

S05E02: Exploring the Legacy of Vine Deloria Jr. on Native American Thought with Philip Deloria

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([00:00:07](#)):

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, Firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee, the indigenous peoples on whose Ancestral Lands Syracuse University now stands. And now, introducing your hosts, Phil Arnold and Sandy Bigtree.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:00:30](#)):

Okay, welcome back to Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery. My name is Philip Arnold. I'm in the religion department and core faculty in Native American Indigenous studies at Syracuse University and the founding director of the Skä•noñh - Great Law of Peace Center.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:00:46](#)):

And I'm Sandy Bigtree, a citizen of the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. And I'm on the board of the Indigenous Values Initiative and the Planning Collaborative for The Skä•noñh - Great Law of Peace Center at Onondaga Lake.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:00:59](#)):

And we're coming to you sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation. Today we're in Bodø Norway, honored to be here with Philip Deloria, who is a well-known author. For the last 25 years, has really galvanized Native American studies around issues having to do with stereotyping and Playing Indian, I'll say. So we're going to have a wide-ranging conversation about a number of things, but just welcome Philip.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:01:37](#)):

Thank you. So great to be here.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:01:40](#)):

First I have to talk a little bit about Vine Deloria Jr., your father. Ella Deloria, your-

Philip J. Deloria ([00:01:49](#)):

Great Aunt.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:01:49](#)):

Great aunt. And Vine Deloria Sr., who was an Episcopalian minister, as I understand. So religion has always been a very important theme in your family, in the Deloria family. And I wanted to raise this up because particularly Vine Deloria Jr. has really transformed my ideas and my work. Just last month, for example, a grad student of mine who is like a shaker and mover, she's doing two PhDs, one in environmental studies and one in religion, had never read Vine Deloria before, African-American student. And she said to me excitedly, you have to know her to really appreciate this, but excitedly, she ran up to me and she said, "I just read Vine Deloria's God is Red and it explains everything." I mean, it still has this real impact on students and I don't think it's as valued in religious studies as it ought to be. Or the work of your family, I'm thinking Ella as well. I don't know. It's not really a question, but it's really just something that I think needs to be... that we need to focus on in religious studies.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:03:16](#)):

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But talk about your department quickly and how God is-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:19](#)):

You talk about it. You do it.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:03:21](#)):

... God is Red. It's your department, Phil.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:21](#)):

Okay, pause.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:03:26](#)):

Okay, that's a good point. No.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:27](#)):

Oh God, that's funny.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:03:33](#)):

Talk about your department.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:36](#)):

We've been married a long time.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:03:37](#)):

You talk about my department.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:03:42](#)):

Yeah. The religion department at Syracuse University back in the sixties was known for its Death of God theology. This was from Gabriel Vahanian and David Miller and other kind of postmodern theologians that were working in the area of psychology of religion, philosophy of religion. This is not really what I do, but we have a kind of secular theology element to our department. And so they were involved with this Death of God theology that hit Time Magazine cover. And I'm thinking like 65, something like that. And then your father in response almost, I'm not sure what, wrote God is Red. And I'm not sure how if it is connected, it's just poetic in many ways. I don't know if you have any comments about that.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:04:52](#)):

Yeah. I mean I think it is connected. So you're completely right about the family. My grandfather was an Episcopalian minister. My great-grandfather, the person I'm named for was an Episcopalian minister, one of the first native clergy in the Episcopal Church. At a time when the Episcopalians were quite good at letting native people take leadership positions compared to say the Catholic Church, which was not, or some of the other Protestant denominations. So there's a long tradition of this kind of leadership within the church of which the family's been part. And my dad went to theology school, he studied theology, earned a divinity degree.

([00:05:33](#)):

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And I think this would've been in the sort of late-1950s, early-1960s, and I think there's a line to be drawn between that moment of his life and his training and his thought where he read a lot of classic religion and theology. And if we skip over *God is Red* for a moment and go to the metaphysics of modern existence from 19 late seventies, 79 as I recall. What you can see there, I think is this sort of development of the ways that he was thinking in the late fifties. So 20 years earlier. And that book is a really interesting book and it like *God is Red*-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:06:12](#)):

I don't know [inaudible 00:06:12].

Philip J. Deloria ([00:06:12](#)):

... it doesn't really get much play either, but it's a rereading of the kind of classic theological literatures that came out of the forties and the fifties. So you can see, I think the ways that religious studies, theology really grounded his thinking. So if you think about that trajectory, and then you put him back in the context of the Red Power Movement of the mid to late 1960s. So he'd been the executive director of the National Congress of American Indians. He had written, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, published in 1969. And that's a really interesting book for the ways that I think it frames all the writing that he did during that period. He wrote something like five books within the space of about five years.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:07:01](#)):

Amazing.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:07:01](#)):

And tons of articles. So he was just cranking out writing. And you can see *Custer Died for Your Sins*, he's learning to be a writer. It's a very important book, but it's not exactly a taut, well-crafted through-line kind of book. It's a set of ramblings and essays and things like that.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:07:21](#)):

Yeah, I say that book is a kind of... that he's writing sort of in the trenches, literally in the trenches, in a car or whatever.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:07:29](#)):

He wrote this in... we lived in a very small little house on 24 40 South Monroe Street in Denver, Colorado. And this was a house that had two bedrooms for four people, and he sat on an easy chair with a typewriter on a coffee table and kind of pounded it out at night. So I mean, that was him learning to be a writer, which he then sort of embraced over the next few years. And in that sense, *God is Red* comes out of his Red Power kind of writing, but it's also this book about religion. And like so many of his books, it starts with an explanatory chapter where he's saying, "Dear white people, let me explain to you how you have understood us, how you frame native people and why that's all wrong."

([00:08:22](#)):

And after a chapter or two of that, so when you think about that Red Power context and you think about where *God is Red* comes from, in all of his writing at this moment, there's always the deconstructive chapter where he's telling people, "You don't understand and now let me clear the ground and now we'll move forward with an argument." And so that's what he does in *God is Red*. And the argument there is so much of a critique of Christianity as a colonial kind of artifact.

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:08:52](#)):

Exactly.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:08:53](#)):

But it's not really a historical argument. It's not saying, yeah, Christianity and history came together around things like the Doctrine of Discovery. He's not really saying that. It's a theological and conceptual kind of argument where that really turns around questions about time and space and how people kind of imagine those things.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:09:12](#)):

And I think that's kind of the irony of this, that in a way, 'cause I think of him as a theologian, but on the ground and challenging the theological superstructure that the academy has built around religious institutions, I guess. And is it something like an open letter to church leaders or something like that that appears in *God is Red*, which many, many of our collaborators point to as the origins of this discussion about the Doctrine of Discovery. On the one hand, he's always thinking about religion, thinking theologically, but then on the other hand, he's very, very critical of the church and its origins in colonialism. And I think it's that kind of conundrum that creates this movement really in doctrine of Christian discovery, with all these repudiations now coming after 2009. And that's why I wanted to start there because I think your dad helped all of us really frame these religious problems. And now we're looking in archives and we're looking historical and all these other... bringing in these other materials.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:10:49](#)):

And-

Philip J. Deloria ([00:10:49](#)):

I mean... Oh, sorry, go ahead.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:10:50](#)):

Well, we have to look at this too like, you're talking about your great-grandfather being an Episcopalian minister or priest, but it was a different time. It's not like native people wanted to become Christian. They really had no choice. So this is giving a great pathway through how native people have dealt with this and to get in a place of authority like your father did, he could then stay with his community and deal with them and guide them through some of this stuff as well. So it's a different context than today. It's like, I know the narrative we turned around at Onondaga Lake, the county was teaching our community that the Onondaga practically begged to be Christianized. And that was a fallacy because the Onondaga made the Jesuits leave within 18 months of their first arrival.

