

The Routledge Companion to Decolonizing Art History



Edited by Tatiana Flores, Florencia San Martín,
and Charlene Villaseñor Black

WHERE'S DECOLONIZATION? THE OHKETEAU CULTURAL CENTER, INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY, AND ARTS INSTITUTIONS

*Rhonda Anderson and Larry Spotted Crow Mann, with
Jonathan P. Eburne, Stacy Klein, and Carlos Uriona*

What follows is a conversation, not an essay. This chapter began as an invitation from the editors, which we honor as an opportunity for collaboration and reciprocity. The ensuing conversation continues in this spirit.

As Rhonda Anderson notes below, over the past several years many cultural organizations have published statements about their commitment to antiracism and decolonization. But what does this mean? Where does the work of decolonization take place, and what forms does it take? As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang wrote pointedly in 2012, decolonization is not a metaphor.¹ Nor is it a theme, or even a topic. What does it mean to loosen the grip of white supremacy, to dismantle what Stephanie Morningstar elsewhere refers to as the “crystalline structure of settler colonialism” throughout Native and other BIPOC lives? What does it mean to dismantle this crystalline structure throughout the institutional, material, and epistemological foundations of cultural work, in art history as throughout the education system at large?²

What follows is a co-authored exchange that addresses such questions by documenting a concrete, site-specific instance of collaborative institutional decolonization (Figure 12.1).³ Native artists Rhonda Anderson (Inupiat-Athabaskan) and Larry Spotted Crow Mann (Nipmuc) discuss the processes of organizing and community-building that have resulted in the formation of the Ohketeau Cultural Center, a Native-run arts and education organization in Western Massachusetts.⁴ First envisioned in 2017, the center’s mission is to provide a safe, rewarding, and enriching experience for the Indigenous community of the region. Ohketeau has already sponsored a robust series of programs, including artist residencies and a series of colloquia on “The Living Presence of Our History” (in collaboration with Double Edge Theatre), in addition to classes and workshops that include tanning, herbalism and medicine, weaving, and other traditional practices.



Figure 12.1 "The Living Presence of Our History—Part VI: A Conversation with Indigenous Artists Making Art for Social Change." September 19, 2021, Ohketeau Cultural Centre/Double Edge Theatre. Photograph by Travis Coe © Ohketeau Cultural Center.

Our claim in the ensuing conversation is that the work of "decolonizing art history"—and of decolonization more broadly—involves more than a shift in the objects and methods of aesthetic contemplation, or in the visibility of BIPOC artists and scholars. While noting the growing recognition of the wide-scale looting, destruction, devaluation, and appropriation of art objects, human lives, and extractive resources that have characterized the past four centuries of colonial modernity, the authors stress the urgency of creating and sustaining new sites for Indigenous people, as well as Black and Brown people, to survive and thrive creatively, spiritually, culturally, and materially. It is a question not only of *how* to create such sites, but also of *where*: As Mana puts it, "where are we going to serve the people, the Indigenous people, the Black and Brown people? Contemporary institutions don't meet their needs. And they never have." Dismantling settler colonialism and cultural erasure demands generative practices of autonomization, reclamation, and healing, in order to build or rebuild infrastructures for material and cultural thriving.¹

The Ohketeau Cultural Center is an effort to meet such needs on a local, organizational level. Its formation emerged through a series of conversations as well as a significant expenditure of time and labor. The process of founding a cultural organization such as Ohketeau thus offers a significant dialectical complement to the process of dismantling colonial and racist infrastructures throughout the world. Such a process does not take place in isolation. The artists involved in Ohketeau developed the organization in dialogue with the non-Native artists of Double Edge Theatre, who have served as partners—accomplices rather than allies—in Anderson's and Mann's endeavor to found an autonomous, Native-run cultural center in rural Massachusetts.²

Founded in Boston in 1982, Double Edge Theatre relocated in 1994 to a former dairy farm in the village of Ashfield, Massachusetts, USA, where the artist-run ensemble has been training, performing, and managing the farm ever since. The Ohketeau Cultural Center was founded in 2017 when Double Edge gifted a renovated nineteenth-century barn facility to Ohketeau. Ohketeau also has access to housing and facilities at Double Edge, along with a land share of the entire 110-acre Farm Center.

