

Jordan Brady Loewen-Colon ([00:07](#)):

Hello and welcome to the Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery podcast. The producers of this podcast would like to acknowledge with respect the Onondaga Nation, the Fire Keepers of the Haudenosaunee, the Indigenous peoples on whose ancestral lands Syracuse University now stands.

([00:25](#)):

And now introducing your hosts, Phil Arnold and Sandy Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:32](#)):

Welcome back everyone to Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery supported by Henry Luce Foundation and Syracuse University. I'm Phil Arnold. I'm a faculty in the Department of Religion here and core faculty in Native American and Indigenous Studies and a Founding Director of the Skänoñh Great Law of Peace Center.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:53](#)):

And I'm Sandy Bigtree, a citizen of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne and I was on the Planning Committee of the Skänoñh Center and also on the Board of the Indigenous Values Initiative.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:04](#)):

We're delighted today to be joined by Anthea Butler, who is the Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought and the Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Butler is the author of *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America*, and we're delighted to have her today. Thanks for joining us.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:33](#)):

Yeah, I'm excited, really. Being a Mohawk woman, I'm, of course, not a stranger to the racist underlying structures of Christianity in this country. We were hit in the early 17th century hard by the Jesuits invasion, but I really had a lot of questions about today, and I'm wondering about evangelical Christians and what role they play in manipulating the voting structures and policies that are now being passed by Republicans.

([02:11](#)):

And you lay that out so wonderfully in your short book. I mean, it's like 150 pages and it's so packed and everybody really ought to get this book because it lays it out so clearly. And it's just wonderful to have you here. And I want to have you talk about your work and try to explain as well as you do these underlings of where it's brought us today, the morality majority.

Philip P. Arnold ([02:47](#)):

The moral majority, yeah.

Sandy Bigtree ([02:48](#)):

The moral majority and how that was founded and the connections made during the Reagan Administration and how that's been building since we came out of the '60s. So yes, please.

Anthea Butler ([03:03](#)):

Well, I think, for your listeners, what's important to know about the book is that it's a way to correct history in a way, and not just to correct history, but to insert the parts of history that evangelicals didn't want to say about themselves. If we think about, just like you talked about, the Jesuits tearing up the Mohawk Nation, we need to think about how evangelicals have done the same across the nation with different people groups, whether we're talking about slavery or we're talking about missions work, we're talking about education, we're talking about the political system. All of these things have been racialized by evangelicals.

[\(03:40\)](#):

And I think what's important to know about my book is that I'm bringing together two things that we don't often talk about together, which is racism and morality because morality, for evangelicals, is a shield. It's the way for them to talk about how their Christian faith influences what they do, except that usually they are using that morality as a shield and a protection to protect themselves from the way that they see the government or life or changes in civic engagement are affecting their kind of culture.

[\(04:14\)](#):

And so what they try to do is impose their own morality on others rather than living by it themselves. And I think that's an important part of what I'm trying to show in the book through these different experiences from the 1800s to basically the Trump era. And what I think is an important takeaway from all of this is that we need to begin to see this as not just a religious project of theirs, but a political project that they have wholly signed on to, and I think that is key.

Sandy Bigtree [\(04:52\)](#):

If you could also go into a little more detail how, as a whole, this movement really wants to break down government and how does that play into being an evangelical when you're going out into the world and just evangelizing the world?

Anthea Butler [\(05:11\)](#):

Yeah, well, exactly. They want to bring about the Kingdom of God, and so for them, the Kingdom of God has evangelicals running it instead of everybody else running it. That's the first of all. And that kingdom is supposed to be on earth. And so I think that's an important theological piece that people have to remember is that when they talk about the kingdom or kingdom works in all of this, they're talking about ruling and reigning in power on earth, not in heaven, not someplace else. That's the first piece.

[\(05:38\)](#):

I think the second piece of this that's really important is that you also have to think about the ways in which Republicans have talked about limited government, and that very much dovetails with evangelical belief and thought, that they see the government as imposing their structure. And that first for them is always God, and government is somewhere down near the bottom. It's God and family and then maybe government, but limited in their actions as possible. And so their idea of government is somebody that is trying to impose something on you, but the irony of it is that they are the ones who are imposing their will on us, whether that's about abortion, same-sex marriage, trans rights, racism, what you can teach in schools, and taking books off of shelves. All of these kinds of things are really important about thinking about what they are really doing as opposed to what they are saying about themselves.

