# The Seneca Falls Dialogues

## Journal

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**Cover Image**

It is not the intelligent woman v. the ignorant woman; nor the white woman v. the black, the brown, and the red,—it is not even the cause of woman v. man. Nay, ‘tis woman’s strongest vindication for speaking the world needs to hear her voice. (121)

Anna Julia Cooper, 1892

Several events for the Seneca Falls Dialogues are held in the Wesleyan Chapel, the site of the Women’s Rights Convention of 1848. In 2016 we started to feel the tension between our gratitude for the accomplishments of well-known foremothers such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and our eventual acknowledgement of those left out of the Seneca Falls story. In the Chapel, during a celebratory collective recitation of The Declaration of Sentiments some of us stumbled over the line “he has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners” (Stanton), which exposes the prejudices evident in Stanton’s later speeches in which she advocated to prioritize ascertaining the vote for white women over black men and depicted immigration as “this incoming tide of ignorance, poverty and vice.” The passage of the 19th amendment did not enfranchise all women, as many women of color fell under Southern state discrimination practices.
that denied them access to civic voice. Conference organizers recognized the need to address these tensions directly, to acknowledge the sins of the past, to address the challenges of the present, and to work towards an inclusive vision of the future. The theme of the 2018 Dialogues, “Race and Intersecting Feminist Futures,” turned our attention to both the heightened racist rhetoric of our current political and cultural moment and the racist practices of many white suffragettes who met on this historic site.

To open the 2018 Dialogues and to set the tone for an inclusive and intersectional weekend, the performance group We All Write staged a reading in the Wesleyan Chapel. Self-described as a “consortium of dope black women thinkers, creators, healers and shapeshifters” (Graham), We All Write was founded by Tokeya C. Graham, Associate Professor of English at Monroe Community College. The group also includes: Reenah Oshun Golden, Founder/Creative Director of the Avenue Blackbox Theatre; marketing professional, Selena Fleming; founder of Roc Bottom poetry group, Lu Highsmith; and Kristen Gentry, Associate Professor of English at SUNY Geneseo. While Kristen was unable to attend the Seneca Falls performance, the other four members rocked the chapel with a multimedia performance featuring a stirring interplay of original prose and poetry and the images and words of African American suffragettes and freedom fighters, including Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Harriet Forten Purvis, Mararetta Forten, Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Daisy Elizabeth Adams, Anna Julia Cooper, Naomi Anderson, Elizabeth Piper Ensley, Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. Also quoted in the performance were

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activists, poets and truth tellers, including Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Maya Angelou, and Melissa Harris Perry.

Titled “When and Where We Enter: Black Women Writers + Intersectional Arts Activism,” the performance piece offered a conversation between the women on stage and the elders whose names and words they called forth. From the moment the performers stepped on stage, the feeling in the Chapel was electric. As members of the audience, we felt a seismic shift as four powerful women gave voice to those who had been previously excluded from this space. In an interview following this performance, we asked the members of We All Write to recount their preparation for and experience of this pivotal event at Seneca Falls.

Tokeya described the process of working with individual pieces and weaving them into a new piece that would resonate with the words and work of the foremothers. Each performer researched the lives of the women whose names they called because, as Tokeya explained, “as we’re saying their names with the call and response with the audience, we’re saying their names, but we also know who these people are; they’re not just random names. It’s important,” Tokeya continued, “that we inform ourselves about the lives of these people, so even when we are taking older pieces that we’ve written, and having a fresh look at them, and writing them together with us.” For her quotations, Lu explained, she chose Nikki Giovanni’s “If you don’t understand yourself you don’t understand anybody else” and Audre Lorde’s “When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed / but when we are silent / we are still afraid / So it is better to speak.” (Lorde 31) These words highlight concepts of self-knowledge and voice that resonated with Lu’s work, “I Be,” which she quickly decided to start with for the performance.

Kristen spoke of the pressure of “rising to the occasion and the level your sisters have set for you” and the pressure she puts on herself, but acknowledged that “it’s a good pressure to have.” This sense of community, with each other and with other black women writers is critical to the creative force of We All Write. As Kristen pointed out, she is surrounded by creative writers on her campus, but no other black women. “It means a lot,” she said, “to be able to come into a space with people who not only know what it means to be a writer, but to walk in the world as I do. And
that plays a huge factor in what I write, in what we all write and the lives that we live outside of the page.”

Moved by this astonishing and overdue voicing of women who have long been overlooked in the narrative of Seneca Falls, we asked about the experience of performing in the Wesleyan Chapel. Tokeya spoke of the welcoming feeling of the place and her recognition of being “in the presence of something bigger than ourselves.” She spoke of the need to fit the space and recalled the piece she performed about her grandmother who worked as a domestic: “it talks about the sentence of the broom speaking back; and I felt like we were in that space, honoring the names of these women that we had just learned, some of us more recently, in our education, because the school systems don’t really present it for us.” Lu described a similar sense of significance that hit when she set foot in the Chapel. “I felt simultaneously humbled and empowered,” Lu said. “Thinking of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells and so many other black suffragettes who worked tirelessly, many with no recognition or acknowledgement, caused me to feel proud to continue with speaking our truth. Then I was humbled to make sure that I am extending and stretching myself to ensure that their labor was not in vain.” Lu found the performance a “re-claiming of sorts,” in which We All Write changed the narrative by “claiming that space as ours too by speaking through our powerful voices and emanating our presence.” Recognizing the responsibility, the honor and the privilege of speaking the words of black suffragettes, Tokeya found that the audience disappeared for her. “I really was onstage with my sisters,” she recalled, “and we work so well with each other. It felt like we had done our eldresses some honor.”

For Reenah, her experience brought back memories of earlier trips to Seneca Falls, often taking all-girl groups on what she calls “the Day Trip through Women’s History.” The trip would include a visit to Harriet Tubman’s House among other sites, but Reenah spoke of sometimes skipping the chapel because “there is often so much omission of my people.” She recalled the challenge of “hearing myself and my people omitted” and how difficult that is, especially when bringing young people who look like you who might walk away from the trip and ask “well, what did I do?” To counter this answer, she would create a scavenger hunt at
the Women’s Hall of Fame to look for the black and Latina women “in addition to some of the ones that we know will be there” and she encourages these young girls “to take the time to go and look at their faces, their pictures, read about them, and leave knowing that we contributed, because we know what we did, but it’s not always archived.”

In contrast, Selena had not visited Seneca Falls before the performance. She did some research but wanted to feel the experience in a more organic way. She described the process of walking into the chapel: “I knew it was important for me to be there. And I knew that we were going to release something that had not been previously released before. And if it impacted no one else, it was going to have a profound impact on all of us. And in the end, as we watched people cry, as young women from all different backgrounds, especially those who looked at us, said ‘oh my God, thank you,’ I knew that we had done our work. And then many days later, when you could feel whatever the thing was that we were wrapped in, just kind of open up a little bit to give us the space to breathe, I could describe it as the skies opened, the sun shone, and there was a chorus of ancestors saying ‘thank you for the work. Thank you for calling our names. Thank you for giving us space. Thank you for saying the truth.’”

The title of We All Write’s performance alludes to Anna Julia Cooper’s quotation, “only the black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me” (Cooper 31). Tokeya explained that they chose Cooper’s words “to lead us and talk about entering, and when and where, and defining it, and really wanting people to understand that one of the dominant narratives about black women’s experiences in the United States is their right to pain, their right to trauma and tragedy, and we standing in opposition to that too; there’s a lot of power and joy.”

The tears shed among the audience bore witness to a transformation of place and story. We could feel the power and energy of the words, images and speakers and knew that We All Write had changed the Wesleyan Chapel and Seneca Falls forever. The dialogues that followed Friday’s performance worked to extend this transformative moment through presentations and conversations that examined the
exclusions and intersections of feminism within a wide range of topics. The essays in this volume contribute to that conversation.

The project of the Seneca Falls Dialogues is founded on hope in the face of continued discrimination and inequities, and the essays in this journal continue to move that agenda forward. We open the volume with activist and author KaeLyn Rich’s keynote talk, “We Marched. Now What?!: Positionality, Persistence, and Power as Catalysts for Change,” which she delivered to a packed room on Saturday evening. Rich’s words as spoken then and reproduced in text here inspire us to examine ways the dynamics of institutional power situate us individually and in feminist movements in order to garner the power needed to challenge inequities. “Doing the *: Performing the Radical in Antisexist and Antiracist Work” follows as a bridge to reify the activism that Rich describes in her talk. This student-and-faculty-authored essay weaves together a series of creative feminist manifestos that enact critiques to gender and racial inequalities.

Three essays center the volume, each teasing out themes of gender and racial justice as analyzed across a diverse range of disciplinary frameworks. “#BlackLivesMatter: Intersectionality, Violence, and Socially Transformative Art” interrogates the discourse around the language of oppression using an interdisciplinary examination of art as deployed in the protest movement #BlackLivesMatter. “Media and Social Media Best Practices for Feminist Activist Groups and Organizations” identifies best practices for feminist activist groups and organizations to help begin or improve their media relations efforts. “Entangled Visualizations to Craft Feminist Activism” discusses examples of how to craft feminist activism from dialogue to committed action as means to stop injustice and work toward intersectional justice.

We close the volume with, “Let’s Change the Subject: Grounding Social Change in Indigenous History and Philosophy.” This essay circles back to the ways we deploy activism to address inequalities rooted in identity and place. The author urges altering the discourse around social change as a means to create more peaceful activism and forge better allies to indigenous nations and peoples.
A call to action, linking past to present to future, best captures the breadth and scope of the essays in this volume. Taken together, the essays bring us back to Kaelyn Rich’s keynote and the We All Write performance. In describing the hard and sometimes uncomfortable work of feminist activism, Rich reminds us that we must use our positionality to speak for and amplify voices of those who are pushed to the margins. We All Write affirms the significance of positionality in our work, reminding us that as they performed the words of their foremothers, they had to let other women’s stories “sit on top of them;” they “had to wear their skin.” As a call to action, we must look closely at ourselves and each other as we come face-to-face with past racial and gender exclusions that continue to persist today. The essays in this volume affirm that we can do better. We must do better. We will. Inspired by the 2018 Seneca Falls Dialogue theme, “Race and Intersecting Feminist Futures,” join us in this important fight for equality. Quoting Rich, “You are the catalyst. It’s been you the whole time.”

Editors
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Can we agree that it’s already been a tough couple of years? For many folks, those already pushed to the margins in tangible, daily ways, it was already bad before November 2016. For all of us, I think, it feels even scarier today. The twenty-four-hour news cycle is playing like a movie reel on the inside of my eyelids at work and at home. A 24-hour Twitter and Facebook feed, scrolling-scrolling-scrolling-scrolling past mounting trauma—trauma as a result of this administration and trauma amplified and retriggered within our communities and movements. When you work in social justice or justice-adjacent fields, you can’t turn it off. When you’re a queer woman of color, you can’t turn it off. There is no safe space. There are safer spaces like this space we’ve created together here, but for people with multiple marginalized identities, even safer spaces are riddled with microaggressions and hypervisibility and respectability performance.

That’s why, when the first Women’s March happened in January 2017, I was intentionally on the sidelines. I chose that position. It’s also because I had an infant at home. I have done that grueling bus trip to D.C. many times, and I didn’t have it in me. Even at the sister march in Rochester, I took on the role of protest monitor and legal observer. It felt

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1 These remarks were delivered on October 20, 2018, at the Seneca Falls Dialogues Bi-annual Conference, Seneca Falls, New York.
better to be somewhat on the outside because, as much as I was inspired by the organizers of the Women’s March and the platform they had put together and the deeply collaborative process they went through to get there, I didn’t feel confident that everyone organizing and attending around the nation was truly understanding the intersectional lens at the core of the March, or truly intentionally thinking about their individual place in it. Here’s the part where I get really frank. I’m talking about white women.

Even here at this intersectionality-themed dinner, this beautiful and open space, I feel myself naturally hesitate to say those words because I see a lot of white women in front of me, and whether it’s rational or not, I’m still fearful that my words will cut you and you’ll stop listening to me, that you will react with defensiveness and anger, that you will mark me as negative or naïve. For me, an Asian woman, I worry about being silenced or discredited. For Black women, the ramifications of speaking truth can be even more dire and dangerous. For trans women and trans women of color, especially, there’s a fear that speaking up at all will result in banishment from a sisterhood that they’re fighting to even be allowed to claim. No one is actively “micro-aggressing” me right now, but in a room where I’m in the literal minority in several ways, I carry with me—I feel the impact of a history of microaggressions, gaslighting, and respectability politics without any person even saying a word to me.

Positionality is an epistemological tool of feminist standpoint theory. The basic premise is that each person enters research work with their own individually shaped experiences — both cultural and personal — and specific social, political, and cultural identities. This is your standpoint, your sense of your positionality in the work. In this way, standpoints are multifaceted and multidimensional rather than essentializing. I’ll say that again. Standpoints are multifaceted and multidimensional rather than essentializing. In other words, two people may share some common identities around gender, race, or class or even all three, but none could be defined solely by these attributes, and each has an individual standpoint unique from each other. Positionality is the unpacking-of and declaring-of and sometimes deconstruction of those identities we each hold.
In the context of research, it is making explicit that each researcher has implicit biases. In the context of academia and in the realm of activism, positionality is in direct conversation with intersectionality. If you’ve taken Dr. Barbara LeSavoy’s Feminist Research Methods class at SUNY Brockport, you’re familiar with Sandra Harding, American postcolonial theorist and philosopher and editor of the 2004 *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. Harding developed the concept of strong objectivity, the idea that starting research from the lives of real women and taking into account the positionality you bring to your research makes for stronger scientific objectivity than weak objectivity or what we’d typically call neutral objectivity. The issue, Harding suggests, is that weak or neutral objectivity is impossible. Every researcher brings their own biases and when we pretend that objectivity is neutral, we tend to privilege the voices of those who are already most likely to be trusted and supported in research, namely white, cisgender, heterosexual, currently abled, college educated men (127). Think back to your social sciences curriculum in high school or college. Whose so-called neutral scientific observations did you learn about?