The village of Ashfield, where both organizations are located, is the homeland of the Nipmuc Tribal People, who have been stewards of this territory for over 12,000 years; the Nipmuc territory also borders the neighboring and closely allied Pocumtuck, and the adjacent present-day Indigenous Nations surrounding the region: Massachusetts and Wampanoag to the East; the Mohegan, Narragansett, Schaghticoke, and Pequot to the South; Mohican and Mohawk to the West; and Abenaki and Pennacooks to the North. The territory of the Nipmucs, which once stretched over 2,000 square miles, was forcefully taken from the tribe beginning in the early 1600s and continuing into the late 1800s. Today the Nipmuc Tribal land amounts to less than 30 acres.

The authors of this chapter are not art historians. One of us is a (white, settler) university-based scholar, whereas the others are artists and culture workers involved in the foundation and leadership of Ohketeau and Double Edge, respectively. This chapter addresses the project on which its principal co-authors have been collaborating since 2017, which seeks to decolonize the practice of art, and the organization of and access to cultural networks, at the institutional level. Together we are interested in gathering models of institutional autonomy for Indigenous artists and culture workers that can also provide examples for how white, settler organizations and individuals, as well as other BIPOC institutions, can take an active role in the decolonization process—albeit a necessarily partial, strategic, and contingent one. This means upholding the concrete demands of decolonization on the economic and administrative level. It thus also means attending to the minutiae of fundraising and organizing, the cultural demands of land access and cultural survival, and the stewardship of artistic labor. Reckoning with centuries of genocidal settler colonialism demands an engagement in and with the present, a vigilance that includes fending off “predators” intent on capitalizing on BIPOC cultural labor, as well as dismantling economies of prestige and self-interest that can be so readily mobilized to invisibilize such labor.

Rhonda Anderson: Larry and I have different stories about how the Ohketeau Cultural Center started. Here’s my version.

It was early 2017, and I was supporting Larry by attending his talk about being a Nipmuc Water Protector, as Nipmuc means “People of the freshwaters.” This was at the UMass Native Center, and I happened to sit next to Carlos, who was looking for Indigenous people to talk with about Double Edge Theatre’s town-wide Spectacle, which would take place that May. Stacy, Carlos, and the Double Edge team had tried to find information about Indigenous peoples in the area, and wanted to highlight this history in their Spectacle. They were told, “No, there were no Indigenous people here; there’s no one here now.” Essentially, the local Historical Society invisibilized entire communities.

I ended up talking with Carlos, who invited me to visit Double Edge, tour the facilities, and see if I could suggest other Native peoples, communities, and Tribal leaders who might assist with their Spectacle. Eventually, Stacy said, “Hey, we’re renovating this barn” and she threw out some ideas: “Maybe we could have a library, where people could come and read about Natives.” And I thought, maybe instead of a library, we could create a community center where Native people could come and just be.

There are Indigenous and NAIS centers in the region, just as there are Indigenous students at the colleges nearby. But it's all very institutionalized. I think the wider Native community has a tough time attending events at those places, even though they're open to the public. There is no space where Native people can just be Native people, where we can have our own gatherings, our own ceremonies, our own stories to tell, and not have an institution over our shoulders or an urban setting.

I grew up in the town next to Ashfield, and I went to school in Ashfield, and I felt like I was the only Native person there. I have always appreciated this area, and I wanted to see other Native people come and appreciate their traditional homelands, which I consider absolutely gorgeous. Being out on that land and reconnecting to the land is a meaningful way to reconnect to yourself. You have a better idea of who you are and how you connect to the world when you're in that natural place; you're not battered by all of this noise of modern society—cars, traffic, screens. You're more taken in by the natural environment and its circadian rhythms. I feel that this is a massive part of the ills in our community: not having access to the land, not having access to traditional medicines, not having access to safe spaces for ceremonies and gatherings.

We needed a safe space. And Stacy said, "Come look at this space." I had already seen the barns at Double Edge and saw the fantastic spaces that they've created from them. I could see ahead: this will be amazing. There were some introductions to various people from the Native community. Ideas took with some; with others it didn't work out. It ended up being Larry and me, and we make a good team. We have the same visions for the future, and for our communities.