Sandy Bigtree [\(06:34\)](#):

And what they're saying about themselves, from what I understand, is that God works through them as evangelicals. They are not in charge of the world, and they have to be obedient participants in this

structure of Christianity, and yet they're joining with the Republicans and government in enacting voting systems and laws.

Anthea Butler ([07:01](#)):

Yes, exactly.

Sandy Bigtree ([07:02](#)):

It's like doublespeak.

Anthea Butler ([07:03](#)):

Yeah, it's double-talk, doublespeak at every moment with evangelicals. And if you don't understand that, then you might get very confused trying to follow all their machinations, but I think this is a really important part of what they're doing. In one sense, they're saying this out loud to people to say, "Oh, we just want what God wants," but in reality, it's what they want in order to control the narrative, to control schools, to control other parts of civic society.

Philip P. Arnold ([07:35](#)):

I think so much of what you're saying resonates with 15th century Christianity and how that justified the whole Age of Discovery, which really begins with a number of papal documents that justify the enslavement of Africans through the Canary Islands and whatnot, and then the taking of land of all non-Christian people. Their project was really about Christendom, creating the Kingdom of God on Earth, which in many ways resonates with what I'm hearing about the evangelicals. Is that right?

Anthea Butler ([08:17](#)):

No, exactly. And I think, how should I put it? The game has changed, but the plan remains the same. And so in other words, if you can think about all of these people that you are trying to make subservient to your will and to your beliefs as heathens, and that you have the right to do whatever you want to do with them because they don't believe as you do and they are heathens, then this is how we see the kinds of things that we're seeing today with the kinds of abuses, the cutting back of people's rights. So those are the things that I think really resonate from the Doctrine of Discovery forward to the 21st century.

Sandy Bigtree ([09:00](#)):

This brings to mind a documentary that was done on a movement that was started with Billy Graham in the '70s, and there's a documentary out. It's called Awakened. And he had a gathering of evangelical Indians who he pretends will be the saviors of Christianity as they move out into the world, so among the least of us shall now lead us to the Kingdom of God, and it's just so mind-boggling.

Jordan Brady Loewen-Colon ([09:29](#)):

It's been very successful, you might add too, among Indigenous peoples. Yeah.

Anthea Butler ([09:33](#)):

Yeah, it has been.

Sandy Bigtree ([09:34](#)):

We're talking about completely opposing orientations of how we live as human beings in the world. When the Jesuits came into Mohawk territory or any Indigenous community in the Northeast, they were first hit. They came in within a handful of years and right away renamed the people. They forced them into Christianity and restructured the matrilineal family into a patriarchy. And that started within years, months of first contact.

[\(10:06\)](#):

So that family structure was part of the model for conquest, an effective way of conquering masses of people and cultures. And so you're talking about the power of the family among evangelicals? Well, that's nothing new.

Anthea Butler [\(10:24\)](#):

No, it's not. No. But I think what my book shows is that you can see this obsession with the family, even in the 19th century going forward, that's a little bit later than what happened with the Mohawk. It's still there. And it's still the control of the family means you get to control that.

[\(10:39\)](#):

But I think even a more important point for when we're talking about Mohawk or any other Indigenous group of people is that whiteness is the overarching game, whiteness and Christianity. And so part of this is about Christianity representing a kind of cultural whiteness that has to be imposed upon groups so that your way of thinking about your cosmology, how you marry, how you bury, how you teach your children, the kinds of rituals that you have as Native American groups, those things were wiped out.

[\(11:15\)](#):

And this is the same thing that happens, and I talk about this in my book in a 20th and 21st century way by talking about the issue of colorblindness and how colorblindness is the way in which people say, "Well, I don't see color." It means that they don't see anything but white. And they like the cultural aspects of whiteness, whether that's about singing or worship or any of those other kinds of things, and that cultural whiteness is the norm. That is the norm that you must accede to in order to belong to these groups.

Jordan Brady Loewen-Colon [\(11:44\)](#):

Do you need help catching up on today's topic or do you want to learn more about the resources mentioned? If so, please check our website at [podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org](http://podcast.doctrineofdiscovery.org) for more information. And if you like this episode, review it on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

[\(12:01\)](#):

And now, back to the conversation.

Sandy Bigtree [\(12:05\)](#):

You'd mentioned in, I think it was the 70s, where the white churches were being opened up to African-American congregates and that they would come to church on Sunday, but no one was ever invited afterwards to come home and have dinner and have these heavy conversations.