In an activist context, we talk about the similar concept of checking our privilege and unpacking our privilege, the term “unpacking” made famous by Peggy McIntosh’s *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* published in 1989 in the Philly-based Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’s magazine. It’s since been used in trainings all over the world.

I want to note that I just named two white women, Sandra Harding and Peggy McIntosh. They’ve both achieved some success based on their work and their personal commitment to anti-racist frameworks and culture-shifting work inside and outside of institutions. All that said, it was Black women and women of color who brought these ideas to the front first, all the way back to the African-American suffragettes, the freedom fighters who would not and could not disentangle their race from suffrage rights, who were ultimately disenfranchised as many white suffragettes moved to court southern women after the passage of the 15th Amendment. They did this by insinuating that the best way to counter Black male votes was with women’s votes—white women’s votes.
For hundreds of years, Black women and women of color have spoken from their standpoint and developed their own theories and activist practices from womanism to the Combahee River Collective to the intersectional theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw. If there’s one thing I’ve learned from actively living “on the margins,” in the liminal space, it’s that many things are “both, and.” We live in a “both, and” world more than a binary world. Women have been marginalized by U.S. history that centers men and their accomplishments. Black women have been marginalized in women’s history that centers white narratives. Queer and transgender Black folks have been marginalized in Black women’s history. It’s all true.

Last night, Tokeya Graham, Reenah Golden, Selena Fleming, and Lu Highsmith of We All Write opened the Dialogues with a spoken word event. At one point towards the beginning, they asked us to gather in the Wesleyan Chapel, a room where the Declaration of Sentiments was signed and where Black women who were active and organized in abolition and suffrage movements were made invisible, to speak the names of Black freedom fighters. It felt like a blessing, a reconciling of sorts, to speak the name of Anna Julia Cooper, who wrote the first book analyzing the condition of blacks and women from a feminist perspective, A Voice from the South in 1892 (Gines); of Mary Church Terrell, the founding president of the National Association of Colored Women in 1895, an organization that fought for women’s suffrage, temperance, access to education, and also against lynching, Jim Crowism, and the sexual assault of African-American women (Michals; Knupfer); of Margaret Murray Washington, Ida Wells Barnett, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Josephine Silone Yates, just a few of many women who worked tirelessly, but did not get more than a footnote (if that) in history and who called for the lifting of women’s rights and Black rights in the same voice. It felt like a healing to honor the powerful work done in the Wesleyan Chapel by the attendees of the Seneca Falls Convention, while also declaring suffrage for Black women who fought alongside despite being discriminated against in the early women’s movement. It felt like a reclamation. It felt like taking power back. It can be both, and.

Positionality is the key to unlocking our power, both the power to do good and the power to do harm. I recently published my first book, Girls
Resist!: A Guide to Activism, Leadership, and Starting a Revolution. It’s a handbook for young adult readers on how to “do” activism and organizing with a feminist lens. I’ve been doing workshops about the book around the country. One of the hallmarks of that workshop is an activity that’s written into the first chapter of the book, an exercise called “Who Has Power?” (19). The idea for this activity came from a workshop I put together for Girls Rock! Rochester several years ago. I was tasked with doing an organizing workshop for young kids and teens, ages eight through sixteen. I wanted to do it justice, but I was also like, “How do I teach these topics in an age-appropriate way to little kids in a way that’s really meaningful?” I consulted with my mom, who is a retired first grade teacher, who suggested something tactile and visual, and ultimately came up with this activity.

In the book version, there’s a pretty, full-page illustration that’s a picture of a bunch of people all in a grid, kind of like that Guess Who? game. Remember that game? Like Guess Who?, the picture is just of people’s heads. There’s a white man in a suit, a brown-skinned women in a suit, a woman wearing hijab and perfect cat-eye eyeliner, a person wearing an androgynous shirt with short hair and lipstick, a Black baby girl, a woman in construction gear, a Black man in a suit, an older Black woman, and a young white boy. I present these pictures to look at and the following prompt without any additional context, “Looking at these pictures, decide who has the most power and who has the least power.”

Much like Guess Who?, (which eventually came under fire for its lack of diversity in race and gender of the available characters—it’s since been updated) (Alexander), playing this game reveals implicit biases we all have. Almost every single camper picked the same people. The middle-aged white man in the suit has the most power. The Black baby girl has the least power. Remember these are kids as young as eight years old. We then use this activity to discuss institutional, systemic power. Who has the power? Who is without power? How do you know this? What did you think about when deciding who has power? We talk about discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, immigration status, skin color, age, ability, gender expression, and more. We unpack implicit
bias, the hard-to-unlearn biases we all carry based on what we've been taught and exposed to that inform our unconscious decisions every day.

What amazes me about doing this program with youth is that they get it. The very first time I did this activity, at the first-ever Girls Rock! Rochester camp in 2012, I used a crude Google image search and printed off about twenty images of visually different types of people and asked the girls to put them into order from least to most power. Similarly, the white man in the suit came out at the top (surprise, surprise) and the Black baby came out at the bottom. Honestly, I was kind of flying by the seat of my pants facilitating this activity the first time. One very young girl, maybe 9-years-old, spoke up and said something that changed my own understanding of power and how to teach others about power. She said, “Miss, the baby has the least power, but if the baby cries, a grown-up has to come and pick it up.” If the baby cries, a grown-up has to come and pick it up. Mind. Blown. I tell this story now whenever I facilitate the workshop and then I lead into a whole thing about grassroots organizing and how that’s what it’s all about—banding our collective voices together, combining our cries together until those with the most institutional power have to listen to us.

From the mouths of babes, quite literally, folx! I’ve been thinking lately about how women and femmes are infantilized by those with power, how we’re treated like children or nuisances even though those in power are the most fragile and whiny and self-absorbed. I’d like to propose that we start organizing “cry-ins” where we go to our legislators’ offices or homes or, I dunno, the White House, and just cry and cry and cry, unapologetically ugly beautiful crying until we flood the patriarchy with our tears. Persistence crying. Resistance crying.

After watching Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony, I really felt like a cry-in could be a real thing, like we might just flood the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court with our collective tears. And through my own tears, I also reflected on how intersectionality comes into play in our movement. In other words, if we’re gonna’ cry for Dr. Ford, we’ve gotta also pay back those tears that Dr. Anita Hill did not hear when she sat before Congress in 1991. Look, we didn’t have Twitter and livestreams and whatnot, I get it. But the fact remains that she sat alone and everyone who did cry tears
for her sat alone, too. Both, and. I’ve been seeing this graphic going around with Dr. Ford at the center, facing forward and Dr. Hill slightly behind her, facing sideways so we see her in profile (image by Animashaun and Reynolds).

I’ve been wondering, who made this? What is the standpoint of the person who made this? Was it a white woman? Why couldn’t this image just as well have had them standing side-to-side or back-to-back, equals, or with Anita in front, since she was the trailblazer. Positionality matters, both in understanding the ways we are marginalized and the ways we can become the oppressor, even with the best intentions.

Understanding power, both how institutional power works and how it situates us individually in our movements, is essential to understanding how we build power to challenge inequity. We are going through a transformation as a country right now or, rather, those who haven’t felt so closely under attack are suddenly feeling attacked. Quite frankly, the days after the November 2016 election were heavy for me. As they were for many. For some of my friends, though, particularly Black and trans friends, it was just another crappy day in a country that refuses them healthcare, employment, housing, and dignity every damn day. I think that, because those of us who have a lot of systemic advantages, like myself, were suddenly threatened in a very personal way by this sexist, racist, rapist administration, we woke up.

No social scientist has backed me up on this, but I’m going to declare right here that I believe radical empathy is happening right now. For the first time, seriously powerful white men are being held accountable for sexual harassment and sexual assault, because other white men are finally believing white women. It’s not every man, but it’s a start and it’s about time. That said, even with the #MeToo movement, there have been missteps. October 15th was the one-year anniversary of #MeToo going fully viral thanks to a tweet by actress Alyssa Milano. The actual founder of the #MeToo campaign twenty years ago, Tarana Burke, tweeted on October 15th:

A year ago today I thought my world was falling apart. I woke up to find out that the hashtag #metoo [sic] had gone viral and I
didn't see any of the work I laid out over the previous decade attached to it. I thought for sure I would be erased from a thing I worked so hard to build.

I remember calling my friends frantic and trying to figure out what to do. I didn't know whether to go online and say - THIS ALREADY EXISTS! Or to just let it go, but then I realized letting it go wasn't an option in this moment.

Enter - the Sisters. Black women who knew my work and supported me over the years raised up in arms... They activated a network and the support came from everywhere.

I didn't know that @Alyssa_Milano sent out the first tweet until the following day. And that is when she found out about @MeTooMVMT and reached out to me. She tweeted an apology and posted our website and asked how she could amplify our work.

The most interesting thing happened over the next 24 hours. I posted a video of me giving a speech about #metoo [sic] from 2014 and that went viral. And then people began to get confused - had "white hollywood" tried to steal this from a Black woman??

The short answer, No. But I was definitely in danger of being erased if YOU ALL Black women and our allies and friends, didn't speak up. But something else happened too. I watched for hours that first day as more and more stories poured out across social media from survivors.

One story in particular hit me hard. It was a woman's story or (sic) being assaulted on her college campus and it resonated so deeply with me. I was on the one hand fielding calls from my girls like "whatchu wanna do??" they were ready for a fight to make sure I wasn't erased.

On the other hand - I was watching thousands of survivors pour their hearts out across social media with no container to process, no support and no one really helping to walk them through disclosure or uplift the power of community for survivors.

My work has always centered Black and Brown women and girls. And it always will - but at the heart of it all it supports ALL survivors of sexual violence. And I committed to that work a long time ago so watching people open up with what felt like no covering online was hard.
The whole time I was fretting about saving my work and I didn't realize that 'my work' was happening right in front of me.

I have wondered a lot this year why God chose to give me this platform and why I was trusted to shoulder this responsibility and every time I ask the question the answer shows up in a different way. I am not questioning anymore I am just grateful.

Thank you to everyone who has shown me so much love and support this year. I hope that I represent and stand for survivors of sexual violence in a way that makes you proud. Please know that our work is never ending. In fact its (sic) just beginning (@TaranaBurke).

Our work is never ending as activists and especially as feminists who are living in a critical moment. Now is the time to speak boldly from our standpoint and to use our understanding of our positionality to amplify the voices of those whose standpoint is more directly impacted than ours. The Women’s March, for me, was about people banding together and seeing the humanity in each other. It was also an act of radical empathy and an affirmation that our struggles are tied together. As Audre Lorde said, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own” (132). It was also an opportunity to perform intersectional feminist ally-ship without taking any real risks in doing so for many white women. It was both, and, and all of those truths have meaning.

As an activist, I’m about to say something sort of controversial about protest marches. They don’t work. By that I mean they don’t work to make change directly.

My first march was a Take Back the Night march, a march in solidarity with the national movement to end violence against women, at SUNY Oswego in 2000. I was an undergraduate. Full disclosure, I went for extra credit. That march was maybe two hundred people and confined to our campus sidewalks near the residence halls. It didn’t change rape culture profoundly. I doubt it even changed the minds of fellow students who were likely going to commit sexual assault that very same weekend who may have heard us through their dorm window or came across our
posters on the bulletin boards. It didn’t change the campus administration’s treatment of sexual assault cases through judicial affairs.

What it did was build power, in me. I joined the Women’s Center. A year later, I became the director of the Women’s Center. I changed my second major to Women’s Studies. I went to more marches. I became a community organizer. I chose a career in advocacy and organizing. I wrote *Girls Resist*. I went on a whole different life path because of that Take Back the Night march. I met people through that path who changed my whole life and woke up my sense of justice, the one that was already there ready to rebel.

The Women’s March itself is a symbol. It’s what your position in relation to activism is in this moment. It’s a symbol of the need for feminist intersectionality right now and the power of strong objectivity that you possess right now to change...everything.

We’re going to do the uncomfortable work. That’s what real persistence looks like. It’s not marching over and over again, though we should do that too. It’s about persisting through the discomfort of not knowing, or messing up, or harming and not letting ourselves get lost in our own guilt or defensiveness. It about using our positionality to speak our truth and to honor the truths of others by amplifying voices of those who are pushed to the margins when we’re not. It’s about living into an idea that we can contain multitudes, that our movements can contain multitudes, that things can be “both, and” and that there isn’t one right way to do this work.

We can use our persistence and our power to open doors for others, without speaking for them or without them, without taking credit when we help. We won’t abuse our power by assuming we know what those we stand in solidarity with need or want. We can use our power to respond to the needs identified by those affected and marginalized. We can give money directly to people who are impacted, without making judgments about their lives. We can remember our power when making hiring decisions, when making leadership decisions, when we have a seat at a table and others don’t, when we have the opportunity to give someone else a platform offered to us first. We need to listen before we act and act in
ways that put ourselves on the line. We need to do the risky work of being vulnerable and being wrong sometimes.

This is the catalyst. It’s you. It’s been in you the whole time. The power to harm. The power to help. The power to speak and say the things that feel scary to say. The power to listen and hear the things that feel scary to hear. The power to reclaim our histories and build better, more inclusive ones together. The power to do better and demand better. You are the catalyst. It’s been you the whole time.