([00:11:49](#)):

So it's a very brutal history, and you have to contextualize this. I don't want a listener coming in not knowing any of this and hearing this conversation. So you didn't have the choice, and it was a place of influence if you became a minister or a priest at that time. And thank goodness with what your lineage did-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:11:49](#)):

It's a complicated thing.

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Sandy Bigtree ([00:12:14](#)):

... could still guide us through some of this history as well.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:12:17](#)):

Well, this is the story in our families that my great-great-grandfather Saswe, had basically said to his son, Philip J, Tipi Sapa, look, this is in the wake of the Indian Wars and this is in the wake of all of this violent military colonialism and domination and the sort of restructuring around reservations and allotment and assimilation policy. And said to him, "Look, the old venues of leadership have been under assault and they are crumbling, and there's new ways to imagine serving and leading. And one of them is through the church. So maybe you think about that." And that whole generation, that first generation of Lakota and Dakota ministers, I mean my great-grandfather, he did his sermons in the Dakota language. He used the translated Dakota hymnal, they used the Dakota Bible. They were keeping the linguistic and language tradition alive, even through literary kinds of means.

([00:13:19](#)):

They'd have the annual convocations, which looked a lot like the Sundance. They'd have the men's societies, which looked a lot like the old men's societies. They'd have the women's societies who did the... So in some ways, the church became this kind of umbrella through which you could reconstitute and reimagine older ways, older social organizations and structures. And I mean, my grandfather sort of oftentimes had critiques of the church, turned against the church. That multi-generational thing. By the time you get to my dad, and I think this helps put God is Red in another kind of context, which Custer Died for Your Sins is in some ways, I mean it's read as being a Red Power book in the same discourses, the American Indian Movement or the Indians of All Tribes. But in fact, it's really not that, he's very much an institutionalist in that book.

([00:14:12](#)):

He is in favor of, well-run tribal government and he likes tribal chairs who know how to negotiate with the government. And so he's got an institutionalist kind of vibe to him. And in the early seventies, he was invited to be on the National Council of the Episcopalian Church, the Episcopal Church, which he did for six months, nine months, something like that, floated all kinds of proposals, which basically went back to that earlier structure, sort of saying, you need to recruit native ministers. You need to give them authority to move in a native kind of way through the church. And the church was just not having it. Just was not doing it.

([00:14:57](#)):

So you can watch the Episcopal Church as it sort of fades and declines from a very "successful," I'm doing air quotes here, kind of very successful organization in the late 19th and early 20th century to, by the time you get to the mid-century, a kind of sad, faded, degraded, declining kind of thing. My dad thought, well, maybe the church could reinvigorate itself. He was watching black social activism, which was so church-based and sort of thinking, could the churches actually provide infrastructure for native folks, as well? And his conclusion was, no.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:14:57](#)):

Right.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:15:31](#)):

Right.

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Philip J. Deloria ([00:15:31](#)):

And then he resigned from the church board. And right at that moment is when he sits down to write, God is Red.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:15:36](#)):

That's right.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:15:36](#)):

Right.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:15:37](#)):

But that is through that period where you had no option but to congregate under the authority of the church. Indigenous people were not allowed to congregate unless it was at the church. That's what we were hearing from Onondaga out there. They got fed in those places. The best meals were served at the church. And these are community folk. And so the church was it.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:16:00](#)):

I mean, we don't have to talk about this [inaudible 00:16:03] because we could talk for hours about this, but I was also thinking about Black Elk and his experience and the whole controversy about his being a catechist and things, which I love to teach because it is a complicated story and there's so many twists and turns. But then that's the Catholic Church, very different than the Episcopal Church.

([00:16:25](#)):

And I also wanted to note that it is the Episcopalians in 2009 that are the first to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. This comes out of Maine and some interactions between Episcopalians and Penobscot. And they're the ones that really are the first. And it just creates this wave of repudiations all through denominations, Christian denominations, religious orders, all kinds of places. Now they have different motivations. Episcopalians are concerned about Cabot Charter, the British kind of colonial superstructure around the church and how that was used, and that it diminishes the Christian faith. So they're concerned about their own Christianity in some ways. Maybe they should be a little more concerned about what they did to native people. I'm not sure. But there are different motivations in these repudiations.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:17:34](#)):

But we also hope with this work, the Doctrine of Discovery, they can reflect and see what happened to them, what happened to their indigenous lineages, right?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:17:34](#)):

In Europe.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:17:44](#)):

In Europe. This is all connected because when Europeans came to this country, they knew darn well what they were doing. I mean, they attacked us and focused right in on how to make the quickest, most abrupt change in the least amount of time.

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:18:02](#)):

And we should talk maybe about the Irish. Well,-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:18:07](#)):

Yeah, but I just wanted to insert here. The American Indian Religious Freedom Act did not pass until 1978. You weren't really allowed to talk about anything but Christianity in these territories, all of them. And your father and grandfather, great-grandfather, helped get people through this mire of domination.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:18:07](#)):

Yeah.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:18:33](#)):

Yeah. I mean, the church was sort of, for this period, was this interesting kind of repository. I mean, I didn't-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:18:40](#)):

What period were you talking about? What time period?

Philip J. Deloria ([00:18:43](#)):

Kind of late 19th through the Red Power Movement.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:18:50](#)):

Oh, really? That late? Okay.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:18:50](#)):

Yeah. I did an interview one time with Albert Whitehouse from Rosebud, and he said, when we kind of brought the Sundance back in a kind of visible way, he said "The first day there was a whole bunch of these Indian Christians who sat on their lawn chairs and watched us and just kind of folded their arms and didn't say much. And by the third day," and we sang the two songs that we'd learned out of the ethnography kind of thing. And he said, "By the third day, they engaged us and brought out all kinds of knowledge that they had been keeping under the rubric of the Christian Church." Right.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:19:26](#)):

That's right.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:19:27](#)):

So, there are those ways in which these things are common. And I would say, certainly my great-grandfather was a person of Christian faith. I mean, there was no doubt about it. And my grandfather was episodically a person of Christian faith. I mean, he mostly was, but then he wasn't. And then there were these moments where he was questioning, and he always said, "I'm interested in Jesus, the man, not Jesus the God," things like that. And he would say, "Well, these four Lakota values and these four Christian values," he had a lot of fluidity back and forth around these things. By the time you get to my dad, you're in a different political context.