Philip P. Arnold [\(12:21\)](#):

Yeah, Bible study or whatever.

Anthea Butler [\(12:25\)](#):

Exactly. Yeah, yeah. You're not invited to Bible study. You might disagree with how they read the Bible. Right?

Sandy Bigtree ([12:29](#)):

Right.

Philip P. Arnold ([12:35](#)):

Right, right. Just to backtrack a little bit, if you could for our listeners just go through briefly the history of the evangelical movement because we're lumping together a lot of Christian movements in the United States and beyond, but the evangelical movement starts as kind of a lesser version of Christianity, tent revivals or something like that, and then generates into university campuses and all these other kinds of things. And so I think you are distinguishing in the book between mainline Christianity and then evangelical Christianity, which is sometimes referred to as non-denominational, I think.

Anthea Butler ([13:28](#)):

Sometimes, yes, not always, but that's for discussion.

Sandy Bigtree ([13:29](#)):

[inaudible 00:13:30] Right?

Philip P. Arnold ([13:30](#)):

Yeah, that's where it gets messy, so if you can clarify that.

Anthea Butler ([13:31](#)):

Yep. Let me give you a streamlined version. First of all, I have to tell you that they would not like to think of themselves as lesser, so that's really important.

Philip P. Arnold ([13:41](#)):

Well, not now.

Anthea Butler ([13:42](#)):

That is very important. You'd never say that to an evangelical because they'll go, "We're the reason why you got Martin Luther. We are the different kinds of things," and if we think about the First Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards and others to the Second Great Awakening and Cambridge Revival and Revivalism, and the rise of evangelicalism in the 19th century, this becomes important.

([14:05](#)):

So if you want to think about what evangelicals are, let me give you an example, for people who are listening, how that might work out for you. Southern Baptists are evangelicals. You could talk about Christian Reform churches as evangelicals. These are denominations, but they're not mainline in the sense that we're talking about Methodist or Presbyterians. We're talking about groups that have a particular orientation to evangelicalism and to the way in which they evangelize.

([14:31](#)):

One person that people don't think about a lot when thinking about in terms of evangelicalism is Charles Finney, the great revivalist who came up with the idea of the anxious bench, and so that happened right around Syracuse University in Rochester, New York. That was the first place that the anxious bench happened. And so that mode of confessing yourself and confessing your faith in Jesus Christ became an important part of services.

[\(14:56\)](#):

And so in the 19th century, which you can sort of think about in terms of evangelicalism, is you can think about pro-slavery movements. You can think about anti-slavery movements, you can think about missions and revival. You can also think about violence because lots of evangelicals were involved in the Civil War on both sides. So that makes it important.

[\(15:17\)](#):

I think what's also important to talk about for evangelicals, and they don't like it very much, is to talk about what I discussed in my book, the Lost Cause, the Confederacy and lynching and all of those kinds of things that are happening post-Civil War, that influence not just civil society, but religion and racism. And in the 20th century, we can start to think about the ways in which evangelicals start religious schools or they break apart from schools. Let's think about Princeton versus Westminster Theological Seminary, and the seminary I went to, Fuller Seminary, which is the home of neo-evangelicalism or that new evangelicalism in the 1940s. But I think if you really wanted to place evangelicalism in a certain point, that is an understandable point for people who are not historians and not religious studies scholars.

[\(16:13\)](#):

You look at the figure of Billy Graham. Billy Graham was an evangelist, traveled all over the world, was very instrumental in having lots of different revivals in places all around the world, and not only that, was very instrumental in bringing together something very important, which is presidents with this evangelical leadership. And that is really key because that is the moment in which we take that turn to religion and politics. It's not that religion and politics didn't exist before; it's like evangelicals did this, and Billy Graham in particular, in part to inscribe this kind of nationalistic Christianity and that nationalistic Christianity has come forward up to until today where we see people who were attacking the Capital on 1/6 because they believe that the election had been stolen and that it should be given to this figure of Donald Trump.

[\(17:08\)](#):

And I think that what people need to understand about this history, and I'm not going to go into because it's a podcast, we can't get everywhere, but I want you to read the book, is that what I'm tracing in that book is the history of racial proscription and how evangelicals have been racist the entire time and pretended not to be, first of all, and secondarily, how their own theology helps them to continue upon this path of racism and nationalism and whiteness.

Philip P. Arnold [\(17:41\)](#):

And it's really interesting the way you're deploying whiteness too in this book, I think, because it's not just white people; it's a kind of mythic framing or a kind of framework, a sociological framework in some way. Right?