**Works Cited**


@TaranaBurke. “A Year Ago Today I Thought My World was Falling Apart.” *Twitter*, 15 Oct. 2018, 7:22 a.m., twitter.com/taranaburke/status/1051840689477246978.
The essay summarizes excerpts from the 6th Biennial Seneca Falls Dialogue’s (SFD) session of the same title. In this dialogue, students read, displayed, or performed excerpts from feminist manifestos that they authored in a feminist theory or women and gender studies course at The College at Brockport. The manifesto assignment asked students to select a contemporary feminist issue, and using text or text with performance, expose and analyze the issue drawing from the Combahee River Collective Statement and Trans *: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability. Prompted by the 6th Biennial SFD theme, “Race and Intersecting Feminist Futures,” we selected the Combahee River Collective Statement and Trans * as our main theoretical frame because of the ways these writings disrupt white heteronormativity and the ways that they integrate an intersectional lens as means to critique gender and racial inequalities.

As a map to the essay, we provide a brief synopsis of the Combahee River Collective Statement and Trans *, followed by the SFD manifestos. The manifestos problematize identity as gendered (April), question the sexualization of girls and women (Whitehorne), critique commodification

1 In Trans *: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability (2018), Jack Halberstam theorizes the * as a multi-sided projectile that signifies movement across identities. While not a universal symbol for Trans identity, we use Halberstam’s * as he applies it to Trans identity as a way to explain gender fluidity. We discuss the * and its context to our essay in subsequent paragraphs.
of women’s bodies (Mohamed), and interrogate the intersection of race and
gender (Pickett). We close the essay with a video link to Pickett’s manifesto
dance, which, in its antiracist/antisexist narrative, draws inspiration from
Black feminist thinkers Audre Lorde and The Combahee River Collective
authors. As an intersectional bridge, this dance circles back to Halberstam
who, inspired by the gender bending artistry and identities of David Bowie
and Prince, introduces Trans * with the proposal: “Let’s Dance” (xiii).

Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability

Tong and Botts define the radical in radical feminist thought as disrupting
or tearing up the roots to systems of inequality (39-71). In contrast to
liberal feminist movements that deploy reform-based approaches to
equality—women gaining civic voice through suffrage as a classic
example—radical feminism seeks to eradicate the origin sites that breed
inequality practices. Liberation, as opposed to reformation, is the radical
feminist goal.

In the radical feminism of Trans *, Halberstam seeks to disrupt
heteronormative thinking that links sex and gender as a rigid, binary,
man as masculine and woman as feminine, system. In this disruption,
Halberstam also seeks to move our gaze away from the Trans body as the
site of gender variance. Drawing from Laura Marks’ Touch (2002),
Halberstam theorizes the haptic as a multi-sided projectile that signifies
movement across identities where bodies hold multiple and changing
identity parameters that surpass the visual and corporal signals under
which social categories of identity originate. Reimagining the Trans body,
Halberstam deploys the haptic to symbolize the affective dimensions of
identity formation where using a sense of touch, for example, signifies
sensory ways to know and create our social and physical realities. As
Halberstam explains, “The haptic body and the haptic self are not known
in advance but improvised over and over on behalf of a willful and freeing
sense of bewilderment” (92). The word “bewilderment’ shifts the meaning
of to “be lost” and “confound” into to “be wild” and “free,” liberating us from
binary identity classifications that society places on Trans bodies. In
freeing the Trans body then from the institutionalized naming and coding
of identity, we free ourselves from the restrictions that society constructs around naming and codifying all identities. The authors of this piece press Halbertsam’s *Trans* thinking forward in feminist manifestos that take the form of essays with video, poetry, and dance as they argue for a body politic that proscribes gender rigidity. April uses essay and video to tease out how, in girlhood, “we put too much pressure on the ones we are supposed to guide and encourage.” In poetry, Whitehorne argues for bodies that resist directives for “what parts of you deserve to be on display,” and Kamal-Mohamed describes ways a Mattel Barbie doll must “sculpt her tits.” And in movement, Picket performs a dance that she choreographed where she qualifies identity “as freeing, wide.” In all four examples, the manifesto writers disrupt gendering, each pushing back against binary systems of power and dominance that privilege white, cis, male consumption.

For Halberstam then, rather than looking at whose gender is variable, often read and coded as trans and deviant and whose gender is fixed, often read and coded as cis and normative; we instead should explore how gender changes across all bodies. Thematic to our SFD manifestos, the *Trans* Halberstam pioneers seek to sense gender identity as fluid movement projected across multiple settings, to recognize gender identity as performed by multiple bodies, and to reimagine and discover gender identity in the unexpected. In this radically conceived site for the gender haptic, Halberstam argues that trans identity is not a destination placed on gender variant bodies but rather that gender variance is a multifaceted phenomenon which all bodies enact.

**THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT**

Staying close to radical disruption as a feminist liberation platform, the Combahee River Collective is reflective of a group of Black radical feminists who began meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1974 to rally around issues of racist, classist, and sexist exclusion. While representative of a larger collective of black women, Black feminist lesbians Demita Frazier, Beverly Smith, and Barbara Smith are the Statement’s primary authors. In the *Combahee River Collective Statement*, the authors theorize
tenets of intersectionality years before legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw named intersectionality as such: a power-over phenomenon where societal oppressions synergize when multiple categories of marginalized identities intersect. Using an intersectional lens, the Combahee authors write about their experiences as Black and lesbian at a time when the 1970s liberal feminist movement for sexual equality largely catered to white, middle class, cis, straight women. The Collective tied their 1970s black feminist resistance to the 1863 Combahee River Raid where Harriet Tubman helped free more than 750 slaves.

In the *Combahee River Collective Statement*, the authors operationalize the phrase “identity politics,” where they challenge racism and sexism common to the wider U.S. feminist movement. Analogous to Halberstam’s haptic project to disrupt oppressions rooted in gender, the Combahee River Collective authors sought to eradicate racist, classist, and sexist repressions that capitalism, western imperialism, and white heteropatriarchal ideologies manufacture. Penned in 1977 but arguably words that many women of color could have spoken yesterday, the Combahee River Collective authors affirm:

*We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see our particular task the development integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (15)*

Disillusioned with second wave feminism that excluded the experiences of black, lesbian, lower socioeconomic women in their activist agendas — the National Organization of Women (NOW), as one example — the Combahee River Collective argued for a new platform to reconcile interlocking racial, sexual, heterosexual, and classist oppressions.

*The Combahee River Collective Statement* paved the way for grassroots organizing among people of color who face racism and sexism. And the Collective was revolutionary in this regard, although, until recently, largely overlooked for their feminist contributions, both in being
the first to cast out and define “identity politics” as a radical feminist construct, and to launch “consciousness-raising” activism that tackled these identity politics in ways that named interlocking systems of oppressions that grow out of sex, gender, sexuality, class, and racial inequality practices. Pickett’s SFD manifesto dance, where she uses masking tape to draw boxes on her dance floor, with the tape representing the racist and sexist restrictions society places on brown and black women’s bodies, and her choreography, where she dances in and outside these tape boxes, represents the intersectional identity politics that The Combahee River Collective Statement engenders. Pickett chose tape as part of her choreography, explaining, “even though it sticks, it is easy to remove. Tape is something that can be reshaped and disposed of.” In this way, Pickett’s dance captures ways society too easily throws away the oppressions marginalized groups experience. Complementing her Combahee River Collective interpretation, Pickett adds black feminist lesbian poet Audre Lorde to her analysis, performing her dance not only as an act of resistance to racist and classist exclusions prominent to feminist movements, but in the bridge building spirit of Lorde’s poetry and writing, as a tool to step within and across our feminist differences. That feminist bridge, if we were to construct one, could not be more vital today as sexism and racism fester within and around surging white nationalist ideals. Demita Frazier, one of the Combahee River Collective authors, sanctions the enduring importance in The Combahee River Collective Statement, where it serves as a lens to past exclusions and as a reminder that Black women still are not free (29).

**Manifestos**

Students who wrote on or spoke their SFD manifestos posed the following thinking questions: How might voice and bodies enact or perform antiracist and antisexist work? What does intersectional, radical gender equality work look like in future feminist praxis? And how can we break free from a western grammar of bodies so we create embodiment that sometimes falls apart or unmake bodies into new sites for embodiment? Using The Combahee River Collective Statement and Trans*: A Quick and
Quirky Account of Gender Variability, the manifestos that follow link “intersectional feminist resistance” with “transfeminism” to do and undo classifications of sex, gender, race, and other social categories of identity.

“Growing Up Girl” by Mackenzie April

To me, a manifesto could be anything that brings your unique intellect to light while bringing forward an issue that’s important to you through any form of communication. A dance, a poem, an art piece, etc. are all forms of expression with a goal of educating in an accessible, emotional way. In my Feminist Theory class, we were encouraged to create a unique piece to share with our peers that brought a feminist issue to the table while incorporating the thinkers we studied over the semester. For my manifesto, I was able to bring together two things I thoroughly enjoy to make a strong feminist art piece that I could share with my classmates and eventually, Seneca Falls Dialogues goers. These two things were filmmaking and girl studies.

My piece “Growing Up Girl” is a short film dedicated to acknowledging the lives of girls from different backgrounds. Ideally, I would have interviewed girls between the ages of 8-12, but for this project I decided to take advantage of my role as a Resident Assistant on campus in a freshman dorm. Not only was I able to really sit down and get to know the unique backgrounds of a handful of my residents who identify as women, but I had a chance to slow down and get first-hand testimonials from people who lived the real thing.

Girlhood is weird. If there were a thesis I drew from the making of my manifesto, it would be that we put too much pressure on the ones we are supposed to guide and encourage. We put too much pressure on and hurt our future too much. Girls are expected to act womanly and feminine at a young age while also having to hold back their emotions and vulnerability to fit in with the popular crowd. Acceptance is the bare minimum that girls should be given, but in reality, it’s something we all had to work for. On the other hand, boys are encouraged to go outside and play. To be active. To be crazy, loud, or the popular class clown. That is not to say that boys aren’t put under pressure, because they are; but when
it comes down to it, oppression of young girls—especially through girl-girl interaction, dress codes and overall societal expectations—is much more evident.

A big part of my interview research focused on girl groups and drama in middle and elementary school. One consistent remembrance of growing up among my interviewees was the competitiveness felt while interacting with their girl classmates. For example, one of my interviewees mentioned feeling pressured to get her first period before her friends to seem more mature and thus above the others in some intangible way. Another one mentioned how competitive dating was in middle school and the shame they’d feel—as a punishment for that competition—for having their first kiss.

Reflection on my own childhood was pretty essential in this process, since it brought to the table some memories that I had made sure to bury growing up. The message in my manifesto is not to say that being a girl sucks, or that boys need to be punished. But if there’s anything we can draw from it, it’s that being attentive to the stories of girls is important if we’re going to make any radical change for them. Radical change for women must start with radical change for girls, to make sure they grow up feeling empowered (whatever that means to them), valued and never alone.

Here is the link to “Growing Up Girl”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoPMTWJEKu4&feature=youtu.be

“Manifesto for the Young Girl I Was” by Angelica Whitehome

Never miss another pool party because you forgot to shave some abstract part of your body.  
Don’t let anyone tell you what parts of you deserve to be on display.  
breasts but not the forests that grow under your armpits.

Don’t talk only about shaving your legs  
because it is normalized  
by those odd women in the ads  
with shower caps  
who shave already smooth limbs with bladeless razors.
Call out the bullshit of photoshop even if you aren’t supposed to curse
become a bullshit detective and make the entire media portrayal of
femininity your crime case.
Who said freckles were beautiful and acne was not?

Don’t forget to tell your body that a beating heart is the only attribute it
needs to survive.
Never stop growing to be shorter than your prom date
grow to 6 feet tall
grow taller
under the fertilizer of all these compliments—

But more importantly with the knowledge
of your immaterial greatness, your unempirical importance.

Reject reliance on the ever-shifting world around you, on all your favorite
beauty brands
and all your favorite friends
only your own fortitude
can be counted on forever.

Don’t let these glimpses of tragic days become lifetimes of
tragedies,
Sun comes and rain comes and sun will come again.

Remember stubborn is even more of a compliment when given as an
insult,
Be an ox in all of your beliefs.

If you find something is wrong, never think you are too young or too
quiet or too small to fix it, you can fix it.
And most importantly make your own truth, never trust a manifesto
“Dear Mattel Employees” by Jasmine Kamal-Mohamed

Don’t fret over blueprints;
She’s already pre-planned.
She’ll look the way she always has;
Her plastic cold and bland.

We’ll start with her feet,
Pointed and shaped
To fit every high heel
Without her toes being taped.

From slim ankles we scale
To legs luxurious and long
That no real girl has,
So no real girl belongs.

Her hips must be just wide enough
To form an hourglass,
But her stomach just flat enough
So no air can pass.

Finally, you sculpt her tits:
The only things with fat.
Make them perky but with no nipples,
Because no child should be exposed to that.

Lastly is her face:
Symmetrical, painted,
And a head of hair so heavy and long
She certainly should have fainted.

Now, you have your Barbie Doll
Who can’t stand up by herself.
So, lean her against Brad or Ken
Or against a dusty shelf.
“Combahee River Collective and Audre Lorde: Representation of Tape as Intersectionality and Re-bridging Marginalized Groups” by Kendra Pickett

Dance is a form of expression and voice. It is powerful and can get a message across without the use of words or sentences to build an explanation. Many feminist thinkers expressed themselves through songs, poems, writing, speeches, and as an individual and within communities. Audre Lorde was a feminist, womanist, librarian, writer, poet, and civil rights activist. She was interested in bridging marginalized groups. Instead of finding a sense of unity between these groups, she urged awareness and acceptance of differences. This is what she believed laid down the foundation and directs these groups.