Larry Spotted Crow Mann: Ohketeau is a Nipmuc word for "a place to grow," which is what is happening here; it's really living up to its name. We didn't envision Ohketeau as a cultural center at first. It blossomed into this place because there was such a need for it. And we're still learning, in the sense that this is all new. We're the first Native-run and operated cultural center in all of central and Western Massachusetts—but not for lack of trying. Native people have been fighting for self-determination since the landing of the Mayflower.

The obstacles are profound: institutional obstacles, the obstacles of racism and systematic colonization. There have been many impediments against uplifting each other in face of the ills within Native communities, and which prevent us from achieving what we need, because of the dysfunction that was brought down through trauma. This is what we try to address.

Stacy and Double Edge were the right people at the right time. I've been doing culture work all my life—three decades now—and we've seen so many allies. I could go on about people who were just there to be deceitful, people who come around to exploit us, to take advantage. So when we see allies coming, we usually expect the worst. That wasn't the case when I met the folks at Double Edge. I was hesitant at first, but then I went to one of their shows, *We the People* (2017), and I was blown away. I said, "I think these folks are for real. I'm going to stick around here a little bit." And they are for real. We would not be where we are today without their support, and that's the honest truth.

As Rhonda says—we've been friends for just about all our lives—we had the cultural knowledge, and we had the connections, but we just didn't have the support to make something like this materialize. That's a historic problem for all Native people out there trying to make it.

Rhonda: Stacy really opened the door for enabling access to our community, giving us access to a space that was so desperately needed. A big part of our success comes from Stacy's ability to see how difficult it is for Indigenous communities to have access to the land. We've been dispossessed and removed from our land—I say "we," but I'm from a

different Tribal Nation and culture. In Massachusetts, most of the Indigenous communities have been forcibly removed from their land and no longer have access to it. Land identity is an incredibly significant part of who we are. For most tribal nations, their names and their communities identify with the land they're on. This goes for most Indigenous communities on this continent: we're an integral part of the land, not separate beings apart from the land.

It was significant for Stacy to acknowledge this dispossession, and to understand that Double Edge had access to privileges not often seen in BIPOC communities, particularly Indigenous communities: notably, access to funding, access to philanthropy, and opportunities to take the reins of an organization and make it function properly.

I'm Iñupiaq-Athabascan, from Alaska. My enrollment village is Kaktovik, on the Beaufort Sea, area 1002 of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In the late 1960s, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed, and nearly 100 million acres were "returned" to Native people, plus hundreds of millions of dollars. Most of that money was invested in creating 13 regional organizations across the state of Alaska, the thirteenth being for "outside Indians." Basically what the government did is steal our land, give it back to us, provide us with money, and then say: "You subsistence hunter-gatherer people, you're now extractive industry businesspeople. Good luck!" Most of the organizations have failed.

Since 1971, I've been a class A shareholder of Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and its subsidiary, Kaktovik Iñupiaq Corporation. I belong to one of the most vital organizations; there are two that are pretty strong, and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation is one of the strongest because of the extractive industry. Many of the Tribal values of Indigenous people are community-oriented, subsistence-oriented, and land-oriented. We have traditional values that go against being business owners, especially in extractive industries.

That may not seem to explain a whole lot, but it does. Our traditional values as Indigenous peoples look to future generations and fly in the face of extractive colonization. We have a different rubric for running organizations. Our successes and our needs differ from non-Native organizations, so much so that failure is exceedingly common. We're grateful to Double Edge for stepping in and assisting us in applying for grants and talking with philanthropic organizations. That wouldn't usually happen. They recognized the need to decolonize the business side of things, and how to create reciprocity and relationship-building. When Stacy and Double Edge gave us access to their land, it was huge; we could access the land for traditional medicines, for ceremonies. I'm starting to get a little weepy thinking about it.

It's starting to happen more and more across the country, particularly in the conservation sector. Conservation was created not to conserve land but to conserve the culture of white people and white people's access to "unspoiled" land. More people should recognize that there needs to be decolonization of conservation and land access. This is Native land, and in conservation, the land usually doesn't go back to Native people. Native people, the stewards of this land since time immemorial, are still left out of the loop. Through the Land Back movement there is greater awareness that conservation needs to involve accessibility for Indigenous people to steward the land, to have land tenure, and be able to use traditional environmental knowledge, particularly now during climate change.