Anthea Butler [\(17:58\)](#):

Yep.

Philip P. Arnold ([18:01](#)):

And it doesn't adhere to Native Americans or African-Americans or whomever. It's difficult to get at. The racism that you are trying to introduce us to and to articulate in the book, I think is a little more complex than people are normally apt to think about, right?

Anthea Butler ([18:26](#)):

Yes, that's correct. It's complex in this sense, and forgive me for putting it like this, but there was a woman who just recently read my book and she read chapter one, and she's had this incident that I talk about between an African-American Christian singer and a pastor and a business leader. I won't give it all away. And she said, "I don't understand why this word blessing is bad." And I'm like, "Well, you can't see this because of your whiteness, and this is where even though you're reading my book, I'm having to explain this to you so that you understand how much whiteness has blinded you."

([19:02](#)):

And so I think it was really important for her to understand what was actually happening, first of all, and then secondarily, to also grasp the fact that well-meaning white people too can be engaged with this concept of whiteness that drags us all into this kind of morass of not seeing people as they really are, first of all, and then secondarily, trying to make them fit into spaces that they should not fit into.

Philip P. Arnold ([19:29](#)):

Right. And I mean, whiteness is a creation in many ways-

Anthea Butler ([19:33](#)):

Yes, yes it is.

Philip P. Arnold ([19:35](#)):

... of the colonial moment, coming into territories that aren't yours and justifying that occupation, enslaving Indigenous Africans, these tactics of creating a society based on race, based on whiteness, then is deployed for very specific reasons. And I think we're still grappling with that kind of legacy.

Anthea Butler ([20:07](#)):

Yes. Yeah, we are. I think what's also important too is if you think about the Doctrine of Discovery alongside this Age of Discovery and how people are doing this, well, the next thing that happens obviously is the Enlightenment and that's where you start to see the beginnings of racial philosophies and things like that with people who are looking at this through the lens of a Protestant lens in Europe and also through a Catholic lens at some points.

([20:38](#)):

So I think if we think about somebody like Voltaire who talks about the noble savage and imagines the Native American to be a certain kind of person, or we think about Kant and others, I think that's really important for people to understand that genealogy and how that happens.

([20:54](#)):

So one good thing I would suggest for readers, there's an old book by Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!*, and in that, there's a chapter in there that talks about the genealogy of modern racism, and I always find that very helpful for people to understand. If they're trying to figure out how the Doctrine of Discovery pairs up with the ways in which you think about racism and how we got to this

point, then you could start to see these Enlightenment thinkers and how they put this together and how those thoughts, how those intellectual constructions of race become part and parcel of what begins to happen in the American context with slavery and other things.

Philip P. Arnold ([21:32](#)):

Wow, fantastic.

Sandy Bigtree ([21:33](#)):

Wow. In the early 17th century, there were Wyandot Orders who went over to Europe very early in the 17th century, and this is after it was recorded that the Wyandot had been exterminated, and yet they're still traveling around the world as Wyandot, and they're offering knowledge and their observations of Europe, and it's before the cusp of the Enlightenment. They're like saying, "You people speak of liberty and equality, but you're only equal under the monarchs or the Pope. You don't know what living freely is about."

([22:15](#)):

So their eye is on the Americas and coming in and taking the resources on this continent. It wasn't that any of the Indigenous people were unaware of what they were up to or who they were. They were very much aware and gave them much more thought than Europeans are really giving the Indigenous people that lived in Africa or in the Americas. So it's like a reversal of observations, and it's so sad and painful to think through this, the manipulation to get at the resources.

Anthea Butler ([22:51](#)):

Yeah, it is.

Philip P. Arnold ([22:53](#)):

Yeah. In the recent books, for example, *The Dawn of Everything*, they map this early 18th century influence of Wyandot Order-

Sandy Bigtree ([23:03](#)):

That was 17th.

Philip P. Arnold ([23:03](#)):

1700s?

Sandy Bigtree ([23:03](#)):

No, 1600s

Philip P. Arnold ([23:06](#)):

1600s? Oh, wow.

Sandy Bigtree ([23:09](#)):

Yeah.

Philip P. Arnold ([23:11](#)):



Okay. So they mapped this early influence or conversations really between Jesuits and these Native American orators, and how, for example, where did the French-

Sandy Bigtree ([23:29](#)):

You're right. It was early 1700s. You're right. Yeah, sorry.