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:20:07](#)):

Oh, very.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:20:08](#)):

Yes.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:20:09](#)):

And it became, I think, quite important to push back against the Christian Church in its longer history, even while you sort of admitted the interesting things that had happened in the previous 80 some years.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:20:23](#)):

Geez, there's so much that's popping into my head of just the Red Power Movement and how your dad was involved with that.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:20:31](#)):

How do you make that transfer into Christianity though when being indigenous is your proper relationship with the natural world, and it's regenerative. Your food and you're giving gratitude to the food and the forces of nature and all the land animals and then you have Christianity come in, you have this very alive sensibility of being human in a very complex network of life. So you already have this, it's not so much a faith, but you embody this power of knowing something greater than yourself.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:21:07](#)):

And that's a trauma in and of itself, right. Just that reality shift.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:21:13](#)):

Yeah, and I think one of his points in God is Red was really to sort of, he wanted to draw a pretty bright categorical line, in the midst of this kind of murky, murkier, more complex family history to say, "Look, Christianity is a religion of temporality and time, and native religions are practices of space and place-making." And if you take that seriously, the Christian thing will always be on a calendar. It'll always start with creation, always end with redemption, and everything is going to be directed in those kinds of ways.

([00:21:49](#)):

Whereas in the native worlds, he wanted to describe in large conceptual terms, he's stepping outside of any particular religious tradition to make these kind of theorizations. That the fundamental kind of, I think, revelation of that is that the place itself is alive, that the land is alive, that it has certain kinds of characters and qualities to it, that if you are on a landscape that you know and live in intimately, you understand there's some good places you want to go. There's a few bad places. And why is that? It's because the land itself has certain kind of character to it. And in your human relation to that land over time, you develop knowledges and things like that, which...

([00:22:33](#)):

And so second point here is for him and for native folks in general, that categorical distinction between religion and science is completely meaningless. So to be in the place and discover the nature of the place and to live it and to understand and put yourself in an intimate relationship to it is both a science and a religion in a way that destroys those categories is to understand through empirical life that there

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is a spiritual world of which you are a part. And I think his framing of that, it's a hard critique of Christianity in this sense. And we should, I think, read it as such.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:23:15](#)):

Okay. Okay.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:23:16](#)):

And there's so much more beyond what we were limited to become through the confined and dominance of Christian, Christianity. But yeah, the land identifies us, our identity comes from the earth, which kind of leads to your work as you continue on with this legacy of scholarship and identity.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:23:41](#)):

Oh, is it an invitation to say [inaudible 00:23:43].

Sandy Bigtree ([00:23:42](#)):

Yes, please.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:23:43](#)):

I mean, I do see. I mean, I think we both-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:23:43](#)):

Identity politics.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:23:47](#)):

... see kind of that you're playing with issues of identity. I thought Playing Indian was provocative in many ways. It was also a condemnation of... I mean, last year we went to... What is that?

Sandy Bigtree ([00:23:47](#)):

It's cleaning. It's cleaning itself.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:24:10](#)):

Okay. It's a great machine, but it's noisy.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:24:16](#)):

Yeah.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:24:16](#)):

Are you done? Okay.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:24:21](#)):

Last year we were in Germany and for six weeks. And we were there, Max Planck Institute developing some workshops on the Doctrine of Discovery. And we had some Haudenosaunee people with us. And Sandy and I were there earlier alone. And of course we knew about Karl May in Germany. And Karl May is still just a phenomenon in Germany, which frankly just blows my mind. And so his museum is down

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near Dresden, and so we decided there was going to be a huge weekend Karl May event, and we decided to go. And frankly, I just don't know what to make of it. We talked to the director of the museum, the Karl May Museum, and he knows a lot of native people. They all come over there. They come there and they're invited. They're paid to perform. We know some Haudenosaunee performers that had come over there in the past, and I mean, I think some of them said it just got too weird, and they just decided not to. But they just love Indians.

(00:25:45):

And trying to enter into that whole kind of phenomenon is something I'm still trying to sort out. But I think that you probably... you've been dealing with a lot of these Playing Indian things for so long, and it's-

Sandy Bigtree (00:26:01):

This trumps them all, pardon the expression.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:04):

We could go on about it. It was-

Sandy Bigtree (00:26:06):

In Germany.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:07):

And we took lots of film and Germans dressed up like Lakota people.

Sandy Bigtree (00:26:15):

And the Lakota people actually came to perform. And they were at the event the night before in this little village, they had thousands of Germans dressed up as cowboys and cowgirls in a saloon, an old Western village. And then they had no designated place for the actual Lakota people to dance. They had to come in this crowd. It was so intimidating. The next day we're at the museum, there's this huge designated space for dancing, but the Lakota were not invited there. The Germans dressed up as Lakota, and they were dancing.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:50):

And there were Confederate dresser. They dressed up a whole unit of Confederate soldiers.

Sandy Bigtree (00:26:57):

Trump caps.

Philip P. Arnold (00:26:58):

There were Trump caps. I don't know what's going on. I mean, I don't really know what's going on in Germany, that's one thing. But Karl May.

Sandy Bigtree (00:27:07):

Hitler was an enormous fan of Karl May and distributed the books to his soldiers.

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:14](#)):

Probably even met him just before he died.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:27:15](#)):

Yeah, probably. Try to unpack that Playing Indian, I mean, that's-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:18](#)):

And his whole movement to Poland-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:27:18](#)):

...just beyond comprehension.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:21](#)):

... which was seen as a kind of Eastward rather than the Westward migration, that epic story of-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:27:30](#)):

Moving West.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:31](#)):

Moving West, Manifest Destiny. That was kind of mapped onto Poland.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:27:36](#)):

Well even referred to Poland as a reservation. So this is so intertwined with the psyche all around the world.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:27:42](#)):

I mean, it is crazy, but it's serious, crazy. I mean, it's serious. And Indians just play into that whole kind of thing. Now, I don't know if... this is maybe unfair, but the Playing Indian thing just does not go away, right?

Philip J. Deloria ([00:28:01](#)):

No, no, that's true. It [inaudible 00:28:04] not. Yeah. So one of the things you'll notice in that book Playing Indian is that I don't talk about the Germans.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:28:14](#)):

Right, right, right.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:28:15](#)):

Yeah, no.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:28:15](#)):

And that was-

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:28:16](#)):

That's a black hole.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:28:17](#)):

... that was a dissertation. And one of the questions in the dissertation to book process was, do I do Indians who dress up like Indians for themselves and for others? Do I do the European thing? And the answer for me after not much thought was a resounding no.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:28:35](#)):

Yeah, right, right.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:28:37](#)):

Because the American thing is complicated enough. So the American thing is complicated enough, and in a way, it is a different story. It is a quintessential settler colonial story. One of the great moments in my life was Patrick Wolf coming up to me at a conference and saying, "I was reading *Playing Indian* as I was writing my essay on settler colonialism," because there is a kind of a... I wasn't theorizing settler colonialism, but this sort of sense of you will erase the indigenous in order to assume the identities you will perform. And what I tried to bring into the conversation was this aspect of performance that it's not just that you imagine a kind of native other, but that you actually internalize through performance, through putting on masks. And this is what the Germans are trying to do, and the Russians and the English and all the Ukrainians and all the other folks who do this.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:29:32](#)):

And they're devoted. Yeah, they're just devoted to this.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:29:34](#)):

Yeah. I mean, it's really kind of cultic. So I wanted to distinguish in some ways between that odd, weird, modernist, international culty kind of thing from the American thing, which I think is just a fundamental part of settler-colonial practice. That one of the reasons you erase the indigenous is to assume an indigenous identity for yourself and to perform that identity. So the erasure is absolutely fundamentally a part of it, and yet you don't fully erase because you're actually assuming the identity. So the people you're erasing are the material people, are the actual people. You get rid of those people, you kill them, you move them further west, you contain them, you transform them, all of these different kinds of things so that you can be them in order to, and this is sort of a little bit where maybe there's some affinities between some of my dad's work and some of my work is in order to claim that you are of the continent, that you are of the place yourself, and the only signifier of that is the indigenous.