The Combahee River Collective was a black feminist lesbian organization that took off in Boston from 1974 to 1980. This collective was founded and created by Barbara Smith, Beverley Smith, and Demita Frazier. This group focused on bringing peoples’ attention to how the white feminist movement did not address needs that included everyone. These women made sure not to shame black women but to lift them up. They acknowledged how some black women have the tools for opportunity. This collective also brought up intersectionality and the simultaneous oppression black women face every day.

Audre Lorde and The Combahee River Collective both brought up intersectionality and the negativity that marginalized groups encounter. The dance I created was built from a place of passion similar to the passion these influential Combahee River Collective individuals exhibited in their writing and activist work. I chose to use tape as part of my dance choreography as a way to symbolize intersectionality and the way simultaneous oppressions create limitations and struggles for many individuals. I chose tape because even though it sticks, it is easy to remove. Tape is something that can be reshaped and disposed of. The oppression these marginalized groups struggle with is permanent but also something society can throw away.

I created the dance stage in my house, specifically my bedroom. I chose this setting. I wanted it to feel very personal and for myself to be
exposed. I wanted to leave my desk in the room because it was an object that was supported. I wanted my desk to symbolize the core of beliefs, perspectives, and opinions of individuals and marginalized groups. I knew I wanted the dance to start by me “walking” out from the camera, as if the viewer could be in my shoes or a part of the dance. I also wanted to include me laying down the tape, ripping it off, re-bridging the tape to the camera, and in the end, getting rid of it all.

My dance movements needed to be different when performed inside the tape compared to when I tore off the tape. I made my movement in the tape in a small kinespshere and close to my body. Once the tape (oppression) was removed, I wanted my movement to be described as freeing, wide, and big. Dance has much more to it than just the movement. I hope the connections I made with Audre Lorde and The Combahee River Collective impact viewers and readers of my work.

In the spirit of the Combahee River Collective and Halberstam’s Trans *, “Let’s dance” (15).

Link to “Combahee River Collective and Audre Lorde: Representation of Tape as Intersectionality and Re-bridging Marginalized Groups”:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ao0d8pn2s_Ysox5VHVrk01yrCLViOKhE/view?ts=5c534597

WORKS CITED


This paper is designed to elicit dialogue on the impact of the #Blacklivesmatter (BLM) movement and be a call to action in the wake of murder and sustained oppression of the Black body in America. The paper focuses on the intersectionality of the BLM movement using art, “racial” analysis, creative pedagogy, and the theatre of the oppressed. Included is a monologue of a mother whose child has been murdered by a “peace officer” that leads the audience on an emotional journey. In addition, sobering statistics of documented murders of Black transgender women are presented, as are the health effects of discrimination. The language of oppression and its use in the media are explored, as is a discussion of socially transformative art. Finally, recommendations are made to continue to use art and theatre as tools to raise awareness of injustice and to promote social resistance.

In 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson formed an 11-member Presidential advisory commission to investigate the causes of race riots across America. A year later the Kerner Report was issued - a warning to the American people - with its most quoted passage, “Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal” (1). Now, 41 years later, we are still relying on the marginalized to remind us how we have collectively failed at creating an equitable society.

Today in America, racial parity doesn’t exist where it matters. Congress doesn’t have the same racial diversity as our population. The
majority of characters in film and television and the majority owners of American media are white. Neither is pursuant to the racial distribution of the American population, and the equality narrative continues to be inaccurate. Postmodern philosopher and social theorist Michael Foucault introduced social constructionist theories widely adopted by activists. He noted that both language and practice influence society, public opinion, and collective understanding. In addition, the power that the speaker wields correlates to the measure of influence both implicit and explicit (Burr). Contextually, it is clear just how a population without representational parity could perpetuate an incorrect equality narrative: without even knowing it.

Oppression takes many forms and has many representations. At its core oppression is always about power – who is bestowed with power, who is denied power, and the continuous struggle to balance power. The U.S. culture is theoretically grounded in the language of universality and the concept of equality. Its practical cultures, though, are rich in the traditional and historical language of oppression. These power relationships are found in the language of war and conflict, economics and poverty, the discourse around religion, culture and ethnicity, gender roles, social alienation, immigration, and political extremism. The discourse around the language of oppression has been limited to the sociology and linguistics literatures. We applied it in our interdisciplinary examination of art and the intersectionality of perpetuated marginalization of Americans in the protest movement #BlackLivesMatter.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement has grown into an emotional, sensationalized, event-driven, divisive social construct. The need for parity is found in demographics that clearly show disparity in representation spanning all areas of American society. The demographics alone fuel the need for the marginalized to speak up and demand they be heard. Web 2.0 provided access to an entirely new platform on which to challenge this narrative: the simple, inevitable hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has served as the largest collective modern challenge to the false societal narrative of progress and equality. The movement began with Alicia Garza, who in 2014 summarized the need for the movement by saying, “When black people get free, everybody gets free.”
While counter protesters have attempted to drown out the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter by using the hashtag #AllLivesMatter, it has been claimed that the former has been used up to eight times more than the latter (Anderson). The widespread use of social media gives artists and activists the ability to meet the idealism of perceived equality. Through art, theater and storytelling, we seek to examine disparity and identify implicit bias to shine a light on the intersectionality of oppression in America since the highly publicized killing of unarmed black American teenager Trayvon Martin in 2013. It was his senseless murder that spawned the new civil rights movement #BlackLivesMatter.

The killing of unarmed black teens in America in general has drawn attention to the inaccurate equity narrative of crime. However, according to the FBI, the majority of crimes are still committed by whites in America, closely pursuant to their population distribution overall. And still, unarmed white teens live, unlike Trayvon Martin and so many others. The demographics are irrefutable. The 2018 Census report the United States is 76.6% white and 13.4% black or African American (see fig. 1). Overall, 69% white and 27.4% black or African American committed crimes in 2018 (Arrests).

- Notable offenses committed by Whites in 2018 closely pursuant to population distribution are Arson 71%, Vandalism 67.6%, Driving under the influence 81.2%, Rape 68.1%, Burglary 68.1, Larceny-theft 67%, Drug abuse violations 70.6%, and Sex offences (except rape and prostitution) 72.1%.
- Notable offences in 2018 NOT closely pursuant to population distribution of whites/black or African Americans: Murder 44.1% / 53.3%, Robbery 43.5% / 54.2%, Weapons Carrying 54.4% / 43.3%, Prostitution 55.0% / 38.8%, Gambling 40.6% / 48.6%.
1. **The Power of Story Through Monologue**

Because #BlackLivesMatter, Evonne Fields-Gould wrote the following monologue, “*Can There be Justice for TJ?*” to be read to an audience¹.

*(There is a CHAIR on stage. VIVIAN sits in the chair and sets her purse on the floor by her chair. She pauses, looking at her hands. She looks up at nothing in particular. Vivian then begins to tell her story).*

He was born three months early. The doctors didn’t think he would live through the day. I kissed his tiny head and cradled his

¹ Printed in entirety with permission of Evonne Fields-Gould, cherokeerose24@yahoo.com.
hand in mine. I sang “This Little Light of Mine” to him. I continued to hold him and sing to him for more than twenty-four hours. To everyone’s surprise, little TJ began to improve. I believe, to this day, that the loving care I gave TJ allowed him to beat the odds. I know deep in my heart he felt that love, which gave him the will to live.

When TJ finally came home, there were still many challenges we had to overcome. He had to be monitored around the clock, for six months. When we thought we had cleared that hurdle, at the age of two, TJ had developed chronic asthma. I had to spring into action to give him a treatment to prevent a full-blown asthma attack. He fought every day for each breath he took. He couldn’t play outside. I know in my heart, he felt isolated and alone. But he kept a smile on his face despite his illness, and he made the best out of his situation. My heart ached for my son. But to our surprise, when he turned ten, the asthma was gone. Life became easier for our family. What a blessing. TJ was a fighter and I knew he would live a long and happy life.

My son grew up to be a strong, healthy, young man who was on his way to college. The first in our family to do so. On the day he left for college, he told me, “Mama, I’m going to make you proud of me, and when I graduate, I will take care [of] you and Little Man. I love you, Mama.”

He wanted to become a lawyer, so he could fight for those who couldn’t fight for themselves. These are the less privileged people in our society. He always said he wanted to be an example to others, to have a positive outlook on the future, and to show how one can make a difference in the world.

Little did I know, TJ had only four months to live. He was coming home for winter break. I was in the kitchen, making his favorite meal, when I heard a voice say loudly, “Get out of the vehicle! Get out now!” I wasn’t sure what was going on outside. Then I heard TJ’s voice respond in a loud, agitated tone, “I didn’t do nothing, man! I’m just pulling into my driveway! What’s up?!” My heart skipped a beat. I stopped what I was doing and started to make my way to the front door. I heard a man say, “I told you to get out!” I heard TJ say, “Okay, man, okay... at least let me turn off the car.” The other man said, “Put your hands on the car!”
Then, a few seconds later, the sound of gunshots rang out. When I opened the door, I felt like I was moving in slow motion. To my horror, I saw my son lying on the curb. At that moment, it felt like a bad dream. I wanted to wake up, but I couldn’t. That boy lying there wasn’t my child. I couldn’t process what I was seeing. The cop--That cop was standing over TJ with his gun pointed at him, telling him to get up. I don’t know if he realized that TJ was dead. I didn’t want to believe it was TJ lying there.

As my mind cleared, I realized my baby had been shot. I so desperately wanted him to get up from the ground. But he didn’t. Adrenaline rushed through my body as I ran toward TJ. The cop pointed his gun at me, telling me to get back in the house. I screamed at him and told him that was my son he shot, and I have to go to him. But he continued to shout at me. I was a few feet away from TJ when someone pulled me back. I fought wildly to free myself.

I heard a voice saying, “Do you want to get shot, too? It will be okay, Vivian; come on let’s get back in the house, please.” The words meant nothing to me. I wanted to hold my son; to sing to him, “This Little Light of Mine,” and to heal him back to life, but I knew he was gone. There were four bloody holes in his back. His right arm was outstretched, and next to his hand laid his cell phone and keys. That cop said he thought it was a gun. I remember seeing his blood seeping from his body, turning the white snow a crimson red and flowing along the curb.

My son’s lifeblood was now nothing but waste debris being washed away with the dirty snow and street garbage. I will never forget what I saw... my baby’s lifeless eyes staring at nothing. Those once bright, intelligent, smiling eyes, gone forever, along with his soul. Gone. And you know what? That cop walked away free.

And what was TJ doing to make these cops want to follow him home like a criminal? Nothing. The cop’s report said he was playing his car radio too loud and ran a stop sign. But I know that wasn’t true, because TJ wasn’t that kind of person. He was a person who would obey the law. If I made the smallest driving violation, he would correct me without delay. That was the kind of person he was.
(Vivian takes a bottle of liquor from her purse.)

You see this bottle? This is what I use to medicate myself at night. I sit in the kitchen all alone and try to drink away my pain. But this only adds fuel to the fire-storm that is going on in my home. My husband couldn’t handle TJ’s death and my drinking, so he left. Little Man, who was once a sweet child, now has no supervision because of my drinking. He’s beginning to act-out... hanging out with the wrong group of kids. I know it’s because of TJ’s death. He hates every cop he sees. TJ would be ashamed of me if he knew I had neglected Little Man. TJ loved him so much. My heart aches knowing that one day Little Man might become another statistic added to the list of young, black males killed by the cops.

I might have destroyed what was left of my family; I know I have to get help. But there’s no help for me because my heart is broken forever. It can never be fixed. I will never recover from what I saw that day... the dead stare in my baby’s eyes, the blood around his body. I died that day also. There isn’t a parent on this earth who could get over the murder of their child. A death resulting from the meaningless, insensitive killings by some of the so-called protectors of our communities. Can this issue be solved? When will there be justice for black lives, transgender lives, immigrant lives, innocent victims of enslavement, the oppressed people of the world, for all lives who have been unjustly and violently taken... murdered.

What can we do? What can I do?

(LIGHTS FADE.)

End of Play.

Evonne Fields-Gould has shared the underrepresented voice of “TJ’s mother” through her monologue “Can There be Justice for TJ.” Retrieving voice for the silenced, forgotten, and erased in the mainstream history is the core of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), a community-based theatre pedagogy and methodology introduced and developed by Augusto Boal (1931-2009) (Brown). Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1931, Boal served as a theatre director in Brazil until his arrest in 1971. He believed that one can use theatre as a weapon to fight for social injustice and oppression.
His theatre was considered a “threat” by the military government for its advocacy for their free thinking and expression. Boal was imprisoned and tortured for many years (Plastow 296).

After his released in 1971, Boal was exiled to Argentina where he further developed his theatre pedagogy and training for self-awareness, self-identification, and self-expression with both theatre practitioners and those who have never participated in theatre. One of the most powerful practices of TO is its challenge of the traditionally passive role of the audience. TO expects audience involvement in each theatre piece as “active participants” to create, through a theatre project, an “educational tool for bringing about social and political change” (Ball 79).

TO pieces address social and political problems and challenges that people face. The topics can be culled from newspapers. Prior to his arrest, Boal was using Newspaper Theatre in which a group of performers creates a theatre piece using a news article from a newspaper (or any other written materials). In one of Boal’s theatre forms, Forum Theatre, an audience member is invited by the master of ceremonies (The Joker) to participate in the performance as an actor (who becomes a spect-actor) to change the course of the narrative. For example, if the play is about a police shooting of a 12-year old African American boy who is playing with a toy gun in the park, the spect-actor might be asked to play the role of the police officer to change the course so that the result would end without violence.

TO has another form of theatre called Legislative Theatre, in which the participant examines a specific problem in society and proposes a law to solve the problem. During the process, the spect-actor stops the discussion to guide participants to see multiple aspects—both pros and cons—of the proposed solution (law) as well as other people’s points of view. At the end of Legislative Theatre, the participants have a proposal they can actually bring to the legislatures. By using “Can There Be Justice for TJ,” the TO participants may discuss a law to protect innocent citizens regardless of their race and ethnicity.