Philip P. Arnold ([23:30](#)):

Yeah, yeah. So how did the French come up with ideas of equality and fraternity and democracy? Well, not through Christianity. So I mean, think that's what you're getting at here is that these are anti-democratic principles that have been drawn out of Christianity and a certain reading of the Bible, and they resonate again with what's going on in this early period. So we have these kind of forces that are at odds with one another in some way, democracy, but the Kingdom of God, I guess, right?

Anthea Butler ([24:19](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, that's exactly right. That is exactly right.

Philip P. Arnold ([24:22](#)):

Yeah.

Sandy Bigtree ([24:23](#)):

I mean, the Earth is a democracy. We wouldn't exist if all the elements that live on this planet did not live and fulfill the responsibilities of providing each other in this network of life with food. And it's our identities and diversity comes from the original relationships we had with the natural world. That's what created a diverse humanity. So as the Haudenosaunee say, "Peace cannot exist unless you're in proper relationship with the natural world. We cannot know ourselves unless we connect with the earth that provides us our sustenance."

Philip P. Arnold ([25:03](#)):

Yeah. There's a kind of radical democratic principle, yeah.

Anthea Butler ([25:08](#)):

Exactly.

Philip P. Arnold ([25:10](#)):

We're going to be so happy to be able to welcome you into Onondaga Nation territory. I know you, for some of your career anyway, you were up here and in Rochester and you know some of this, but what we try to do at the Skānoñh Center is introduce people to the influence of the Haudenosaunee, for example, on American democracy or the women's movement as a way to kind of challenge the dominant narratives, I guess.

([25:45](#)):

So the question, I guess it's not so much in your book, but I'm wondering how do we make change when these dominant narratives are so intractable in our world? We're trying to change or decolonize the narrative in some ways, and I wonder from your point of view, how do we start to challenge those dominant narratives of whiteness and transform what is a very bad situation now?

Anthea Butler ([26:22](#)):

I think part of the way is to engage civically, and what I mean by that is to be involved not just in having discussions, but to actually doing things. I've said this to people before, and they always look at me askance when I say, "Voting is not enough." And what I mean by that is you can go and pull the lever, but if you're not involved in your local community where they're doing things at the school board or city hall, all of these kinds of things, changing historical signage is actually really important. That's key. So you need to be involved with preservation societies. You have to be involved in certain kinds of ways where you can see things begin to change. This is how you change the narrative.

([27:04](#)):

Let me give you an example. I have a chapter in the 1619 book. The 1619 Project was welcomed and received by so many people because it offered something different to the narrative that has been said about America. What immediately happened? Donald Trump and others decided to come up with the 1776 Project, which kind of died on the vine, and 1619 is going to last much longer than that.

([27:29](#)):

But there's always going to be this competing thing, and I think one of the things we have to do is to make sure more of this history gets out, like what you're doing with talking about the Doctrine of Discovery. You have to educate people, but you have to educate people in terms that they understand. It can't just be this academic enterprise that we hold it to ourselves, but we also have to figure out how do we bring knowledge to the public? How do we help the public engage so that when they start to see these bad history books by David Barton about America was a Christian nation, this is the hardest thing to uproot for people, is to realize, look, those guys who came here, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, all the rest of them, none of them wanted Christianity. They just wanted it to be like it was.

([28:15](#)):

It doesn't mean they were perfect. It just means that even they didn't want the imposition of Christianity from the English, so they wanted this to be a place where people could worship as they wanted to. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way, and unfortunately, their behavior at times didn't advance that belief that they wrote about. But I think it's really important to point people back to, what's this real history of America? How does this happen? And that we can't just say that this was an empty, barren land and not recognize that there were tribes and nations here before any white person got here.

Philip P. Arnold ([28:50](#)):

Right, right. At least that, yeah. Well, thank you, Anthea Butler. This has been a tremendous conversation. We really enjoyed it.

Sandy Bigtree ([29:04](#)):

And everybody get Anthea's book. It's like 150 pages. You fit so much in there. I have to reiterate that again. White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America.

Jordan BradyLoewen-Colon ([29:20](#)):

The producers of this podcast were Adam DJ Brett and Jordan Loewen-Colón. Our intro and outro is Social Dancing music by Orris Edwards and Regis Cook. This podcast is funded in collaboration with the Henry Luce Foundation, Syracuse University and Hendricks Chapel, and the Indigenous Values Initiative.

([29:39](#)):

S03E02: White Evangelical Racism and it's Influence on American Politics an Interview with Anthea Butler

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