([00:30:41](#)):

So that sort of habit of dressing up like an Indian and playing like an Indian from the Boston Tea Party through all the fraternal things of the 19th century, to Camp Fire Girls and boy Scouts, and YMC-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:30:42](#)):

Tammany.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:30:56](#)):

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Indian guys, Tammany societies, to the sort of sixties counterculture people, to the kind of new age folks of the eighties and nineties. I mean, it's just this continual thread. So you got to ask, I mean, if this is something that plays out, different forms, different practices, different variations, but the continuity of the practice across American history, why would that be? Why would that be? It's just very curious. So it is an argument really about the two-faced quality of settler colonialism and domination and conquest, that you kill and displace, and then you take, take that identity because it is meaningful. It is a meaningful identity. I mean, as I oftentimes frame it this way, if you're an English colonist sitting on the Atlantic seaboard, you look over your shoulder and you think like, "Oh my God, the king, the parliament, they just dominate us. I hate them. We're not them." And in order to make that argument back across your shoulder, you say, "We're of this continent. We're Aboriginal, we're indigenous-"

Philip P. Arnold ([00:32:06](#)):

We're American savages as Ben Franklin says.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:32:09](#)):

Exactly. Yeah, and then you look westward and you say like, "Oh my God, these violent savage people, we're not them either, we're very civilized. We have tea in the afternoon and we're part of the European tradition." So it positions the sort of settlers in that place to grab both of these things as it suits them and to reject them as it suits them. So it's a relationship of love and hate, of desire and repulsion that happens simultaneously. I think it's an incredibly generative social cultural kind of position that then leads to generative political and economic kind of consequences.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:32:46](#)):

Yeah, it's a serious thing. It's not just play, right? It's not just Playing Indian. There are serious consequences. And I wondered if that's also true in terms of place names, the erasure of native people from Ohio or Illinois or Massachusetts or whatever. And then, so you name the places after the people that have been destroyed. I wonder if that's similar to what you're talking about.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:33:24](#)):

I mean, it feels like it's a variation. I mean, you look across the geography of the United States and you see multiple kind of strands of practice. One is to sort of appropriate the indigenous place name and make it your own. A second is to erase the indigenous place name and give it New York, New England to those things.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:24](#)):

That's true.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:33:44](#)):

And the third strand, which you all know from being in New York state, is to impose a classical, Greco-Roman-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:54](#)):

Roman.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:33:54](#)):

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What is that?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:55](#)):

Utica.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:33:56](#)):

... [inaudible 00:33:56] practice?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:56](#)):

Syracuse.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:33:58](#)):

Illian.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:33:59](#)):

Yeah.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:33:59](#)):

Yeah. Which is interesting that that sort of begins in a New York thing and then sort of spreads out, moves into the Ohio Valley, moves a little bit west.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:34:09](#)):

Well, I wonder if that's attached to the Doctrines of discovery, which came out of the Vatican. I mean, this lineage back to Rome and the Empire and-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:34:19](#)):

Choosing to be Romans.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:34:19](#)):

... Conquest and Empire building. New York is the Empire State.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:34:28](#)):

This is going to be a little rambling, but one of the things that we're working on, so Sandy and I were involved in the development of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center, which as she just mentioned, was formerly called the French Fort. And it was iconic from 1933. And then it became St. Marie among the Iroquois in the seventies. And that became kind of a friendlier notion that... But it still was The Jesuit Relations narrative of them coming into Onondaga Nation territory and essentially welcoming the Onondaga, begged them to come to be Christianized.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:35:12](#)):

In exchange for 600 square miles of land.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:35:15](#)):

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Right. So the land, we have the Land grant, we have these documents. And sure enough, they were just issued in Montreal or where they came from in Canada, came in Onondaga Nation territory with this land grant, which is the example of the Doctrine of Discovery, taking land of non-Christian people when Christian people enter those lands. So automatically deeded back to the sponsoring nation, in this case, France, the Vatican. Enslaving those people and taking all their worldly goods. Well, the Onondaga figured this out pretty quick because they were amassing weapons in this fort and all this. And eight month, 18-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:36:00](#)):

The Jesuits were amassing weapons in the fort.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:36:06](#)):

Yeah, the Jesuits were amassing weapons. And what's the story? Some little-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:36:10](#)):

A little French boy befriended the local Onondaga and shared with them that there's a stash of weapons under the altar. So he kind leaked what was going on. So I guess the Haudenosaunee went, and as Lauren said, they told the Jesuits, they had asked them to leave prior, they were not leaving. So apparently at this date and time, they took his hand and chopped off one of their fingers and said, "We mean business. You need to leave." And apparently they left the middle of the night.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:36:45](#)):

And that was in 1658. And this does not appear in The Jesuit Relations, however.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:36:53](#)):

Of course not.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:36:54](#)):

Right. No textual resource for this at all. There's a wampum belt that talks about, and this is an example of what oral tradition, which I think is a kind of strange way to frame what a wampum belt does. And so you can juxtapose The Jesuit Relations story, which is, those lousy Mohawks were stirring stuff up, and then we had to get out of town really quick and we got them all drunk, and then they... Totally different story.

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([00:37:27](#)):

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 for more information. And if you like this episode, review it on Apple, Spotify or wherever you listen to podcasts. And now back to the conversation.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:37:48](#)):

One of the reasons that the Onondaga really wanted this center transformed is that the French Fort had told this Jesuit friendly story. And what we did, because it closed, what we did was we transformed the story to emphasize Haudenosaunee values, Haudenosaunee values instead of history. And I'd be interested in what you as a historian.

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[\(00:38:15\)](#):

Because from our point of view, we couldn't be a museum because the council just said, museums are just repositories of stolen goods, so we can't do that. So then we had to be a center, and we had to organize it around teaching people values of the Haudenosaunee rather than a kind of anthropological or historical kind of approach. And that's how we developed this narrative. Sandy and I largely developed this narrative, but you wouldn't understand the Jesuit story without first exploring those values of Skä•noñh for example, peace. Peace can only be attained when human beings are in proper relationship to the natural world. These are ancient, ancient values. The great law of peace, the Thanksgiving address. And all of that, I kind of explain it or explore in the book.