Using the theatre to bring self and community awareness and to galvanize people to social and political action is not a new idea or phenomena. La Donna Forsgren, who examined the connection between the black student union For Members Only and Black Folk’s Theatre at
Northwestern University in the early 1970s, played an important role to galvanize students to action through the staging of leading Black Arts Movement playwrights (Forsgren 303). More recent TO projects include those at the University of Missouri as well as Kansas State University’s Ebony Theatre after the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson. Both theatre groups use active dialogues with “spect-actors” to discuss both short-term and long-term solutions to end racially motivated oppression and violence. These are just a few examples of the incorporation of TO in #BlackLivesMatter.

2. **The Language of Oppression**

The language of oppression is often implicit – it is so deeply ingrained in the U.S. culture that its meaning and effect can go unnoticed. Semantic and linguistic methods and technologies have allowed formal study of the language of oppression. These methods and technologies allow for characterization of the use of oppressive language objectively and quantitatively. This is a significant advance over our historical subjective, qualitative and manual methods. It can now demonstrate how language conveys meaning and reinforces power relationships through its use of common myths, taboos, idioms, clichés, narratives, scenarios, euphemisms, metaphors, allusions and generalizations. It can also now be explained how linguistic patterns and grammar are used to represent the expected roles and actions of the powerful and the powerless. Descriptions of how names are used to differentiate the powerful and powerless – through the power to name, to deny or to simplify one’s name are possible. Language is used to define and reinforce identity – ideal and undesirable identities, inherence, stereotypes, and group characteristics. Finally, language is used to render visible or invisible “others” and to establish distance between individuals. This concept is apparent in the application of framing theory (Entman, 2001) and mass media’s influence on public opinion. Mass media provides for a constructed narrative that once in place is nearly impossible to correct.

3. **Framing and Mass Media**
In 1978, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) pledged to achieve parity in American newsrooms by better aligning reporting staff with the diverse American population by the year 2000. After that deadline passed, a new one was set for 2025 without explanation as to why twenty-two years was not enough time (Guskin).

While representation by way of ownership has had some diversity, the overall lack of diversity in U.S. newsrooms (see fig. 2) and in film and television (see fig. 3) continues to have an impact on the equity narrative.

Fig. 2. Laura C. Fong. Source: Frissell, et al. “Missed Deadline: The Delayed Promise of Newsroom Diversity.” Voices, Asian American Journalists Association, 27 Jul. 2017, voices.aaja.org/index/2017/7/25/missed-deadlines
Fig. 3. Laura C. Fong. Source: “Women of Color in the United States.” Catalyst, 7 Nov. 2018, www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-color-united-states-0.
and on public opinion of news (Lutz). Implicit bias and lack of representation are to blame. The Creative Artists Agency’s Motion Picture Diversity Index confirms that the more inclusive a film is, the more money it makes. For the most recent proof of this, one can just look at *Black Panther*, which in its first two weeks of release earned more than $763 million worldwide. As the American movie going public becomes more diverse, it is imperative that its entertainment reflect its changing demographics. Finding diverse talent might appear to be challenging, but the real challenge lies in seeking out talent outside of traditional networks. Awards recognition will follow when such opportunities are afforded (Reign).

In 1996, the Telecom Act was the beginning of the end for black-owned and black-formatted radio stations. Backed by President Clinton, the Telecom Act lifted ownership limits and, under the guise of promoting competition in the communications market, ushered in a new era of corporate ownership and deregulation, allowing huge companies to acquire stations across the country. As a result, local programming, news, music, and voices have been systematically homogenized (see fig. 4). Six years after the Telecommunications Act went into effect, Clear Channel and Cumulus owned two-thirds of the country’s radio stations. Clear Channel owned thirty times more stations than congressional regulation previously allowed (Corcoran). While consistent data has not been maintained, the *Report on Ownership of Commercial Broadcast Stations* provides a point of reference (5). In 2013, whites owned 1,070 full power commercial television stations (77.2 percent); racial minorities in total owned 41 (3%); Black or African Americans owned a mere nine stations (0.6%). The remaining 275 stations (20%), having no majority interest, are likely predominantly white-owned as well.

While lack of representation doesn’t directly equal racism, it calls to light unexamined prejudice and implicit bias in the majority: those identifying as white. The challenge is that these individuals may not think they have a problem. In many cases, without these educated, well-intentioned reporters, there would be no gatekeepers willing and able to open a dialogue in newsrooms. However, when they fail to examine their own biases, all progress is stalled (Dulai). Implicit bias is unconscious and
beyond control and awareness. It informs perceptions of a social group, and it can influence decision making and behavior toward the target of the bias. Individuals can be consciously committed to equality and work deliberately to behave without prejudice, yet still possess negative prejudices or stereotypes. This is what we see reflected in the mass media, in social media news feeds, and in entertainment. Ultimately, this implicit bias is perpetuated. Most commonly found in the content analysis of mass media coverage, the implicit bias is found in word choice and language that identifies a person’s race and tends to humanize whites and dehumanize persons of color.

Also, of note, is how the amount of empathy towards the subject of a news story correlates with their skin color (Johnson). For example,
photos chosen to accompany news stories are more flattering for whites, and less flattering for persons of color. When it comes to describing subjects of color, there is a lack of focus on the positive aspects of their lives, and a focus on the negative even when the subject is the victim. Racial stereotypes are disguised as humor, and more discrediting than crediting of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Weir). The other clear bias often overlooked is the reinforcement coming from Hollywood wherein persons of color are largely underrepresented. Systemic marginalization does not just apply to persons of color; it applies also to women and transgender individuals.

4. #TransLifeMatters

The #BlackLivesMatter movement (BLM) has been inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals since its inception, emphasizing how multiple systems of oppression intersect and reinforce one another to further marginalize vulnerable groups (Herstory). The demographic statistics are sobering for transgender individuals in particular, with one in five homeless at some time in their lives and many living in poverty due to hiring discrimination that leaves them jobless. Homeless shelters are often sex segregated, and many transgender individuals cannot stay there or are mis-gendered, which may put their health and safety at risk (“Issues: Housing & Homelessness”). Nearly “every two days a person is killed somewhere in the world for expressing gender non-conformity” (“Helen Clark”). In the U.S. there is an epidemic of violent deaths of transgender women, particularly trans women of color (“A National Epidemic”).

Despite more favorable media coverage in recent years, transgender discrimination is on the rise and has been exacerbated by the Trump Administration’s many attacks on the civil rights of trans people. These include attempts to roll back non-discrimination provisions in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Civil Rights Act, which this Administration claims do not protect from discrimination based on gender identity. President Trump has also proposed a ban on transgender individuals in the military and developed a plan to discharge current trans
troops. These attacks are well documented by the National Center for Trans Equality (“The Discrimination Administration”). The stress caused by such affronts to transgender and nonbinary individuals leads to anxiety and depression and may cost them their very lives. Toomey et al. reported that 50% of trans boys aged 11-19, 30% of trans girls, 41% of non-binary youth and 28% of questioning youth have considered or attempted suicide. More critical, homicide is prevalent among trans adults, with the vast majority among transgender people of color who account for 87 of the 102 transgender homicides in the US since 2013 (McBride). Adding insult to injury, police and the media often mis-gender trans women in incident reports and do not classify these murders as hate crimes (“A National Epidemic”). Murders of trans women are fueled by prejudice, racism, easy access to guns, and an increasingly hostile political environment that appears to have increased attacks on persons of color and gender minorities (Virupaksha et al.).

While these statistics are sobering and we are left with a feeling of helplessness, we must continue to advocate for transgender and gender non-binary individuals. We can help them to navigate an oppressive system and focus our efforts on policy change. We must educate parents of trans youth that acceptance of their trans child and calling them by their preferred name can be life changing and lead to suicide preventive. We must strengthen hate crimes legislation by including LGBTQ hate crimes as a category in every state criminal system. Systems’ change involves voting for pro-LGBTQ candidates and changing discriminatory policies. Sensible gun control would also help deter homicides and suicides among this population. We must call our representatives to advocate for LGBTQ issues, including measures to address the homicides of trans women, particularly trans women of color. #BlackLivesMatter and #TransLivesMatter!
In 2018, the daily assault on black people and other people of color had the artist twisting in the wind. *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matters Memoir* is a powerful narrative by Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele. Khan-Cullors interrogates the ideal of democracy in the lives of black people as they live desperate lives of oppression and poverty. When the FBI named Patrice Khan-Cullors a terrorist, they indicted all black women who fight against social and racial injustice and named their activism ‘Black Identity Extremist’ (BIE). This designation is a cause for concern to the African American community and some U.S. legislators as well ("US Legislators Worried") because the FBI now ranks members and supporters of #BlackLivesMatter with extremist groups such as the Klu Klux Klan and the Aryan Nation.

Trayvon Martin was a black, unarmed, teen from Florida murdered by a man claiming to be part of a neighborhood watch. The man wrestled Trayvon to the ground and shot him, claiming that his own life was in jeopardy, thus he was “standing his ground” (Fla. Stat. § 776.013(3)). That day BLM Co-founder Opal Tometi tweeted #BlackLivesMatter, and it was retweeted by Patrisse Khan-Cullors.

Trayvon Martin was killed because he did not belong in an upper middle-class neighborhood. He was perceived as dangerous. He did not show enough difference to a non-black, wore a hoodie, and was murdered because he is a black male and black lives do not matter. Black lives have never mattered in America. Seven years after the murder of Trayvon Martin, ‘living while black’ can provoke any white person to call 911.
because persons of color have become a threat that bears an emergency police response. Black Americans now fear a call to the police for ‘living while black’ (Howell et al.). For driving, shopping, eating in the school dining area, sleeping in the lounge area of their dorm hall, waiting on a friend at Starbucks, not waving goodbye to the neighbors after renting an Airbnb, barbequing, selling bottled water, or cutting the neighbor’s grass while black. Their very humanity is denied by this action! A white individual’s call to 911 is a true act of terrorism, because the result is law enforcement who kill black people with impunity every day in America.

Artists wanted to find a way to respond to the terror of ‘living while black’. They needed to use art as a vehicle to craft a response to what they and so many of their friends, relatives, and neighbors were feeling. They needed to find a way to start a conversation about what feels like a coordinated effort to terrorize black people in the 21st century, a kind of terror that is all too familiar, like the harassment and lynching of the past.

Injustice inspires socially transformative art. A quilt like this demands a conversation about where the United States is going because it doesn’t hide where it has been. Artists use quilting to promote sympathy, to take empathy and make changes in themselves and those around them. The Flag Stories Quilt by artist Faith Ringgold, Fanny B. Shaw’s Prosperity is Just Around the Corner, the Gee’s Bend’s quilters and the Names Project Quilt, have each produced quilts designed to name cultural concerns, reflect on those concerns, and begin to interrogate how these concerns impact culture.

Shaw’s quilt is one of the earliest examples of quilting as a tool of anger, protest, and satire. Shaw is responding to Herbert Hoover’s political slogan “Prosperity is Just around the Corner,” a prosperity that was not realized by most of America’s hard-working citizens. Portrait and visual artists like Amy Sherald’s Welfare Queen and The Fairest of the Not So Fair, Betye Saar’s The Liberation of Aunt Jemima and Kara Walker’s Gone: An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred b’ tween the Dusky Thighs of one Young Negress and Her Heart have produced art, some shocking, to shake us out of our complacency. Their collective works compel reflection and response. Collective responses should lead to conversations about class, race and gender constructs in American culture.
The artist believes the first goal for the artist of color is to heal the wounded psyche of the black mind and body. The second is to expose sadness in the hope that people in the dominant culture understand the depths of the unending and continually re-lived pain of being black in America. The dominant culture must understand this pain to shift their vision of black Americans as human beings so that one day everyone can really move on. Pain is not only suffered, but chronicled and celebrated through these gifts and talents.

The quilted piece on #BlackLivesMatter (see Fig. 5) is both pain and celebration of a people coming together to resist black Americans’ named and unnamed oppressors. The artist chose fabric, colors and design for a quilt that would relay these collective experiences and feelings. They chose black and yellow, the #BlackLivesMatter colors, and decided on squares that would illustrate the history of black lives that have not mattered in America. The logical place to start was with the forced migration of unpaid skilled African labor. The artist needed to choose a color and, to acknowledge the work of painter Amy Sherald, shades of grey for the quilt blocks were selected. Sherald is the American artist who painted the portrait of Mrs. Michelle Obama that hangs in the National Gallery. Sherald uses shades of grey to illustrate black skin in her paintings rather than shades of brown. When thinking about the statement this piece should make, the artist chose to invert the quilt (the art of classic quilting demands even lines stitched with ¼ inch seams). The fabric was torn into 10 ½-inch squares, washed to shred the edges with the conscious decision to not cut any of the threads as the seams were stitched together. This represents the fragility of black lives in America—sometimes their world is held together by threads, those threads often make unbreakable bonds, as were found with the threads hanging from the finished quilt. Then the artist quilted chalk body outlines and gun patterns into body of the quilt.

Images were collected to copy onto fabric and it is startling to see how many civil rights and social activists in the movement had been jailed. The artist then stamped the numbers in black ink on the grey fabric and found mug shots of the subjects and placed them under the numbers. It was then noted that when it came to the murders of black women
(Charleena Lyles, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Shukri Ali, Deborah Danner, Rekia Boyd, Mya Hall, Mariam Carey, Mellissa Williams and Betty Jones), often their names go unknown, save Sandra Bland whose death garnered a great deal of attention (African American Policy Forum). Included is a block with Nelson Mandela in prison to symbolize the long road from apartheid to freedom.

