about 110 degrees to it's starting to now be normally 118, during the summertime. So for farm workers who are constantly working in the fields, you know, there is obviously no shade there. And unfortunately, because a lot of them are indigenous and migratory workers, they don't have the same kind of worker protections that most citizens of the US here have.

Tanner Randall 06:07

I think it was a few years ago, there were a couple of stories that broke about major farm productions, holding immigrant workers, after they moved to a farm new take their immigration status, and then pay them meager wages. So works extremely important. And so I am kind of curious as to what kind of practices that you are implementing to try to instill some of these workers rights that are so important to the health of these communities, in particular, indigenous communities. Because if we don't have those individuals around to show the presence of these minority groups, people often will not allocate the amount of time needed to protect them that they so desperately need. Yeah,

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 06:58

absolutely. And, and a major part of our work was really working with migrant communities in general, not necessarily just farmworkers. So for those of you who don't know, there's there is a famous law that was passed back in 2010, known as SB 1070. Or show me your papers law, it was a very notorious law for being very racist against minority communities, communities, specifically, migrant communities. And

I think there's a misconception as well, in terms of, you know, the migratory community, not necessarily being indigenous. And the reality is 90% of migrants that crossed the border coming from south, the South and Central America are indigenous families. And so, what we started to see during these laws, which of course, we can always connect back to the Doctrine of Discovery. Some of these racist laws were infringing on constitutional rights of workers themselves. The SB 10. Seven is specifically how to provision where workers were not allowed to solicit work on the street, which would, of course, you know, infringe on their freedom of speech, because they weren't able to ask people if they can come work, so don't do does work has kind of been integrated in workers rights in general, just for migrant and indigenous communities. And one of the things that we did throughout our years of work was we created a day labor Center, which was a safe space for workers to come and get work and get paid a fair wage, because what was happening was, like you mentioned, they were being exploited even by just people that were coming in to hire them on the street that needed, you know, construction done in their homes. And like I said, you know, Arizona is very, very hot, and it's very difficult to work during summer months. And, you know, so it's very easy for homeowners who are looking for cheap labor to go out and solicit day laborers. The problem is, is that what we were finding was a lot of the laborers were not being paid, and actually being exploited, being told that if they called the police that they would be called emigrate, they would call Immigration on them. So it was kind of like this blackmail for them to receive free labor. So one of the solutions that donut Sierra partnered with a few other organizations but unfortunately, with 10 Seven D passing the other organizations backed out because it's there's a lot of complications when it comes to legalities on those types of issues. Right. And but don't get stuck it through and we created our daily birth center and we've been since advocating for workers rights, because of the exploitation that tends to happen to this particular community.

Tanner Randall 09:56

I remember the day I believe it was a Particularly the story that I saw was in the onion industry, it was across I think Georgia and a few other southern states, and even the Texas where they found like, there were over like 70,000 workers getting paid like \$2 an hour on the fields. And it's just this story that is absolutely absurd. And you're like, you start to think in your it's very apparent, like, I thought slavery was abolished in the 1800s. It's like, how do we still have this? How do we call ourselves a free country with those kinds of systems? So I really thank you for your work. And so I do have a question and kind of because I know that there are certain kinds of protections you can give these people who are working so does that come in the form of hazard pay or having some kind of government institution to install a an Overwatch committee? What does that look like?

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 10:51

So unfortunately, there's not a lot of government assistance that we're getting when it comes to these types of workers protections. But I think having advocacy groups like Tonatierra, and others that are there letting people know, you know, we're watching, we're watching out for these people. You do have organizations like the United Farm Workers, that do work around specific areas. For agricultural workers, unfortunately, it's like everywhere, that they're able to provide representation. And so especially in Phoenix in the rural area, that we're at Donets, Jana is basically the one that is stepping up to make sure that these folks are getting the kind of treatment that they deserve for the work that they're putting in. One of the things that we started to see this, just this last summer was we had about four farmworkers that died on the fields because of the excessive amount of heat and not being given