[\(00:39:27\)](#):

But then when you have that, you can start that kind of archival historical work. And it was through this, what we call the Two Row wampum methodology. This was the original treaty from 1613 in Albany that we were able to create a kind of method by which we could validate each other and the reasons for why we were doing this work at the Skä•noñh Center.

Sandy Bigtree [\(00:40:00\)](#):

The Two Row talks about parallel paths where the Dutch would sail in their ship and then the Haudenosaunee and their canoe without interfering with one another down the river of life. And so I always emphasize the river of life was beyond comprehension for the Dutch because look at our environment. Because our title dial says, peace can only be when you're in proper relationship with the natural world. When Christianity came in, it forced these dichotomies of good and evil, black and white. They weren't interactional, they were opposing forces. Which was a setup for warfare because that's what they did when they came here. So you're talking about identity and you're dealing with the perfectionists of the British, and they're drinking tea. Then the savage Indians, again, that's that stark history lesson we've all been taught. And both sides are just perceptions. They're not interactional. We're in opposition to one another. And I think that's what your dad is trying to do is these identity politics, they're all false identities. People are trying to latch onto their pre-constructions fantasies. We're all living in some kind of imposed fantasy on this planet.

Philip P. Arnold [\(00:41:27\)](#):

And trying to get back to something, I guess.

Sandy Bigtree [\(00:41:27\)](#):

How do we break through it?

Philip J. Deloria [\(00:41:28\)](#):

Yeah. Well, it seems to me, it's like, you've got two things going on. One is the 30,000-foot life of ethics and morals and values and sort of the ways in which we live. And the other is the very real kinds of social differentiations and conflicts that just happen among people. And how do you navigate those things? Where's the moment where you are in conflict and you reach up and claim your values as being the ground of your... as opposed to like, "No, I just want your land and I'm going to take it."

Sandy Bigtree [\(00:42:03\)](#):

That's right.

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Philip P. Arnold ([00:42:03](#)):

Well, I think that's what I wanted to... because values is a slippery concept, because value can also be valuation. It could be monetary valuation or gift economy or whatever kind of economies that you're working, operating in that have very real world consequences. So I tend to think of ceremonies, for example, as gift economies or expressions of value exchange that's going on between various beings. So values, it can be that 30,000, it can be those moral ethics and values, but it also, in a monetary economy, value is exchanged and the meaning of land is exchanged only monetarily. So that becomes a different way of a value kind of context. But anyway, I just wanted to make that case 'cause that kind of connects the two that you were making. Yeah.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:43:04](#)):

Well, it's also the moment where history has to creep back in. I mean, there's a lot of tribal folks who would say, oh, the great law of peace looks great for you all, but for us it means join or die. I mean, we think about the ways... So you could imagine a question that said, "How is it that in some of these early treaty negotiations, the Haudenosaunee are taking the liberty of trading away other people's lands or claiming domination over other people, claiming people who are minor parts of the Confederacy?" So do we then have to turn to a historical explanation for that and say, well-

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([00:43:45](#)):

Absolutely.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:43:46](#)):

... this is part and parcel of the kind of early colonial period and the moment of the fur trade and the competition that happens there over land and territory and trade. And suddenly... And that's the point at which the 30,000-foot question about values and transcendent truth becomes really quite difficult because on the ground, people are having to navigate other kinds of things.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:44:08](#)):

I see what you mean. Yeah. So how do you use oral tradition in a historical context? I mean, it's a very general question, but what is your thinking around what constitutes oral tradition in these Native American histories that we need to develop?

Philip J. Deloria ([00:44:35](#)):

Yeah, it's a really hard question. So I differentiate between oral tradition and oral history, and between memory, these kinds of things. I did a whole series of interviews with my dad, for example, 60 hours worth of stuff, that's memory work that blurs into some oral history that he was hearing from his father and from his aunts and stuff. But then there's also older stories that are part of that that kind of take you further back into time where suddenly the kind of... I mean, I'm a historian enough to believe that there's not a clean, clear translation across these things, across long stretches of time, but there is a continuity across time, for sure. And so we imagine the ways in which oral tradition continues to hold truths and values and stories and memories and all kinds of things, which have a ton of legitimacy to them.

([00:45:35](#)):

Is it clear that we should read them literally? To me, it's not totally clear that we should. As opposed to things which kind of fit within that oral history category, which I'm much more interested in sort of

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thinking like, this is not conceptual knowledge, this is actual historical knowledge. And we do what we do as historians, which is we cross-reference these kinds of things, and we sort of imagine is there a moment where someone else's oral history is going to confirm or problematize this? Is there a moment where a documentary or archive is going to actually do those kinds of things? I mean, there was a moment in this field 20 years ago where a group of younger scholars said, "You cannot use any written document as a document of the colonizer and so on." It's like, "Well, that makes it really hard to actually make progress on land claims and things like that if you can't use those things, if everything has to be oral kinds of tradition."

[\(00:46:32\)](#):

And what you find is, I think a lot of moments where oral tradition starts to converge through its repetition, that the things become simpler and simpler, where in fact, there's a ton of complexity attached to this stuff. I've been working with these Plains Winter Counts for the last year or so. And if you go through this kind of the many counts, year after year after year, what you see is this incredibly complicated world that was going to be transferred historical knowledge through oral stories, right, through stories. Here's a little picture of crows falling from the sky, and what is it? Oh, that was the winter and it was so cold that birds froze while they were flying. And then what are the stories that are attached to that?

[\(00:47:17\)](#):

So if you think about what that universe of stories must have looked like for the keepers of those counts, who would sit there and sort of swap these kinds of things and tell those stories, I mean, this was an incredibly complex historical record, incredibly complicated kind of thing. And each story generates other stories. Oh, I remember in that year when that happened, this other thing happened, or these other people had this other thing. So there's all kinds of interesting stuff happening in that universe. But I think what happens in our contemporary moment is sometimes we're able to connect up to those worlds. Other times we're ending up sort of just repeating things that everybody says all the time, and that's the way that orality oftentimes work. It's like, I heard this thing, I heard this thing, I heard this thing, and now I'm going to distill it.

[\(00:48:13\)](#):

For example, the contemporary boarding school discussion, to me has simplified, has narrowed. That you can hear today, people who were in boarding schools in the 1960s repeating tropes that were sort of Carlisle, 1890.

Philip P. Arnold [\(00:48:13\)](#):

18, yeah.

Philip J. Deloria [\(00:48:37\)](#):

1890. As Brenda Child has argued, boarding schools become kind of a metaphor for all the bad shit. Which isn't to say that those memories are not true memories, but they are also part and parcel of this kind of other worlds of things which become metaphoric, tropic, shared kinds of memories. So I just think this is the world in which we sort of live when we're going to deal with oral tradition that we should just admit it's a complicated world, just like being a human being in the world, it's a complicated thing. Just like any kind of knowledge of the past where our memories and our collective memories get blurred up and messed up and complicated. I mean, I think to sort of valorize this and say that it is pure and unbroken and unquestionable, just doesn't make sense to me.