Stacy Klein: You are outlining more than Obketeau here; you're outlining what decolonization strategy needs to be—not only for arts and culture but also for business. It's good to have models that can be articulated and reproduced. An important point you mentioned had to do with infrastructure. One of the things we're seeing with foundations that are

actually doing real BIPOC work is that they're providing infrastructural support, rather than just saying "we're giving you a hundred thousand dollars, good luck." I think that's key.

Alan, the invisibility you spoke about is important to underscore a thousand times. We attended that meeting at UMass because we were told by our local Historical Society that there was never a Native presence in these lands. We're talking about one little historical society; imagine how many of those there are throughout the country, telling people that there was no native presence. There's a fundamental thing that needs to change.

The idea of reclaiming and rematriating land seems obvious, but it's really not. It's still thought of as ... wrong ... in most places, and you still have to convince people.

Larry: This is all so new. What we're doing now is going to shape the lives of those who are not even born yet. And it creates a model for other allies and Native communities to follow. That's what we're doing, and it's needed now in this time of arts and cultural equity initiatives. Why are all these institutions suddenly wanting Black and Brown people to be involved? They're looking at the demographics, and they're looking at their wallets. So where are we going to serve the people, the Indigenous people, the Black and Brown people? Contemporary institutions don't meet their needs, and they never have. Those needs need to be met, and the questions folks have been asking need to be answered. Ohketeau Cultural Center is getting overwhelming support because there's a need from the community itself.

It's an amazing phenomenon. I've written award-winning books and I've traveled to different parts of the world; that's all great, but this is far greater because it's something I never thought I'd see. And here I am right in the midst of it—using the experience Rhonda and I have accumulated over three decades to uplift other artists and bring them in. It also means knowing when to say "yes" and "no" as well, because there are always predators out there for Indigenous people and people of color, seeking to take advantage. We have to keep a keen eye on this. I, as a traditional person, tell stories and perform in front of many people, but it's a different world we're now seeing, getting money and saying the right things and using the right language. These are things you have to do, and which have historically kept our people out. Stacy and Carlos have a very keen business eye and an understanding of the business of art, and they help get us into those places where we need to be. And once we're there, people think, "Holy shit! These people are amazing. Where have we been?" Their embarrassment is levered by their belatedness. What took you so long? We're grateful, but there should be a sense of embarrassment on their part that it took 500 years to start saying, "you should be at the table, too." The gratefulness needs to be leavened by the understanding from funding institutions that they're not doing us any favors. We have the right to be here. This is our home. It always has been. They're the guests. They've been sitting at our kitchen table while we're in the basement. And we're finally opening the door.

It's been a crazy day. I'm hoarse. The kids are home, I'm a little sick. I'll stop there.

Carlos Uriona: I want to say something about your crazy day. That's another piece of the colonization game. I hope that we can discuss not only grants, but also daily life itself. It's very difficult, even for white people, to say, "I have an idea I want to pursue, but I need to negotiate these other entanglements." We are entrapped by a colonial daily life that enforces the paradigm that we are isolated individuals, separated from the land, the community, our ancestral lineage, and from what is divine and immanent.

"I need to make the coffee, I need to go to the office, I need to get a babysitter." To start imagining something else is very difficult. That's why it's so difficult to bring in people to be

partners. I think about this every day; that's my job here. I think every day about how we can bring in other Native people to work with Ohketeau, and how we can bring in people to work with Double Edge. I associate this difficulty with the issue of grants.

One thing I wish to add is that I don't want to be an ally. I want to be an accomplice. I want to be someone who steps in.

Larry: Once Rhonda and I realized that Ohketeau was going to be more than a place to hold ceremonies, but an active center for events, we recognized how important it was going to be for our community. We made a conscious decision: we volunteered our time, countless hours, day and night, all through the night. We may get an epiphany about something; we'll call Stacy; Stacy will call us, because she's up all night anyway; we'll talk to Carlos.