the opportunity to take a break. And so we do have direct connections with the farmworkers. And so when there are instances where they're not allowed to take a break, or to stop and get water, will usually receive a phone call. And once we show up all of a sudden, lo and behold, you know, Oh, absolutely, they can take a break, and they can, you know, have some water and but sometimes you get people that are like, Well, no, they need to work for another hour before we can take a break. And we'll go out anyway and just hand out drinks for the for the workers, because really, what can they do? I mean, they can't, they can't stop us physically. So, you know, I know there are always some legal ramifications that can go around that. But I think they're more worried about protecting their reputation as you know, agricultural workers, and they don't want to be labeled as somebody who's exploiting labor. So most recently, we are working with the governor's office to provide more protections to provide us with letters of support to continue the work that we're doing. And one of the projects that we're doing right now is actually doing a farmworker distribution, food distribution, because it's ironic that the very foods that they pick for us to have on our tables every day for dinner, they're not afforded that same kind of luxury to receive that kind of, of food. And so it's, it's, it's been a mission of Tonatierra to ensure that they are being taken care of as well through the food distributions and that they're being provided healthy options for eating and feeding their families.

Tanner Randall 13:35

That's amazing. It to fit a little bit here, I think that it's important to realize that the reason these situations exist is there's an hierarchy instilled in the American idea or system. And a lot of people will point towards the 200 years ago when Johnson V. McIntosh solidified the idea that land can be taken from individuals. And I think oftentimes when we think of the ability to take, it's mostly in property. But there needs to be a point where we look towards the person as a concept that the colonizer thinks of as property, and that they can take it, they can manipulate it. So I'm wondering if you could speak towards I know, you and Betty Lyons have worked together in international spheres to kind of bring the Doctrine of Discovery to light so can you speak on your experience working with at an international level?

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 14:38

Yeah, sure. One of the things I think, you know, because a lot of times we have conversations with people about the doctrine of discovery, and you know, even the discovery of the Americas by Columbus, right and oh, we get a lot of these, oh, well, this happened so long ago. And, you know, we need to just move on and kind of move past it. But as a As many people are starting to learn, the doctrine is basically a legal framework that is b that is perpetuated and has continued through the legal system. And one of the things and it goes even further into trade agreements between different countries. So when you talk about taking the land, it's not just something that happened, you know, 500 years ago or 200 years ago, it's still happening now. And one of the of the examples on the international level that we do that we bring to the forefront in our work has to do with trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is now has been renewed recently between Canada, the US and Mexico, and is now the US MCA trade agreement. But during that time, these very migratory workers that we're talking about that are working in the fields, the majority of them are peoples who have lost their lands in Mexico and even further south due to trade agreements such as NAFTA and US MCA, I don't think people realize that when these agreements are being brokered amongst these member states, you know, US, Canada and Mexico, the indigenous peoples are usually not prioritized in those agreements. So some, sometimes the agreements will call for, for example, with

within Mexico, there were stipulations where land needed to be made available for US and Canadian companies to come in and, and establish their business there. And most famously, the 1900 uprising of the separatist movement was a perfect example of what that trade agreement looked like and how it was affecting indigenous peoples in that community, specifically, their lands were being taken from them, there were communal lands that they use for their economic sustainability. And it was being threatened. And so they had to raise arms, unfortunately, there were lives lost. And there are a lot of wars like that in the south, and you have people that are displaced, and therefore migrate, and you have people that are fleeing from conflict that migrate as well. And these are the same people that who, who already have been exploited, and then come here to try and find and I'm doing air quotes here a better life. Unfortunately, that's not the case, they come here, and then they are further exploited. And I'm not talking about just when they arrive and are working in the fields, even the trek from their homelands to the US to the states often is met with violence and, and exploitation, especially with Indigenous women.

Tanner Randall 17:55

And I think that's extremely important to talk about, because honestly, I didn't realize the impact of a lot of these trade agreements. And I think that some people, especially indigenous scholarship, we talked about the United Nations statement of indigenous rights. And it's great to outline that, but we don't really see it follow too often as it should. And so I do have a question as far as you know, what do we see, as far as you know, obviously, there was the resistance, you Saturday rebellion, you said, and people are pushed to that, because, you know, infringement on territory is deeply personal, deeply spiritual. And so I guess, how, how can we help as since this podcast is geared towards college students? What can we do to make people aware of this situation? How do we break down this barrier? So people have at least a dialogue? Because I know in a lot of educational discourse, I took a lot of classes on an international Indigenous Studies. And we hardly talked about the displacement of people on trade agreements. And that's scary to me, because it's, it happens all the time. And when there's that much of an economic incentive, people don't make the right decisions all the time. So can you speak to what we can do looking forward? Well,