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Sandy Bigtree ([00:49:35](#)):

Well, we're talking about values though, and oral tradition if it's this connection to the natural world and you're paying attention to these cycles, you're talking about the birds falling and freezing. So you're going to watch the cycles, not the birds. You're going to watch the flocks and take in consideration the weather. It's more complex. History, the recorded history, they came over here under the doctrines of discovery to take land. So that's the motivation and how it was all written, and it was a different orientation. But if truly indigenous sensibility is understanding that peace can only be obtained when you're in proper relationship with the natural world, food will be continued to be provided. You're going to get in sync with these cycles. It's just a different orientation, and we've been extracted from participating in that. So I think your father got us through people through this horrific period of domination. We're not back there yet. We're not allowed to live in balance with this earth because the waters have been polluted. There's been dams constructed on almost every single territory.

([00:50:54](#)):

If we don't start breaking down these dams and start freeing the earth, we're not going to become freed either. So we're talking about systems and just ways of thinking and being human, can't totally put it in either camp right now because we've all been so disrupted, but things have to change.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:51:16](#)):

I think this is where you get a distinction between sort of life practice in a spiritual world, of which there are many, many sort of historical accounts, those kinds of things, and the practice of history, which these are different things. I mean, one is to sort of theorize a kind of way of being. Another is trying to figure out what happened. And they ask fundamentally different kinds of questions.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:51:48](#)):

I mean, the thing about Wampum, and I think Wampum is a good example for this, but I think there are other indigenous media, but the wampum belts have their own kind of status. They have their own kind of living presence. So for example, when Wampum belts are returned, Peabody Museum at Harvard has dozens of Wampum belts. And we were there 25 years ago looking at these wampum belts, and I collected all the photographs of these Wampum and I showed Tadodaho, Sid Hill when we came home. And he said, I was flashing through the different ones. And he said, "We've been looking for that one." And it was collected by Peabody in, I'll say 19... at least a hundred years ago.

([00:52:45](#)):

And yet, that Wampum belt has a place, a situation where that was kind of extracted from its use. It was a condolence belt. So in the ceremony of raising their leadership, they used these wampums [foreign language 00:53:05], they used belts and strings, and it has to do with condolence. But then the return of those wampum belts that have been treated with arsenic and all kinds of things, they have to reassemble the meaning of some of those things. And they do this through dreams and other activities, ceremonies and things like that, because the wampum itself has some living presence. So again, the complicated nature of what we're calling oral tradition and having people who know about Wampum, who read Wampum. I can't read Wampum. I only just sort of communicate what other people have said. What Oren tells me about wampum belts.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:54:01](#)):

It's such an intricate part. Each title holder has a specific wampum to identify their title. They're not elected chiefs, they're [foreign language 00:54:10] representative of the Klan. And it's a whole other

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process. And this process is recognized at the UN. Their governance goes pre-contact and still recognized by the UN and the U.S.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:54:26](#)):

And so what Sandy's talking about-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:54:29](#)):

It's a very different way to go about their deliberations of consensus.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:54:33](#)):

... that this kind of ongoing inner relationship with the natural world is not something that just happens in a discreet way, but is also active in their recovering their past and where they should go into the future. So I don't know. I think this idea of oral tradition is just such a misnomer in many ways. I think more in terms of religion, you think more in terms of history, but it's like there's a lot there.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:55:09](#)):

Yeah. Well, maybe that the word tradition is kind of the thing that's leading us astray. I mean, tradition is always reliant upon a pastness, right? The possibility of staticness, that knowledge doesn't change. I mean, I think repatriation is a great example of the ways that knowledge actually does change and practice does change, and things have continuities to the past. But lots and lots of tribal nations who had a traditional ceremony for the return of ancestors, people now recreate out of old content and new things, looking forward to the future. I mean, it's a living tradition. And I think that's the thing that's most important about it. And it may just be that the way that this debate got framed for me as a historian, it kind of leads to a particular set of critiques and contemplations as opposed to the ways that it might work differently for you as a religious study scholar, or people who are actually on the ground doing practice.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:56:15](#)):

Right. Well, there's a lot there. And then finally, I'd just like to talk a little bit about where you see Native Studies going 'cause I see it kind of opening up into a lot of different kind of venues. There's a lot of possibilities now. And one of the things we're working on is the 250 celebration of Declaration of Independence, and we've been selected, the Skä•noñh Center as a site for the Smithsonian traveling exhibit called Voices and Votes, because there's nothing there that connects the founding of Western democracy to the Haudenosaunee, which has been formally acknowledged. So I think that's kind of where our work is developing too. And then also on the English side, we were looking at these documents-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:57:19](#)):

I think there's surprisingly big interests coming from Europe and to what's going on in Americas, I mean, this conference being held here in Buvvda, indigenous practitioners and scholars all coming together-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:57:39](#)):

And they have a whole-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:57:41](#)):

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Exciting [inaudible 00:57:41].

Philip P. Arnold ([00:57:41](#)):

... There's a whole host of agendas, different kinds of indigenous peoples coming together. I'd just be curious,-

Sandy Bigtree ([00:57:49](#)):

People are longing for something. I mean, clearly something is-

Philip P. Arnold ([00:57:51](#)):

There's a lot of energy here.

Sandy Bigtree ([00:57:54](#)):

... is wrong, and there's definite rise of fascism and domination in the world. It's happening all over the world. People are, I think, in shock and they're trying to find a different way of living on the Earth. And maybe they're looking to the United States because the indigenous people there went through this genocide much more recently and recently retain the memory of what happened better than they can.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:58:24](#)):

So I'm wondering what you think of where we're headed in this area. Yeah.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:58:30](#)):

Well, it is quite a complicated question, right?

Philip P. Arnold ([00:58:35](#)):

It's simple. It's a simple question.

Philip J. Deloria ([00:58:37](#)):

It's a simple question.

Philip P. Arnold ([00:58:38](#)):

Where are we going?

Philip J. Deloria ([00:58:39](#)):

My survey class is a native studies class as opposed to a native history class. So for me, it's worth sort of separating out those things. There's some great stuff going on in Native American history right now, primarily economic analysis. And this goes back, I think, to the Bobby Lee Tristan Ahtone Land-Grab Universities study, which was a huge giant database, 187,000 records. And that fantastic article followed by a fantastic article by Emilie Connolly called Fiduciary Colonialism, which really sort of says, look, we used to go to the BIA records and military records. What if we went to treasury? The treasury records? And all those things which are in treaties are framed as annuities, which I've always read annuity, okay, it's plows, it's cattle. It's like, no, no, these are actual financial instrument annuities and the management of those.