We willingly gave up hours and hours, and it's a sacrifice. As an artist I've always understood this, and I know Rhonda does too. Having said that, we can't go to a community that's impoverished and marginalized and expect Native artists simply to come and do what we're doing. They need to keep the lights on. They need childcare. They need food. They need gas in their cars. They need education. They need health care. None of these things are available to them in the way they should be. That is an incredible burden to put on them as they are trying to perform their art, while they have no one to watch their kids or can't keep their lights on. This is why funding is so crucial: for the proper remuneration for their work.

When Rhonda and I make that sacrifice, we see the bigger picture of what can be accomplished here. We're going to do it because we want to bring in other artists and help them reach that platform we've been able to have as artists. Like current artists-in-residence André Strongbearheart Gaines and Tomantha Sylvester, and so many other amazing young artists who are out there: the platform of Ohketeau is going to be a big lift for them. It's a great joy to offer that. But we need to be putting money in their pockets, too. We need to make sure they've got food, and they're not suffering from the expense.

That's something I've always taken notice of as a Native writer, when I had to fight to get my work out there because the Indigenous genre is considered a niche, and because as a Brown artist I wasn't given the respect and attention the work deserved. I had to fight and claw to get my voice out there. So now, I want to use this platform to put up others in that place. That's what Ohketeau is able to do. And yeah, it's also a way of sticking it to all the assholes.

Rhonda: We have an enormous number of issues we deal with daily as Indigenous communities, and most people don't see them. We're invisible to mainstream society. Through the "Living Presence" series, people have seen us internationally as well as locally. I would never have imagined that, but Stacy did. She pushed us to expand who we are and I'm grateful for that.

Larry: It's amazing to have these multi-faceted components of the Ohketeau Cultural Center. We're educating allies and accomplices and educators, and that's a powerful piece in itself. And then we're providing for our community, for their needs, whether it's information on COVID vaccines or substance abuse, cultural education, opportunities for creative arts, or places just to come and be and express themselves. That's just for them, with no outside interference or where they're coming to be a spectacle, but where they can just be a Native person and create and enjoy themselves in ceremony. We didn't really see that at first; we weren't planning that. As Rhonda said, that was Stacy's vision. We can't emphasize that enough; Stacy is really a special person to make that happen. When I read that article about the genesis of Double Edge, when they came to Ashfield and experienced anti-Semitism and it was very disturbing—you wonder, what's wrong with people?—Stacy

and others recognize what it's like to be treated as outcasts. Now we can tell the town, if you didn't like Jewish people, just wait till you see what's coming next!

Now they hear the drums, and they see Brown people driving around and in the stores. I want to give them some solace and let them know that these were the first people here, so take comfort in that. It's nothing new or strange. And it's only making the town better, bringing back that reconnection with the land, which it needs. It has been a beautiful thing, and for them as well. I think the town of Ashfield is really embracing it. When I go around town, for the most part everybody's nice, so it's really uplifting and enjoyable to go out there.

Jonathan: Rhonda brought up the importance of distinguishing Ohketeau from extractive corporations as well as and from institutions like colleges and nonprofit foundations. You've both invoked the daily work involved in the business of collective self-organizing. What does it mean not to be an Institution-with-a-capital-I in the sense Rhonda described, but still to do the work that those other institutions pride themselves on providing? What does it mean to do institutional work differently, and for Indigenous people and not just for white settlers?

Rhonda: I think it means unapologetically being who we are and laying it out in no uncertain terms: *this* is what we're dealing with, *this* is what we need to do. We need to decolonize, we need to refocus an Indigenous lens on our history and our contemporaneity, which will benefit everybody. Not just our Indigenous communities, but everybody.

It's been a struggle. We've been told flat-out: we're not funding you because you're an activist. We lost a grant because I'm an activist. And that's not okay, because as Indigenous people we are born into activism; we're constantly fighting for our most basic and fundamental human rights. We're unapologetically doing this work, and we're straight-up saying: this is what we need to do. I think there has been a more robust recognition, particularly after the murder of George Floyd. People are starting to ask: whose backs are we standing on; who are we suffocating just so that we can live as a society? I think that has been a turnaround. Hopefully, that woke movement will continue to sustain the fundamental work of social and racial justice.