After assembling 30 squares, they were bound and the quilt was backed in blood-red batik cotton. The back of the quilt looks as though it is bleeding. Protest fabric was used as a border and strands of threads are left not trimmed from the quilt. The quilt was finished by shooting it with a gun. There are bullet holes in the squares of Trayvon Martin, Tamir
Rice, and MLK. The symbol of the American Eagle is turned upside down from a flag.

This quilt tells the story of #BlackLivesMatter, including its solidarity with Indigenous, Latinx, LBGTQ+ brothers and sisters, and other people of color facing police violence and domestic persecution.

6. Socially Transformative Art

Socially transformative art is about hope; about solace; about rage and anger. It is about human rights. Its aim to transform society for the better comes from the fundamental belief that art can be an agent for change and for good. Milbrandt states, “In contemporary democratic societies, the arts not only function to maintain social traditions and describe the world, but also explore issues of social justice, identity, and freedom” (8). Art and social justice are indeed inextricably linked, creating a symbiotic relationship, one influencing each other, to provide a lens for deeper understanding of social injustices through visual means. What follows is a sample of black artists who create art to illuminate social injustices, reminding us that artists are indeed change agents, as well as shakers of our foundational beliefs and principles.

Known most recently because of his official portrait of President Barack Obama, Kehinde Wiley is also known for highlighting the everyday lives of black people. Power shifting results in portraits that show everyday black individuals, juxtaposed against traditionally elitist art-historical type patterned spaces of opulence. Old portraits are reimagined and our understandings of who is important in history—including in contemporary times—are reconceptualized (“Kehinde Wiley”).

Likewise, Amy Sherald—in recent headlines for painting the official portrait of First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama—shifts understandings of black lives, skin tones and hierarchies in society. Black people are given grayscale skin, juxtaposed against vibrant backgrounds, to highlight diversity and beauty within black communities. Part of Sherald’s goal is to create images that disrupt the typical whiteness associated with museums. The grayscale makes us question how black people have been represented throughout history, particularly through
photography (Sherald).

Carrie Mae Weems has long aimed to expand notions of race and gender in art. The oppression of stereotypes of black people in particular is explored in Weems’ work, recovering narratives about black women for further reflection. Irony and humor displace initial reactions oftentimes to allow digging deeper and displacing the power found within stereotypes (Binlot).

Like Wiley, Kerry James Marshall addresses black bodies within an historical lens. Using African American life and history throughout his work, Marshall portrays and questions black identity historically for reconsideration. He refers to his subject in the painting as emphatically black—with no mistaking their presence as black people.

For a more ambiguous take on race relations, Laylah Ali depicts people of color through absolute graphic clarity using cartoon-like depictions. Her Greenhead series leaves the viewer making racial and social connections and questionings that are personal yet broad.

Diversity in art has always been a powerful factor. These artists force the viewer to consider the role diversity has had and continues to have in society. Black Artists do indeed matter; they did in the past, and they do now. Their voices expose and reveal, lift and transform. No understanding of both the history of art and social justice is complete without knowing the unequivocal role black artists play. Black artists do indeed matter.

Language in all of its forms of expression reflects individual cultures – basic assumptions, beliefs, and values. Culture changes slowly and only through positive reinforcement and the availability of alternatives. Teaching the language of oppression and researching the nature of oppressive language can raise awareness of basic cultures. Neither teacher, student, nor researcher is free of some powerful or powerless role in one or more of the contexts mentioned above. Teaching these concepts is revealing and disturbing because it reveals assumptions, beliefs and values – when each person ardently believes they are free of such prejudices.

The Seneca Falls Dialogues are an ideal context in which to raise awareness of these teaching and research opportunities. Changing
oppressive behavior begins with exposing oppressive thoughts in the use of language. Changing language is not a remedy, but it is a critical first step in understanding privileges and prejudices. There is considerable room for research, teaching, and further public discourse.

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Feminist organizations and activist groups from the Women’s Suffrage movement to the Women’s March have utilized media relations tactics and techniques to share organizational messages. Over time, the art of media relations has evolved from a tactical role to a strategic necessity, one that is vital to the success of any activist organization or group as they seek to inform, educate and/or persuade their intended audience through the use of media and social media.

Media relations, a practice area within the field of public relations, refers to the development and maintenance of relationships with editors, journalists and reporters in the mass media, as well as those in social media (often referred to as “influencers”) in an effort to obtain positive media coverage for a company, organization, or cause. Media relations efforts can be proactive (a push) and/or reactive (a pull) in nature. Proactive media relations work includes the development of a story idea and eventual pitch of that story to a member of the media or multiple media outlets. Reactive media relations work involves responding to incoming requests for interviews or information from members of the media. Resulting media coverage, whether it originates from an organization’s intentional outreach to obtain that media attention, or because the organization has done something newsworthy, is called “earned media.” This media coverage is not paid for by the organization; it was earned by the group or organization by doing something that media outlets deemed newsworthy to their readers, viewers or listeners.
This essay identifies best practices for feminist activist groups and organizations to help begin or improve their media relations efforts, ranging from initial hiring to media relations planning, and social media tactics to increase intersectional feminist representation.

Skills Matter

Media relations practice has evolved rapidly over the years. Pre-internet, the media landscape was much less dense, much slower, and far less complex, existing primarily of print newspapers and magazines, broadcast TV, and terrestrial radio. Cable television eventually ushered in an era of 24/7 news, which changed the television landscape and created many more opportunities for television placement. The advent of the internet added websites and led to the creation of blogs, podcasts, social media and more. As a result, media relations work has become more complex and requires a variety of skills in order to achieve success including: relationship building, communication, and strategic thinking. In addition, knowledge of the ever-evolving media landscape, an ability to think like a reporter, and social media management and analytics skills are crucial.

Sharp written and oral communication skills are, and always have been, vital to the success of media relations efforts. The ability to craft a clear, concise, and cohesive story pitch that will attract the attention of an often overworked member of the media is critical skill. Appendix 1 provides an example of a job posting from Time’s Up Now, “a social welfare organization that works to create solutions that cross culture, companies and laws to increase women’s safety, equity and power at work.” The listing provides extensive detail about the duties of a media relations practitioner at a high-profile feminist activist organization and highlights the skills needed in order to be effective. The job requires over five years of experience working directly with members of the media and/or as a journalist, in addition to existing relationships with members of the political press and extensive knowledge of news media operations in all formats.

Unfortunately, due to resource scarcity in many smaller grassroots organizations or non-profits, the person tasked with reaching out and
responding to the media may not have a background in media or communication or may need updated training on best practices in media relations. If that’s the case in your organization, consider partnering with a likeminded organization to split costs or outsource to an agency or consultant as needed. Or, consider ways to reallocate your budget to allow for hiring an experienced media relations practitioner.

**Relationships Matter**

The strategic cultivation and maintenance of relationships with members of the media and social media that align with the needs and interests of your organization is at the heart of media relations and can be helpful in getting your message through to the right audience. In their book, *On Deadline: Managing Media Relations*, Howard and Mathews state:

> This is a people-to-people business. A media relations person deals with writers, editors, bloggers, producers and photographers – not with newspapers, television stations, radio microphones and websites. Knowing how to assist reporters and their supporting cast can make a positive difference in establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with the media – the only kind to have (62).

For feminist activist organizations or non-profits, it’s important to establish relationships with those in the media who cover feminist issues in traditional and social media. This may mean identifying traditional print journalists or broadcast reporters who cover or care about your cause, as well as identifying influencers in social media that can help amplify your message.

Just like any relationship, it takes time to get to know someone, and it takes effort to maintain a relationship with them. “Good media contacts proliferate once they are established. They’re built only gradually, based on a variety of contacts over time, and strengthened by experiences that foster growing knowledge and respect” (Howard and Mathews 62). And, consider this: by some estimates, media relations practitioners outnumber journalists by as high as 6 to 1 (Schneider). This means that journalists and reporters face a deluge of communication from those seeking media attention. Practically, this means that they get a ton
of emails from media relations pros and there’s no way they can (or want) to cover every story idea that’s sent their way.

Yet, if you have built an established working relationship with a journalist, it’s fair to say that your email has a greater chance of being opened than an email from someone who is unfamiliar to the journalist. For feminist media relations professionals working to build relationships, it’s also important to know that men still dominate the media industry. The Women’s Media Center report “Divided 2019: The Media Gender Gap,” found that of the 28 top news outlets, “male journalists continue to report most news, especially for wires and TV prime-time evening broadcasts.” Practically, this means that more likely than not, a media relations pro will pitch a story or respond to a request from a male member of the media.

Finally, it’s important to note that the relationship between media relations practitioners and members of the media can be both friendly and adversarial. Those handling media relations have a reason for communicating that may not always align with that of a journalist or reporter. But good, ethical working relationships with members of the media that cover your issues may help you earn coverage. If you haven’t already, develop a list of journalists, reporters and influencers that you would consider allies of your cause, and work to build (or renew) relationships with them.

**Long-Term Strategic Planning is Vital**

Whom should you communicate with and when? What exactly do you communicate, and to whom? Who should be the face and the voice of the organization? A media relations plan will answer these questions, and a skilled media relations practitioner will develop a long-term plan that includes the identification of key messages and story angles that help meet your organizational objectives. Once these stories are pitched to members of the media, resulting media coverage is monitored and measured to determine whether or not your intended message(s) are getting through to intended audiences. Ideally, your media relations plan helps to create controlled and consistent messaging across media outlets to reach your
target audiences. However, despite best efforts, it may not always go according to plan, because you can’t control the kind of media coverage you earn. For example, in 2011, The Occupy Wall Street movement sought to end income and wealth inequality. In an ABC News story, the movement was criticized for a number of reasons, including a failure to clearly communicate its message:

As the Occupy Wall Street movement enters its fourth week of protests in lower Manhattan and spreads within New York and to several other major U.S. cities, its message is becoming a bouillabaisse of views representing the many groups that have signed on, and their demands are unclear.

Their causes include such diverse issues as global warming, gas prices and corporate greed—though most seem to be fueled by the common thread of anger at the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the middle class and less fortunate.

... But with the protests spreading to so many cities, there is no clear, single message, leaving many wondering what exactly people are protesting about (Katrandjian).

**Partner with Other Feminist Organizations to Make News**

Feminist activist groups with aligned objectives can and should work together to craft messaging and media relations strategies in order to maximize impact. A collaborative approach could help to frame major issues, ensure message clarity and consistency and enhance an overall understanding of the issue at hand. It’s hard to know what earned media coverage has come as the result of proactive media relations efforts. The *TIME* article, “#MeToo and Time’s Up Founders Explain the Difference Between the 2 Movements—and How They’re Alike,” provides an interesting example of organizations with aligned messages possibly working together to clarify the missions and goals of their organizations and using the media to get their message to the masses. The article explains, “Although they overlap, there are distinct differences between the #MeToo and Time Up’s organizations and the movements fueling their formation” (Langone). It goes on to interview #MeToo founder Tarana Burke and Christy Haubegger, a Creative Artists Agency executive who
helped start Time’s Up, “about what they see as the similarities and differences between their two organizations” (Langone).

For organizations with less visibility than #MeToo and Time’s Up, collaboration can help to increase newsworthiness. For example, if two organizations collaborate on an event or protest, if there is evidence of a trend, or if they work to develop another newsworthy angle, there is a chance of increasing media coverage by working together. Finally, because many activist groups and organizations work with small budgets and staff (or volunteers), a collaborative approach to building relationships with feminist allies in media and social media can increase impact by saving time, resources, and money.

**Social Media Can (and Should) be Used to Amplify Intersectional Feminist Voices**

From a communication standpoint, the advent of social media has been advantageous to feminist causes and activist organizations, as it has removed barriers to traditional media coverage, allowed for the identification of allies and influencers, and given a voice to the often voiceless. Social media allows practitioners to craft the story of their organizations in the way they want it to be told, without having to go through traditional media. Social media is considered “owned” media (as well as “shared” media), meaning that you are in control (you “own”) of the content you create. For feminist organizations seeking to increase the diversity of voices and stories being told, social media provides the perfect space to highlight intersectional feminist voices.

Due to the nature of social media, much of this has happened organically, without the push of traditional media relations practitioners. From the article “Social Media Minds the Intersectional Gap,” published in *Ms. Magazine* in 2013, two popular hashtags on Twitter addressed a lack of intersectional feminism:

- #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen created by Mikki Kendall and
- #BlackPowerIsForBlackMen created by Jamilah Lemieux. The first addressed the racism black women face from some white feminists and the other spoke of the sexism they deal with from some black men. The
stream of tweets pointed out the countless ways both of these groups, white women and black men, benefit from privilege, and how their refusal to acknowledge race or gender privilege throws black women under the bus (Little).

Of course, the #MeToo hashtag provides us with a blockbuster example of the power of social media to give voice to a wide range of people. According to Anderson and Toor at Pew Research, by September 30, 2018, the hashtag was used more than 19 million times on Twitter since Alyssa Milano’s initial tweet on October 15, 2017.

Certainly, not every organization can achieve such exposure or virality. But every organization can consider the role that social media platforms play in sharing messages, and use social media intentionally to highlight intersectional feminist voices. This approach involves the creation of content and the strategic sharing of content, by identifying the appropriate social media channels and the right influencers to amplify your content. Women from various backgrounds, races, and classes, including those without access to traditional forms of power, have emerged as strong feminist voices and allies on social media, elevating feminist causes like #MeToo from social media platforms to the top of the mainstream media’s agenda.

The role of social media and media relations practitioners within feminist activist groups and organizations, is to keep that momentum going.