([00:59:40](#)):

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There's a moment at which the federal government stops delivering wagon loads of specie and starts saying, "We're setting aside a trust fund, a big pool of capital for you, a trust fund, and we will pay you the annuities off of this. The interest off of this." The management of that money turns out to be one of the most important sort of facets of American slash Indian history. The southern states that go bankrupt after the panic of 1837, they're all bailed out by Indian money. Their infrastructure is all built with Indian money through these loan instruments. So this is complicated economic history, Michael Witgen's Political Economy of Plunder. Dave Beck has a new book coming in. So this sort of financial analysis where we've always said the wealth of the United States was built around slavery and the extraction of labor from black bodies. This is true.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:00:37](#)):

True.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:00:37](#)):

But we've not paid much attention to the ways... we've always sort of known, Indian land, yes, was converted to property and et cetera, et cetera. But people are now really crunching the numbers and doing the on the ground fiscal analysis. So this is, I think this incredibly booming or potentially booming kind of area within American Indian history to sort of figure those kinds of things out. As well as the kind of work that everybody's been doing, either community-based kinds of stuff, and community collaborative kind of work where it's like, what do communities need? How can historians actually help meet those needs? So those kinds of things are really important. As well as the bigger views I think that many people are taking. I mean, I think not a coincidence that we've had three big, four big survey book, 600 page tomes, Ned Blackhawk who won the National Book Award. Pekka Hämäläinen Survey. Kathleen Duval book just came out of Margaret Jacobs. So people are writing big synthetic things that are trying to reimagine and reposition the history.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:01:49](#)):

And I see a kind of convergence too, at least in religious studies, a convergence with white evangelical racism, for example, the rise of Christian nationalism and how that connects to these larger questions of the foundations of the United States and other kind of colonial outposts. So I do think there are native academics working with some other non-natives around these more and more urgent issues.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:02:30](#)):

Well, I think this is the other direction. So maybe three directions.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:02:33](#)):

Oh, sorry. Sorry.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:02:33](#)):

For me... No, no, no, that's... I mean, the second direction would be the sort of studies direction, which is like now we've had Rutherford Falls and Reservation Dogs and a bunch of films, and it's always... I mean, my dad made this argument, other people have made this argument that Indians come and go on a cycle of about 20 years. And the question is whether in fact, we've reached the tipping point where native representation and native production is actually... I mean, before these things came out, these people all trained themselves making YouTube videos and things like that. They've seized the means of production, which now anyone can do. So is it a new world for thinking about native media, and is it

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then that world, part of a global indigenous world that sort of plays into the political formations of the last 50, 60 kinds of years? So I think there's a whole set of studies dimensions that take us into literature, art, media, all of these. So these things I think are right for a new generation of scholarship.

[\(01:03:28\)](#):

And then I'd say the third thing is the kind of the political situation of the now. Phil, so it's agreeing with you on this. It's like, when we think about climate change, when we think about fascism and kind of hard right authoritarianism, native studies, native history, native sociology, all of these things have always responded not only to the histories, but to the contemporary political moment in which we're in. And I think one of the things we're seeing here in Norway is the ways that the green economy, which we can sit in the US and celebrate wind turbines all we want, and we can see the ways that it completely is attacking Sámi people right and left across all of these Scandinavian countries. I mean, there's a kind of hard slap in the face for me hearing the accounts of what wind energy is doing here.

[\(01:04:19\)](#):

So this is one of these moments where it's like, okay, we got to deal with not just climate change in an abstract kind of way, but we got to deal with what the alternative economies look like, what the green economies look like, what nuclear waste disposal looks like for those who want to go down the nuclear path, what lithium mining looks like for those who are building batteries. All of these different kinds of... And then I think on the political side, there is a real question about what our field has to say to the kind of hard right turns that everybody is making.

Philip P. Arnold [\(01:04:53\)](#):

Exactly. And it's more than just Playing Indian. I mean, it's that indigenous peoples are a real practical resource for a future if we're to have a future.

Philip J. Deloria [\(01:05:13\)](#):

If we were to go back to the Doctrine of Discovery and think about the ways that it makes its way into American politics through Johnson v. M'Intosh, the Cherokee cases, these things. I mean, what you can see is... I mean, I think of it this way. Indian folks show up in the Constitution as separate individual tribal nations. They're written into the Constitution literally to be excluded from the Constitution. You get to the Cherokee cases, which are weird. I mean, we-

Philip P. Arnold [\(01:05:43\)](#):

They are very weird.

Philip J. Deloria [\(01:05:44\)](#):

... should just admit how weird they are. Right?

Philip P. Arnold [\(01:05:46\)](#):

Marshall saw that they were weird too.

Philip J. Deloria [\(01:05:49\)](#):

Yeah. I mean, they all saw, Joseph Story saw how weird they were. Everybody on that court was like, "What are we doing?" But they were also quite willing to invent new narratives. "Oh, they're all nomadic. They never own property. They're all roaming around." They invented stuff.

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Philip P. Arnold ([01:05:59](#)):

They just made it up.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:06:00](#)):

They just made bullshit up, in the way that the Supreme Court kind of always does. So you've got the first case, which really is the foundation for American property law. Then you got the second case-

Philip P. Arnold ([01:06:00](#)):

That's a big one.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:06:12](#)):

... which gives you domestic dependent nations. They're inside and they're outside. Maybe they're not, maybe we have a trust responsibility. Then you get the third case that basically goes back to the indigenous elements of the Constitution and says like, yeah, actually... So really you get this interesting trust sovereignty kind of theme that emerges out of those cases and then is developed over time as the United States exerts jurisdiction, forced citizenship, all of these kinds of things.

([01:06:40](#)):

But by the time you get to the present moment with that, and particularly coming out of the Red Power Movement, Indian Self-Determination, the sovereignty movements. I mean, you've got an utterly unique political formation. It's not like anywhere else in the world. It's not like anywhere else in our history. It's this intensely interesting political kind of structure that we look back oftentimes and lament at how crazy it is and how much it is wrapped up in domination. But I mean, I spent time in Taiwan and Australia, kind of other places, indigenous people around the world, they look over at the United States and like, damn, if I could have those treaties, if I could have that. Could I get a treaty? How could have that, could we... So I mean, it's also thinking about the ways that it is something, right? That we ought to kind of think about, like well, how do we actually lean into this, do more with it, think about how it actually structures American politics in ways that no American politician will readily admit.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:07:42](#)):

Use it.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:07:42](#)):

Like we've got a four-part, kind of federal, state, local and tribal.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:07:49](#)):

Or anti-Indian law.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:07:51](#)):

And we say this, and we say this... yeah, exactly.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:07:52](#)):

Anti-Indian, federal anti-Indian law. Except Onondaga, they don't fall under that federal Indian law case because they never violated the treaty, nothing was held in trust for them. They never accepted any

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money from the federal government. That's why your dad said the clearest line back to the original relationship with the US was through Onondaga.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:08:18](#)):

And they have no BIA government.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:08:19](#)):

No BIA government.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:08:21](#)):

They meet with presidents and dignitaries all the time, but they're recognized.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:08:26](#)):

And whether that can serve as a model for how to get back to this.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:08:26](#)):

People, I think other people have asked.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:08:30](#)):

I mean, Oren explained how they stayed out of keeping the BIA out of there because it was the churches and the different territories that were talking to their parishioners to vote in this BIA government. Because "traditional," in quotes, those air quotes, we were talking about that, the practitioners of this culture didn't vote because it was a foreign government coming into their territories. So Onondaga also heard about this election going up to vote in the BIA government. And for the first time, the traditional people went knocking on each other's doors, getting those churches and voted down. And so that's how they kept the BIA out of Onondaga. And then other territories across the nation, it was voted in, the BIA governments were voted in through those churches. And after the fact, many nations said, "We don't want it. We should have done what you did. How do we get it back?" And the US said, "Too late, you voted us in."