It is challenging, and I know it has been a big problem for BIPOC organizations, and especially Indigenous organizations, to constantly fight for our basic human rights. To fight for our activism, to make sure that our land is here for our next seven generations. I mean, potable water! Water is a basic human right, no? To make sure that we don't have to go to school with a derogatory, racist mascot. All these things are microaggressions or macroaggressions that we're constantly fighting, and it gets to be too much after a while. It can be really challenging to fight for civil rights constantly.

We are unapologetic about what we're doing.

Larry: We're building pathways, because the colonial pathways weren't meant for us. They were designed to keep us out, and they're still doing that. In Ohketeau we're rebuilding these pathways, ways to get our people in, who have been historically been kept out. This means dealing with us in an Indigenous way, on different levels, to meet the needs of the community.

As they say: meet people where they are. Learn that you have to deal with Indigenous people. You have to go into the communities. You have to talk to the people. Other institutions don't have a history of doing this.

You can count on both hands and your feet and someone else's the white-led Native organizations that are doing "Indian work," but they don't have a grasp on the communities because they're not working for the communities. They're working for other organizations

and institutions, and that's usually where the money goes. Or it goes to an individual like myself, who is invited to come and perform, but my tribe still doesn't have the water, still doesn't have the land. This is the way it keeps you in perpetual slavery.

Ohketeau is changing that; it's about empowering ourselves. And it starts with building pathways, to redefine what it looks like to get opportunities.

Stacy: Foundations have their work cut out for them in trying to identify Native organizations, in order to represent a BIPOC cohort in their funding profile. They tend not to know much about Native organizations working on their own, because they're still really invisibilized on account of racism and genocide in their communities. And white people are afraid of the land back movement.

Rhonda: You're absolutely right. I have sat on panels for a state-run philanthropic organization that shall remain nameless. They are reinstating new policies system-wide in their organization to address systemic racism. Their policy was filled with glorious terms like "racial bias" and "social justice," "racism" and "antiracism"—"antiracism trainings," antiracism this and antiracism that. I looked at the policy and said: amazing! Where's decolonization? We're invisibilized in your policy. There's no mention whatsoever of Indigenous people; there's no mention whatsoever of decolonization. Because when you're looking at decolonization, you're looking at the very root of racism in this country. That was mind-blowing for the person leading the effort, who was a BIPOC person herself. They never thought of that.

We're slowly making changes by addressing the root of these issues. This means owning up to the fact that colonization isn't just historical; it's a contemporary thing that's happening today. We need to address this. We're making changes.

Larry: Speaking of making changes, it's much easier to have Rhonda or me or another Native artist come to an institution to speak or perform than it is to support Ohketeau becoming an institution unto itself, with its own agency, its own power. This is self-determination. Some see this as a threat. But this is the kind of change we're grasping, because one of the tenets of our teachings, as with most Native tribes, involves passing it on. If Rhonda and I can't pass on all these things we've done to the next generation, then it's not worth it. Ohketeau has the opportunity to do this.

I was honored to hold a residency this year at Bunker Hill Community College. They have partnered with Ohketeau to build a permanent Indigenous curriculum into the graduation requirements. This is not just talking about the Lakota or somebody far away; it's about the local tribal people; about the Native people taken to Deer Island, the land taken from the Nipmuc people, the battles that happened here, the Nipmuc men and other tribal people who served during the Civil War. This will be built right into the BHCC graduation curriculum, and also at Greenfield College and several other organizations who are working with us. We're becoming a hub for education, where they can redefine the terms of their education. As Rhonda said, that's where changes are going to happen: where we're educating future generations. In the classroom.

Rhonda: The education of colonialism begins in kindergarten, with the myth of Christopher Columbus and Thanksgiving. It snowballs from there. We're hoping to make changes on that level as well, which is challenging.

Speaking of myths, the Doctrine of Discovery is still being used against us as Indigenous people in the Supreme Court.⁷ Ruth Bader Ginsburg herself actually used it against Indigenous tribes as recently as 2005. These are things most people don't understand. Most people don't realize how many sovereign nations there are in the United States. There are over 570 sovereign nations here—individual, governmental countries. Most people have no idea.