**Conclusion**

Because media and social media have the power to influence public opinion, feminist activist groups and organizations must employ skilled communicators with a depth of understanding of our complex media environment in order to successfully get their messages out to the intended audience. With highly skilled practitioners and a robust media and social media strategy, activist groups and organizations have the ability to utilize the media not only to cover important issues, but to make significant impact.
Advocacy Communications Manager, Washington or New York, TIME’S UP

TIME’S UP is looking for a Communications Manager to implement media relations strategies that inform and influence key audiences on TIME’S UP’s corporate change and legislative change initiatives. Reporting directly to the VP of Communications, you will help oversee our advocacy storytelling and campaigns strategies, while executing daily communication tactics to enhance, and demonstrate, the impact of TIME’S UP. The Communications Manager should have a demonstrated excellence in multi-channel advocacy campaigns management, with particular experience producing material for the media, responding to media requests, preparing high-impact spokespeople, and proactively securing placements in a variety of media outlets.

What You’ll Do:

- Own earned media strategy in support of TIME’S UP’s objectives related to public policy, corporate change and industry change (with an emphasis on healthcare and tech sectors) by identifying and creating opportunities to elevate TIME’S UP and its surrogates in local, national and digital media.
- Supervise day-to-day work of PR agencies related to policy and corporate change advocacy.
- Support communications initiatives by drafting pitches, press releases, statements, advisories, op-eds, talking points, briefings, message guidance, fact sheets, blog posts, advisories, remarks, roundups, reports and more.
- Create and maintain a media contacts database of key journalists, columnists and editors, and take responsibility for building and maintaining strategic relationships.
- Create and maintain a database of high-impact surrogates and influencers, and take responsibility for forging and maintaining strategic relationships.
- Monitor media coverage and keep TIME’S UP leadership and staff up to date on breaking news, earned media opportunities, and important developments through daily clips and campaign reports.
• Manage events and editorial calendar, including writing impact and recap stories, outlining schedule, managing creative materials development, and recommending overall topics for storytelling.
• Proactively identify and deploy ways to disseminate key messages and build awareness of TIME’S UP to a diverse group of audiences.
• Assist in the development, coordination and execution of events that support the goals of the organization.

Key Competencies:
• Bachelor’s Degree
• 5+ years of experience working directly with members of the media and managing communications plans, and/or as a journalist, ideally in state or federal advocacy.
• Motivated self-starter with excellent verbal/written communication skills, interpersonal and presentation skills.
• Ability to quickly develop in-depth knowledge of policy issues facing TIME’S UP with proficiency speaking and writing about them.
• Deep understanding of media and the workings of newsrooms and interview processes for both print and broadcast.
• Existing relationships with members of the political press and extensive knowledge of news media operations, including print, online, blogs and broadcast (encompassing cable, new media, podcasts, and other multimedia platforms).
• Experienced and comfortable with public speaking and cold calling reporters.
• Experience with media training specifically for broadcast and television.

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Our Seneca Falls Dialogue workshop focused on how to construct feminist activism through dialogical mapping. We began the Dialogue by introducing the concept of intersectionality. Many scholars examining the construction of gender and race often focus on one or the other of these categories, rarely considering them as inseparable entanglements or “as complex, mutually reinforcing or contradicting processes” (Acker 442). Intersectionality highlights the relationship between multiple kinds of subordination (Cole 170; Crenshaw 93; Damaske 402) and considers how hegemonic structures intersect to oppress the lives of racially marginalized communities (Kantola and Nousiainen 459). While intersectionality theory helps to reveal the impact of multiple forms of oppression, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw’s simple analogy to an intersection warrants a reconsideration of how each form of oppression mutually informs the other.

This article presents the processes and outcomes of our workshop in which we re-envision intersectionality theory as an entanglement of social identities and circumstances that hampers one’s ability to escape, disengage or act at will; and systemic changes needed to address societal barriers. Entanglement includes the relationship of material bodies and ideological standpoints that are entanglements of social, political, and economic inequities; entanglements of complex and nuanced multiple selves and shifting identities; entanglements of tacit, situated, and authoritative knowledge; and entanglements that reside in culturally hegemonic, stratified social structures that control options in people’s lives.
Entanglement builds upon and incorporates the notion of intersectionality. While intersectionality has facilitated understandings of the impact of colliding forms of oppression within legal and academic fields, the term has become a feminist buzz word and has been appropriated in ways other than those intended by African American legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term in 1989 to explain injustice and violence against Black Women (Emba 2). The term has now broadened significantly and is often used as a blanket term to describe the combination of numerous social factors, including disability, sexuality, and nationality, among others. Everything is an intersection. Even so, policies, the legal justice system, and daily actions do not reflect notions of intersectionality (Emba 3).

In The Free Dictionary, “intersect” means to cut across or through; while the term “entangle” means twisted together or caught in a snarl or entwining mass. Arguably, when something is twisted together in an entwining mass, it is more complicated or messy than something that potentially cuts across or intersects with something else. To further clarify, intersections are not always entanglements; however, entanglements are always intersections. Thus, the term “entanglement” considers the nuances of language and a more complicated rhizomatic relationship between twisted and entangled parts. Therefore, “entanglement” is more wide-ranging than “intersectionality” and can serve better as a means to understand the inherent complexity of the simultaneity of marginalized social identities and experiences.

**Mapping Entanglements**

During our Seneca Falls Dialogues session, we facilitated a process that focused on entangled social identities by offering a means to map multiple and simultaneous strands of injustice, inequality, discrimination, and oppression. Mapping entanglements of social identities is a process of creating a graphical representation or picture that illustrates the complicated relationship among and between marginalized social identities. Like intersectionality, entanglement is not a simple or straightforward concept; however, entanglement does make visible and
problematizes how power structures and power relations are enmeshed, preserving social, political, and economic inequalities. Our activity was an attempt to re/capture and re/focus attention on complexly interwoven, twisted, and tangled parts of social identities and identity hierarchies, and how the interactions of each hierarchy influence the dynamics of others. Mapping entanglements of social identities revealed injustice, inequality, discrimination, and oppression.

Many injustices affect individuals and groups with marginalized social identities daily, many with implications for generations to come. Because there are many injustices, it can seem at times too much to muster agency, energy and time to do anything toward justice. While many, if not all, injustices are entangled with social identities—making them seem impenetrable—addressing one thread may begin to unravel the mesh (and mess) of seemingly growing injustices. Thus, we must stand up for justice in times of crisis and violation of human rights; whether or not change can happen should not hinder us from trying to effect change. Given the U.S. climate today that normalizes misogyny, violence, White supremacy, racism, and ableism, to name a few encompassing injustices, we asked participants to focus on one specific injustice that deeply matters to them.

We presented the following injustices at our workshop to draw attention to the entanglement of racism and sexism with other forms of discrimination and oppressive systems:

- Four out of five Indigenous women experience violence in their lifetime, with the majority of these cases being a form of sexual violence, including stalking, harassment, and assault (Rosay 1).
- Climate change is inescapable; but, there is still an opportunity to “seize the best-case scenario rather than surrender to the worst” (Solnit 2). Climate action is necessary to preserve “human rights because climate change affects the most vulnerable first and hardest – it already has, with droughts, fires, floods, [toxins in water], and crop failures” (Solnit 4). Rather than attempt to figure out how to stop the destruction of the planet, we asked participants to consider one specific
injustice, more specific than the climate change crisis. For instance, we asked participants to think of a particular act impacting their environment, such as pipelines and fuel trains, refineries and shipping terminals, fracking and mountaintop removal, divestment and finance, policy and law, gentrification, environmental racism, and so on.

- We also asked participants to consider the racial disparity in the United States concerning arrests and incarceration. We provided data related to mass incarceration as an act of state violence. For example, people of color constitute about one-third of the total population in the U.S. yet comprise more than one-half of all people incarcerated in the United States (NAACP 8).

- Moreover, unarmed Black people are murdered by police disproportionately, and harassment from surveillance and racial profiling occur every day (ACLU 1). Black women, Black queer, and trans folks continue to bear the burden of relentless assaults while being disenfranchised from human rights. Though the injustices are numerous as people target Black lives both systematically and intentionally—we encouraged participants to focus on a specific experience or witnessing of a specific occurrence of injustice.

Participants thought about specifics (who, what, how, why) concerning the injustice they chose. For instance, we asked participants to consider who is involved, in what ways, and how is the injustice normalized?

Participants identified focal points, overlaps, or strong linkages to the past. We discussed when/what/where are the flashpoints that have contributed to the injustices today. We questioned funding, mainstream media, news, and policies in the process of mapping injustices. As participants mapped the injustice in relationship to entangled social identities, they also searched for places to remap toward justice. For instance, in remapping and revisioning the injustice, we identified groups and coalitions that are working toward justice concerning the specific injustice and entanglement(s).
TERRAINS OF INJUSTICE: ROADMAPS TO ACTIVISM

The following are examples of some of the maps developed by groups of two to six participants during the workshop: While four of the nine maps focused on sexual assault, three maps focused on racism, and the other maps focused on hegemonic control of resources and opportunities. Through graphic depiction, each map conveys an entanglement in which participants identified race, gender, economics, and other constructed hierarchies as forces of injustice. Participants shared stories of injustice, experienced, or witnessed. One participant described entanglements of race, gender, and class injustice based on a personal experience in which the individual was handcuffed and violently removed from public transportation by authorities for sharing a bus pass with a stranger who needed help getting to work. The participant self-identified as being a trans woman of color who was attempting to help another woman of color from a low socio-economic background who otherwise could not get to work without bus fare.

Still focusing on the experiences of trans women of color, one group pointed out the high number of murders of trans women of color that have not been acknowledged by LGBTQ+ communities. Moreover, the participants noted that people have instilled “toxic Black masculinity” into individuals since their childhood and that there is a lack of news coverage and scarce resources. Further, there is a need to make transparent the investigative process into murders of trans women of color. Another map raised questions about policies, organizations, power, privilege, experiences, statistics, and media that normalize sexual assault (see fig. 1). A third map noted that shame and stigma are ways that individuals perpetrate sexual assault within families, communities, society, and media. Counter-narratives to the normalization of sexual assault, such as gathered through the use of the hashtag #MeToo, boldly challenges the social mechanisms of shame and stigma that have kept women silent about the sexual assault that too many have suffered. A fourth participant highlighted racism as a form of injustice while noticing more overt racism and discrimination, given the current climate within the United States (see fig. 2). We discussed how racism functions at both individual and
institutional levels and how individuals perpetuate racism through institutional structures, processes, norms, and expectations, as well as individual attitudes and behavior. Moreover, racism is further complicated when entangled with classism, sexism, and other systems of oppression. Dismantling racism will compel all to unlearn existing patterns of behaviors and become aware of the unconscious values, beliefs, and assumptions we possess so that we may effectively participate in and sustain racial justice work.

**CONCLUSION/INVITATION**

We conclude our essay with an invitation to meet with others to dialogue and map injustice, revealing the entanglement and histories of oppression that has become normalized. Intersectionality has served as a critically important theoretical lens in feminist and gender-related studies to
analyze injustice and the oppression of minoritized groups. Recognizing that multiple and intersecting identities inform the social realities and lived experiences of individuals and groups, intersectionality considers how various power structures such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, and other markers of difference intersect and interact simultaneously in the lives of those perceived as being different from the majority (e.g., Black women). Mapping entanglements of complexly interwoven, twisted, and tangled parts of minoritized identities and intersecting inequalities helped participants to begin to untangle the threads of systemic injustice to consider actions that might develop feminist activism collectively.

Fig. 2. Racism map.


A commonplace suggestion is that people who seek to change the culture, political climate, and institutions of the United States should adopt an inclusive approach respectful of diversity. However, many of the conversations about change in the United States are inward-looking; advocates for peace, racial healing, better relationships, and more justice usually neglect the topic of indigenous nations and peoples and how they fit into the broader picture of change. To be a more responsible change agent, two shifts in perspective are recommended. First, carefully examine and understand the colonizing practices that have shaped, and continue to shape, the lived experiences of indigenous peoples. Second, study and learn from indigenous wisdom; allow the values, concerns, and perspectives to inform new ways of imagining the world and how to live in it. To be relevant, minimally, theories and practices to cultivate a better world should be mindful of the above aspects. Without this minimal awareness, attempted improvements might, out of luck, help indigenous nations and peoples to address and correct long-standing injustices; more likely, however, reforms ignorant about these aspects will perpetuate the status quo and reestablish similar injustices. After 500 years of attempts to convert, displace, and diminish indigenous peoples, the time has come to be more mindful: acknowledging, learning from, and respectfully engaging their histories and wisdom.

This article begins by emphasizing the criminal history that went into founding the United States. One of the most pressing issues historically, and in the present, is the perpetuation of the Doctrine of
Christian Discovery (DoCD). While it emerged from the Catholic papal context, the ideological dimensions advancing Christian supremacy and the ability to seize non-Christian lands influenced Protestantism and Manifest Destiny. The DoCD continues to influence approaches toward ownership of land and the treatment of indigenous nations and peoples around the world. The boarding school movement, an attempt by the United States to “civilize” indigenous children by separating them from their families and cultures, was emboldened by this Christian supremacist orientation and has been defined as a form of cultural genocide that has contributed to extensive intergenerational trauma in indigenous communities (Churchill 1-76; Pember 1-15; Smith, *Conquest* 35-54; Woolford, “Discipline” 29-48). Informed social change, however, needs to move beyond this negative dimension. The following three sections address indigenous wisdom that change agents should embrace to help alter practices intent on creating sustainable peace and justice: understanding the world from a deeply relational perspective, developing a political community *seriously committed* to long-term peace, and embracing a gift economy nurtured by an ethic of preservative care. Basic mindfulness in these areas will allow advocates for social change to be better allies to indigenous nations and peoples. Before concluding, one section addresses the issue of cultural appropriation and a possible technique to avoid it, which incorporates ideas previously developed in this essay.