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 19:18

I think raising awareness, which is what you're doing right is bringing this information to light. And one thing I wanted to know is yes, we do have a Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues within the UN system. And there was a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was, was passed in 2007. But I think what people don't understand is a declaration is not a legally binding instrument. It's not a legal legally binding document. And so unfortunately, it's not enforceable. And so we just have to continue to pursue and educate people on what can be done in them. meantime, I think sometimes we feel very small in this big, you know, Empire of colonialism, and how are we going to conquer it, but it really starts with little pockets of movements. And I really feel confident that, you know, young people, people in college that are learning about the system, I encourage them to find other ways of learning earlier today, in one of the sessions somebody was talking about, knowledge is not just in the institutions in the university, it's in the communities themselves, it's around the world when you travel, that's how you're going to know what's happening. And so I think about just going to the UN and learning about international law, and what can be done and what can't be done and what our limitations are. But one of the things that I learned is that indigenous peoples from all over the world are

experiencing the same type of exploitations violations to colonization. And one of the things that is really hopeful and promising is that we are working together, we have people from the South people from Canada, people from New Zealand, you know, indigenous nations that are coming together to bring light to the work. And that's as evidenced today. You can see that here in this conference. So I think just bringing about the awareness, but also relying on the younger generations to make positive change and to question these institutions and to challenge the what the moral, really the morality of, of how this colonial government and system is working. And I think that's a big question that we were talking about this entire weekend, you know, when it comes to religion, and the doctrine, it doesn't make sense, it's, it's two different sides of the coin, when you're looking at something that's supposed to be, especially in, you know, when you talk about religion, and you talk about good faith, and being a good neighbor, and love and all of these beautiful things, it's so hard to believe that there was such violence that came, you know, in the name of that, of that one thing that people have so much faith in. But I think that there is room for us to grow, I think there is room for our younger generations to step up and really, like have a voice for all of the people that need that.

Tanner Randall 22:40

And through my academic experience, I think that I can't think you know, the generations from the past 60 years, I feel like to me, they've done so many great things. But for people growing up, now who are going through high school and college, so look back and see those generations as the information generation, because they were finally people that were willing to address these difficult topics in realizing the need to address them and start combating them. You see a lot of these smaller organizations now combating these ice isolated issues or not isolated, but these unique situations. And my hope is that my generation will be able to take the information presented and to grow these organizations to combat a widespread amount of ramifications for the Doctrine of Discovery, for example,

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 23:32

absolutely, and the and the, I think the benefit to the younger generations now is even you know me, I'm almost 50 years old, but you know, as a young adult, we didn't have social media, we were fed whatever information the media wanted to give us based on whatever they felt was best for us to know. And so I think now we're at a different time where and as evidenced by, you know, the most recent wars that are happening here. It's not one sided anymore. Because of social media, we're able to see really what's going on in the world. And that goes to climate change as well. You know, I remember in high school back in the in the 90s, if I may age myself a little bit I remember seeing this video on climate change and thinking oh my god, this is terrible. It was you know, 30 minute video or whatever it was, and, and I can only I was I remember thinking this is just awful looking at all of the desecration that was happening and to know that it is 10 times worse now. And one of the things that I think we lose focus on is how important it is for us to address climate change because Indigenous peoples have been saying this all along. You know, we've been at the forefront of that fight because we lived for millennia as without having imbalance with the earth right? We imbalance with our ecosystems, and it really only took 500 years for Colin In addition to destroy all of that, and so even at the UN level, there are experts who will tell you Indigenous peoples have the knowledge to be able to mitigate climate change, to be able to have solutions. I mean, we've always had that knowledge, I think, you know, just these colonial powers don't see us as equal, and even more recently didn't see us until he, you know, didn't see us

hue as human until very recently, based on, you know, the international languages. So, it's, I think that now it's not so much an indigenous issue anymore. It's a it's a human issue, you know, when it comes to climate change, because we all drink water, we all breathe air, and we all have to live from the earth. So it's really all of our responsibilities. And that, and that's not even, you know, touching on the fact that, you know, when it comes to the migratory workers and the farm workers, the poisons, that they're being, you know, exposed to on a daily basis from the pesticides and stuff, I mean, all of there's, yeah, there's so much, you know, involved with not just the work, but it's not just poisoning the people that are, you know, harvesting, it's poisoning the earth, it's poisoning the water systems, and then even just us in general that are consuming these, you know, these foods that are that are contaminated. So we have to really look at how we can do better and change, you know, change what we're doing right now, because it's, it's not getting any better.