I make a point of including three action items in every land acknowledgment I make.⁵ This is all tied into making changes. You don't want a land acknowledgment to be performative, to tick a box. Don't break your arm patting yourself on the back! You have to do the research. All the tribes in Massachusetts are easily researchable; in the age of internet access, there's no excuse to be ignorant. Contact somebody, an elected tribal representative, and ask them what is needed. Do you have needs, anything you would like allies to help you with? Of course there are. This is part of creating a relationship and making it reciprocal: not mining cultural nuggets but asking "what can I do to help you." That is the start of a relationship, the beginning of acknowledging that there are Indigenous people here and they are still struggling.

Of course, a land acknowledgment also acknowledges the land and how much she/it gives to you, and it makes sure there is caring for the land. But including action items gives people a place to begin a real relationship. Those action items are constantly being updated, and they're different for every area. But that's the job of making a land acknowledgment: to actually do that research, to reach out and ask what someone can do to lift Indigenous voices and communities.

Larry: It takes Indigenous people to help with these land acknowledgements, as Rhonda says. But people in these organizations also have to realize that when the land acknowledgements are read there are going to be some uncomfortable sentences, and usually it amounts to their culpability. The institution reading it needs to be accountable. It's not an abstract reading; there need to be terms in there about their role in genocide, in atrocities, segregation, redlining, and keeping Black and Brown people out of their organization for the last three or four centuries. If they don't account for that, then they're not doing their job. It's easy to say, "some bad things happened to Indians, and we're separating ourselves from that." No. The founders of your institution were usually part of it. That needs to be part of those land acknowledgements.

Rhonda: My town recently created a resolution, which I helped write. I used words like "intentional genocide," "cultural genocide," "dispossession," and "war." They came back and said, "we can't have these terms in our resolution, because it's too violent." And I'm thinking, well, that's the truth of it! That's why we're having this proclamation, to acknowledge this.

Stacy: You can't just make a land acknowledgement that uses other people's work because you couldn't bother to do your research. You have to actually listen, you have to change, and you have to offer something.

A major question for me is: what's the model for listening? Listening doesn't take a genius. What Oñketeau is doing to provide a space for listening and teaching is happening in a very kind way, in my opinion. I've learned so much in the last year and a half, just by listening. Once you start listening, you can do anything, and change will really happen. If you listen to Larry and Rhonda, you already want to go out and rip down some racist mascots.

Also, I've learned that some of these things, like offering land sharing, are really not that hard. People don't even use their land. They barely cut their grass! In western Mass, there are thousands of acres of land owned by private individuals that could be shared.

Rhonda: When I'm done giving a land acknowledgement, I always say: "Quyanaq Naol-agrigavsi." That means, "Thank you all for listening." I have a lot of gratitude for people who listen. It opens up your heart, it opens up your mind. You might not agree, but at least you're listening, and that's a big step in the right direction.

Larry: For those who don't know, the US has never publicly apologized for the genocide against Indigenous people. During the Obama administration there was a written apology buried on the 45th page of a Department of Defense paper; it was very brief, and at the end there was a disclaimer, saying that none of what was just said holds the United States to be bound by any laws or regulations or lawsuits. So that was that.

Notes

- 1 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
- 2 Stephanie Morningstar, "The Living Presence of Our History - Part III: Healing and Reparations Through The Land Back Movement: A Conversation on Indigenous Land Tenure and Access." Ohketeau Cultural Center, March 21, 2021. <https://www.ohketeau.org/living-presence-series>. See also Irvin Hunt, "This Bridge Called the System: An Interview with Stephanie Morningstar." *Dilettante Army* (Winter 2021). <https://dilettantearmy.com/articles/this-bridge-called-the-system>.
- 3 This conversation is transcribed and edited from a zoom discussion in late 2021.
- 4 See the Ohketeau Cultural Center website: <https://www.ohketeau.org/our-mission>
- 5 See Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- 6 See the Double Edge Theatre website: <https://doubleedgetheatre.org/>
- 7 On the Doctrine of Discovery, see the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007): <https://doctrineofdiscovery.org/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples/>
- 8 See <https://www.ohketeau.org/living-presence-series>.

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