Philip J. Deloria ([01:09:35](#)):

Yeah.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:09:36](#)):

So then, yeah.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:09:38](#)):

Well, I think the variation across Indian country, the sort of... And given all the troubles and hardships that are still present. I mean, the stuff that is happening in Indian country is interesting, and it's in many cases, revolutionary and radical. And it's interesting from a political kind of perspective. And if we're going to imagine the sort of dissolution of the United States in some kind of weird way, then we got to be thinking, how do we reimagine what happens next? What does that look like? I don't know. I am not a political scientist. I don't think hard about this stuff. It's not exactly my jam. But it feels to me like this is one of those places where we're thinking about the future of Native studies. We need to do some kind of good, hard thinking. And people are doing it, doing it right now about what the future looks like.

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Sandy Bigtree ([01:10:27](#)):

But this federal Indian law category is a real problem because if you're of the government, then how do you have treaties? How are you sovereign if you are a compartment under the United States, federal state, federal law.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:10:43](#)):

I mean, that's the dilemma here.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:10:45](#)):

That came later. That's not how this country was formed. First international treaties were between Indian nations and the US and only Congress had to ratify any kind of land transaction or trade among states throughout the country.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:11:00](#)):

That's the dilemma that the Sámi have here because they're essentially wards of whatever nation [inaudible 01:11:09]-

Sandy Bigtree ([01:11:11](#)):

Well, the referred wards of the US as well in the United States.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:11:14](#)):

But the sovereignty issue then becomes a slippery one to some degree. To what degree are you under the United States [inaudible 01:11:25]-

Sandy Bigtree ([01:11:25](#)):

If they can work at every stage trying to assimilate Indian nations into context of the United States. Can we go in reverse and separate from the US, why does it always have to move towards assimilation?

Philip J. Deloria ([01:11:39](#)):

But you could argue really that, I mean the sovereignty movements of the last decades have actually moved further away from worship and more towards-

Sandy Bigtree ([01:11:39](#)):

I hope so, right?

Philip J. Deloria ([01:11:49](#)):

So I think this is why it's just an interesting moment. I mean, the story of the 19th century is the extension of American jurisdiction, citizenship claims, all of these sorts of things. And I mean, what's interesting to me in the American context is usually the extension of citizenship is-

Philip P. Arnold ([01:11:49](#)):

A good thing.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:12:08](#)):

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Right. This is what every immigrant wants. It's what the African-American Movement was about across. But in fact, for native people, it's actually quite a different thing. And it's the extension of surveillance, dominance, control, those kinds of things. But that's part of our history and it's right there. And there's a few folks who managed to evade it perhaps, but most people not. But the extension of sovereignty within a trust relationship is this interesting. It's a really interesting thing. And I think far too, Americans don't know anything about it. Haven't thought about it. I mean, I see this with, you are at your kid's soccer match and you get these parents who are like, can I build a casino in my backyard?" It's like, "Oh my God, no."

Philip P. Arnold ([01:12:54](#)):

No.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:12:54](#)):

Yeah. Have you any idea of why that was.

Philip J. Deloria ([01:12:56](#)):

Right. And then of course they think that's a funny question. So it's like it tells us exactly how much educating there is to be done out there before we could even imagine some [inaudible 01:13:06] into futures.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:13:07](#)):

Onondaga [foreign language 01:13:09] went to the World courts in Geneva in 1923 to protest the violation. The US violating all the treaties among Indian nations. It was the very next year the US bestowed citizenship on Native Nations.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:13:28](#)):

Coincidence?

Sandy Bigtree ([01:13:29](#)):

Really?

Philip J. Deloria ([01:13:32](#)):

Right. Well, and Canada was the evildoer in that whole exchange. I mean, the Canadians... this is the other thing that's so interesting to me is, and we've seen this now with the boarding school kind of revelations, is people for so long have sat in the US and thought, oh, Canada, they've got their act together. It's like, actually, not so much. Not so much.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:13:52](#)):

Yeah.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:13:53](#)):

We visited the Pope last year... not the Pope, the third line to the Pope.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:14:00](#)):

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[inaudible 01:14:00].

Sandy Bigtree ([01:14:01](#)):

[inaudible 01:14:01] and several other people individually talking about the doctrines of discovery. And they had made it, the Pope had traveled to Canada. That's why that came out of my mind. But we just asked them, "In the future, can you please come to Onondaga Nation territory? Because they're not Christian representatives, they're not Catholic. When you speak to Catholic Tribal leaders, you're kind of talking to yourself and we really need to move forward on all of this stuff. So we're watching you."

Philip P. Arnold ([01:14:38](#)):

Yeah, risk management versus real progress.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:14:43](#)):

Because we dealt with at the Skä•noñh Center, when they were... before the Skä•noñh Center, when it was a French Fort, the county was hiring Catholic Mohawks to give all the tours. And during that period of time, they wanted the [foreign language 01:14:56] to be canonized. So they're all on board with the Jesuit story. And I went in there and said, but this is not Onondaga Nation territory. I mean, it is not Mohawk territory. You're on Onondaga Nation territory. You can go west to Oroville where the shrine is there. And slowly they kind of moved out. I felt I could say that and I did. But yeah, so it was pretty difficult breaking down that foothold the county had on that place, telling that erroneous story. It didn't even happen.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:15:31](#)):

Yeah. So all these yellow buses would come into the fort, they'd learn about the Jesuit story and all that. That's Sandy's childhood. People come, we still have the fort. It's still behind the Skä•noñh Center. In fact, we had a papal bull burning ceremony there once in 2018 that was very interesting because they did that at Standing Rock, and I thought, let's bring that guy out here. But now young kids are coming to the Skä•noñh Center, so they're learning a different kind of way of thinking apart from that kind of colonial story that they were learning before. So actually, we're pretty proud of the fact that we were able to make... It's a county facility, and so it's county backed, Onondaga Nation is helping out with [inaudible 01:16:30]-

Sandy Bigtree ([01:16:29](#)):

Yeah. Right where the Great Law of Peace was founded at this lake. So it's not little.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:16:37](#)):

I think people are making different kinds of moves, and I remain hopeful in spite of the fact-

Sandy Bigtree ([01:16:38](#)):

Right. It takes a continent.

Philip P. Arnold ([01:16:51](#)):

In spite of the fact that it seems to be oftentimes in the news moving in the wrong direction, but whatever. Let's draw this to a close. I want to thank you again, Philip, for sitting here and being our guest on Mapping the Doctrine of Discovery.

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Philip J. Deloria ([01:17:10](#)):

It was my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Sandy Bigtree ([01:17:12](#)):

Thank you. Hope to see you again soon.

Jordan Loewen-Colón ([01:17:16](#)):

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. If you like this episode, please check out our website and make sure to subscribe.