Tanner Randall 26:36

I do want to circle back to what you were saying about people being displaced from trade agreements, you particularly mentioned, women from Latin America, can you speak to that in how, what we can do to kind of bring awareness? Like, what's the specific dangers? Because I always know that statistically, you know, women in poverty are more susceptible to dangers, because people are terrible. They did terrible things plainly, like I don't know what other better way I can put it, besides be besides that, but can you speak to kind of some of those issues you're seeing in some of the organizations or tools that are out there to combat the situation situations? Absolutely.

Eve Reyes-Aguirre 27:26

And thank you for bringing that up. Because I do think it's really important when we talk about this work, you know, in the in the north, in North American Canada, I mean, and in the US and Canada, specifically. There is a big movement around missing and murdered indigenous women. I think there's less of a call to action in the south. And the reason being is because it's more dangerous for women and people in general to speak out against. The term that they use in the south is femicide, because there were so many women that were being exploited and killed violently, that they actually started to turn to coined that term femicide to address that, that phenomena that was happening in the south is specifically in Mexico. But what we were seeing, and this was something that was really important for me, as somebody who works on an international level was to be able to have a voice for our relatives in the south, specifically, our sisters from the South to be able to advocate for them, because the phenomena that's happening around North America and Canada, it usually is connected to extractive industries, what they call man camps. So wherever there's oil drilling happening, or some of these other extractive industries, where they have these man camps, which are usually in rural areas where Indigenous women are, are in, that's where you're starting to see a lot of that violence happen. The same thing for the South. Unfortunately, there aren't any kind of protections and the government tends to look the other way because these corporations are usually foreign corporations that are coming in to do business. And unfortunately, economics is more important than human life, especially the lives of Indigenous women down there. And so those women there have been women that have stood up and have been assassinated for speaking out on femicide. So it's important that we make that connection and we bring awareness not just to what's happening here in the North, but just knowing that it's a global phenomenon. Violence against indigenous women is a global phenomenon, but more specifically, I feel very obligated because my people are from the south. I want to be able to uplift their

voices, because they're not able to advocate for themselves without being threatened are having their lives in their lives with their families put in danger. So I think just learning about awareness, of course, now we're starting to see more human trafficking happening here in the US, even in Arizona, and unfortunately, through social media, right? You know, I see posts about a local mall where people are being trafficked. And it people know it in the city, as you got to be careful when you're driving there at night if you're a young woman, because you can absolutely be kidnapped. So I believe things have changed, where people are becoming more bold, and are feeling like they can exploit women like this in the open, because they're not seen so much protections for them. So I think just bringing around bringing awareness to that, and trying to figure out what we can do to help raise that awareness. And, of course, the first thing that comes to mind is speaking it into existence, knowing that it's happening, and knowing that making these connections with these women, so part of my job is at the UN, is to help write these interventions for these protections for these women. Wow,

Tanner Randall 31:16

that's extremely powerful. It's definitely something I would like to know more about, because I think it there's been a lot of work done to make missing murdered indigenous women, a international campaign, and they've done a lot of great work bringing awareness to that. But I do think there is a lot more work to be done on the southern side of the country. So I think that it's great for our listeners to be introduced to the term of femicide, because that's something I've never heard prior. And we could honestly probably do an entire podcast just on that and trying to address that issue. But thank you so much for providing us with that information and bringing that issue to light. Absolutely. Thank you. Thanks for listening to this episode of the doctrine of Christian discovery recorded at the 2023 Religious Origins of White Supremacy Conference at Syracuse University in New York. This podcast is produced in collaboration between Good Faith Media, Syracuse University, and the Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm Tanner Randall for Good Faith Media. Our executive producers are Mitch Randall of Good Faith Media Philip P. Arnold and Sandy Bigtree of the Indigenous values initiative and Adam DJ Brett Syracuse University and the American Indian law Alliance. Our producer is Cliff Vaughn and our editor is David Pang. Our music comes from Pond5. Production assistance provided by the American Indian Law Alliance. To learn more go to doctrineofdiscovery.org.