The purpose of this essay is to remind people who want to improve the United States that they should be responsible advocates for change, which means no longer overlooking indigenous history and wisdom. Unfortunately, such a lack of acknowledgement is too common, a problem that has affected feminist history and its relationship with indigenous nations and peoples. This essay is increasingly relevant when considering the place of Seneca Falls, NY, and the feminism that has grown out of this context: U.S. feminism emerged on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and in contact with people from its five nations (Wagner 28-51). Feminism in the United States, arguably more than any other movement for change, should not overlook indigenous history and indigenous influences; to do so is just another act of colonial
downgrading in the present. To be responsible and to truly embrace intersectionality, therefore, feminism needs to address indigenous concerns, while being mindful and critical of the intersection between feminism and colonization, Western Christianity, white supremacy, global capitalist ideologies, and feminism’s supportive role in indigenous oppression, both historically and in the present (Grande 179-212). Concerning the egregious violence against indigenous nations and peoples that constitutes U.S. history, Robert W. Venables writes that “most citizens of the United States prefer collective amnesia” (ix); it is time to subvert this amnesic comfort in our roles as citizens, reformers, and educators.

**U.S. History and Religio-Political Ideology**

The United States can be reimagined as a large crime scene. The country developed through deadly collisions between indigenous nations and peoples and Europeans and their descendants who focused on colonizing and conquering a supposedly new world and its inhabitants (Eakin 1-15). This alternative lens foregrounds the cultural violence, structural violence, and direct violence that sustained extensive harm against indigenous nations and peoples, three dimensions that Johan Galtung has identified as the “violence triangle” (291-305). From the DoCD and undermining indigenous sovereignty to the decimation of indigenous populations and the boarding school experience, the United States is haunted by significant atrocities and the rationales that continue to impair current relations with indigenous nations and peoples. By understanding this history, those seeking to cultivate sustained peace will be better equipped not only to critically examine U.S. failures, but also to avoid recreating them. By considering the wisdom of those who have survived colonizing injustices later in this paper, a different way of thinking, living, and relating may help to lead U.S. citizens, reformers, and educators out of the sustained violence that continues to shape the U.S. context.

To categorize what was done in the name of country, “group cause homicide” offers an interesting lens; this form of homicide is characterized
by a group “with a common ideology that sanctions an act, committed by
one or more of its members, that result [sic] in death” (Douglas 263). The
best sub-category is that of the extremist; it includes Hezbollah and The
Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord. While extremist homicide is
“killing motivated by ideas based on a particular political, economic,
religious or social system” that includes either individual or group
offenders, U.S. crimes against indigenous nations and peoples move
between motives that are political, religious, racial, and socioeconomic in
nature. Extremist in character, the offenses are “prompted by a fervent
devotion or a system of beliefs based on orthodox religious conventions”
(Douglas 263). Homicide of this type “results from intense hostility and
aversion toward another individual or group who represents a certain
ethnic, social, economic, or religious group” (Douglas 269). Through
hierarchical structures, military training, and political and religious
documents, many people within the spatio-temporal boundaries of the
United States committed murders grounded in a religious nationalism
that reduced indigenous populations by millions of people (Newcomb 303-
342). Rooted in the DoCD, religiously-based ideologies justified the seizure
of indigenous lands and the displacement of indigenous nations and
peoples. The separation of indigenous children from their families and
cultures through the boarding school experience was another dimension of
policies and actions intent on eradicating indigeneity (Adams 5-94; Glauner 911-66; Piccard 137-85; Woolford, Benevolent Experiment 21-96).

To understand the deep historical roots of the religiously-based
homicides of indigenous peoples, the place to begin is with the DoCD,
which supported Manifest Destiny, shaped U.S. legislation, oriented the
law in other “developed” countries, and continues to shape international
law in the present (Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery”). It is often
incorrectly believed that the DoCD is in the past; however, it continues to
be used to support legal and political decisions regarding land ownership
in the present, from the United States and Canada to Australia, Russia,
and China (Miller “American Indians” 330). The DoCD emerged from the
papal bulls of Pope Boniface VIII, Unam sanctum (1302); Pope Nicholas V,
Romanus pontifex (1455); and Pope Alexander VI, Inter caetera II (1493).
These documents assert that salvation comes only through the Church,
that the Catholic Church is the supreme authority, that Portugal has the right to subdue Muslims and non-Christians as enemies of the faith, that non-Christian lands can be seized, and that Columbus, Ferdinand, and Isabella have the right to discover and possess non-Christian lands and to spread the Christian religion to non-believers. This formed the foundation for international law during the time of exploration; it shaped the actions and policies of England, France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain (Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery” 2-21). This influence is present, for example, in the authority King Henry VII gave to John Cabot and his sons in 1496: he gave them the right to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.... And that the before-mentioned John and his sons or their heirs and deputies may conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities, and islands by them thus discovered that they may be able to conquer, occupy and possess, as our vassals and governors lieutenants and deputies therein, acquiring for us the dominion, title and jurisdiction of the same towns, castles, cities, islands and mainlands so discovered. (qtd. in Hart 21)

As Steve Newcomb argues, the merging of Christian religion and law played a key role in contact with indigenous nations and peoples, whether the “discoverers” were Protestant or Catholic; European contact was hostile and grounded in the idea that indigenous peoples were enemies of the faith, both religiously and racially inferior (309-310). Religiously-guided international law necessitated subduing heathens, which often resulted in the forced removal or extermination of indigenous peoples as part of the civilizing process. Europeans and Euro-Americans often disregarded indigenous peoples’ welfare and decimated indigenous populations and nations based on the idea of Christian supremacy and racial superiority.

The DoCD extends well beyond its Catholic roots and the shaping of U.S. colonial history; in other words, just because the DoCD has Catholic roots does not mean that Protestants in the United States have not heavily relied on it to justify their actions and decisions. For example,
and with the idea of a “Christian nation” in mind, the DoCD has shaped U.S. Supreme Court decisions to the present. In *Fletcher v. Peck* (1810), the Supreme Court deemed indigenous peoples as having “a mere occupancy” for hunting and other activities, but having no title to the land (Gray 73-78). Discovery and conquest justified the European right to own land: “This is the right gained by conquest. The Europeans always claimed and exercised the right of conquest over the soil” (qtd. in Gray 74). Supreme Court members relegated indigenous peoples to an inferior status: “The Europeans found the territory in possession of a rude and uncivilized people, consisting of separate and independent nations. They had no idea of property in the soil but a right of occupation” (qtd. in Gray 74). *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) reinforced this view; Chief Justice John Marshall declared that “discovery gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy, either by purchase or by conquest” (qtd. in Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery” 68). This rationale made its way into other cases: *Martin v. Waddell* (1842), *United States v. Kagama* (1886), *Shoshone Indians v. United States* (1945), *Tee-Hit-Ton Indians v. United States* (1955), *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* (1978), and *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Nation of N.Y.* (2005). The above 2005 decision directly cites the DoCD in a footnote justifying European, and later U.S., sovereignty over the lands. In 2016, the Supreme Court declined to hear *White v. University of California*, a case concerning two 9,000 year-old skeletons. The Supreme Court supported the decision of California’s 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which used the DoCD as part of its justification to repatriate the remains: indigenous right to occupancy “comes from the legal theory that discovery and conquest gave conquerors the right to own the land but did not disturb the tribe’s right to occupy it” (United States Court of Appeals). In a nation advocating the separation of church and state, its laws and relationships with indigenous nations and peoples are grounded in international religious laws propagated by popes supporting the delusion that indigenous people are inferior.

The DoCD not only shaped the dispossession of indigenous lands, but it helped to justify attempted cultural genocide through U.S. boarding schools. The assumed barbarity of indigenous peoples is present in rationales to improve or exterminate them. In 1881, Carl Schurz, former
Secretary of the Interior, asserted, “The circumstances surrounding them place before the Indians this stern alternative: extermination or civilization... To civilize them, which was once only a benevolent fancy, has now become an absolute necessity, if we mean to save them” (123). Echoing this sentiment in 1881, Henry Price, former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, claimed, “Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die” (qtd. in Adams 15); little doubt existed concerning which was to perish. In 1886, Lucius Q. Lamar, former Secretary of the Interior, asserted, “the only alternative now presented to the American Indian race is speedy entrance into the pale of American civilization, or absolute extinction” (qtd. in Adams 15). Economic realities also played a role; Schurz and Henry Teller, former Secretary of Interior, found it more economically sound to civilize indigenous people than to go to war to eradicate them. By Schurz’s estimates, it would cost approximately $1,500 over 10 years to civilize an indigenous child, but $1 million to kill an indigenous person in combat. Likewise, Teller estimated that the continuous need to protect the frontiers was $22 million, which could be used to educate 33,000 indigenous children per year (Smith, Conquest 37-38). The accuracy of their assessments is irrelevant; indigenous peoples were again diminished, their well-being assessed through cost-benefit analyses. Murder was too expensive, so education became the chosen weapon through which the next systematic attempt would be made to conquer indigenous peoples. Euro-Americans had displaced indigenous peoples to about 2% of the total U.S. landmass, but this was not enough. The next phase was to take their culture and familial relationships away from them.

Captain Richard H. Pratt, who helped to found the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879, wanted to “kill the Indian and save the man” (qtd. in Smith, Conquest 36; Adams 51-52). The aim was to introduce indigenous children to U.S. institutions and culture, to teach them about individualism and private property, to help them embrace the Christian worldview, and to teach them how to be good citizens (Adams 21-27). From 1877 to 1926, funding for boarding schools increased, and the influence of the schools grew. In 1877, U.S. funding for the project was small, only $20,000. In 1880, funding rose to $75,000; in 20 years at the
turn of the century, the United States provided $2,936,080 to “civilize” indigenous children. In 1877, indigenous enrollment was 3,598; the enrollment grew little by 1880: there were 4,651 indigenous children in boarding schools. By the turn of the century, 21,568 indigenous children were enrolled. In 1885, approximately 25% of indigenous children had been part of the U.S. boarding school experience, but by 1926, the figure reached 83% (Adams 26-27). In an 1891 speech by Merril E. Gates, President of Friends of the Indian, he asserted:

We do believe in a standing army; but it should be an army of Christian school-teachers! That is the army that is going to win the victory. We are going to conquer barbarism; but we are going to do it by getting at the barbarians one by one. We are going to do it by that conquest of the individual man, woman, and child which leads to the truest civilization. We are going to conquer the Indians by a standing army of school-teachers armed with ideas, winning victories by industrial training, and by the gospel of love and the gospel of work. (Barrows 9)

Empowered by the religio-political ideology that supported the taking of land through “discovery” and murder grounded in beliefs of supremacy, education was attempting to erase the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous peoples. The forced removal of indigenous nations and peoples from their traditional lands and the attempted erasure of indigenous cultures through educational conquest reveal not only how those within the United States have disregarded and diminished indigenous nations and people, but how a common ideology intent on indigenous extermination has been systematically woven into the country’s history. Politics, history, jurisprudence, and education in the United States can be understood better if the DoCD and the boarding school experience are acknowledged in conversations for socio-political change.

Since the Age of European Exploration, imperial conquests were couched in a religio-political language of Christian supremacy that expressly supported the subjugation of non-Christians, which allowed for murder, forced relocation, and cultural imperialism; in the United States, this came to include racial dimensions that relegated indigenous peoples to an inferior position closely associated with nonhuman, untamed
animals. In the explanation to John Gast’s “American Progress” (1872) depicting Manifest Destiny, George A. Croffut writes, “This rich and wonderful country—the progress of which at the present time, is the wonder of the old world—was until recently, inhabited exclusively by the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey” (qtd. in Suzack 73). Upon “discovery” of North America, there were at least 12 million indigenous people, which is a low estimate (Mann 107-114), with approximately 5 to 10 million people in what is now the United States (Dunbar-Ortiz 39-42; Madley 356; Shoemaker 2-3; Zinn 16); in the United States, the indigenous population dropped to 237,196 in 1900 (Shoemaker 4). This decline in population is a result of the attempt to deal with the “Indian problem.” The use of warfare and mass killing, along with the attempted extermination of cultures through educational practices, helped to disrupt or destroy entire indigenous nations or cultures. The attempts to exterminate them or to civilize them may seem like a relic from centuries ago; however, with a population decline of around 5 million people (a low estimate) and with approximately 100,000 indigenous children undergoing the boarding school experience (Smith, “Boarding School” 89), it is clear that the United States is a large crime scene grounded in Christian supremacist ideology. Kevin Gover reinforces this attribution of U.S. criminality in his speech at the 175th anniversary celebration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs when he associates his agency’s history and practices with “ethnic cleansing.”

Without acknowledging this history and how colonization continues to inform the present, any discussions of race and social change are myopic. Attempts to bring peace, struggles for social change, and cutting-edge theories are significantly irrelevant—and at worst, part of the colonizing process—if they neglect past and current colonizing practices and traumas as part of a larger network of causes and conditions sustaining U.S. injustices. Racism, sexism, and classism cannot fully be analyzed and corrected without this criminality being addressed. Theory and practice, education, reform, politics, and economics in the United States are nourished by the criminal soil that is the foundation of U.S. culture, institutions, values, and visions of the future. Without remembering indigenous peoples and their suffering and continuous
struggles, citizens, reformers, and educators who overlook this criminality are communicating they do not matter. Whether this is intended is irrelevant; indigenous insignificance is communicated by the absence and the neglect of this long violent history in discourses about fixing U.S. social, political, and economic ills. Unaware of this past, change agents are likely to reproduce portions of it, yet affirmations of new values and ways of being are needed too. Those working for a better world need a new way to think, speak, and interact with one another that goes beyond anger, resentment, and hatred; through affirming common indigenous ideas, new possibilities emerge for relating to one another. When these affirmations complement a better understanding of U.S. injustices against indigenous nations and peoples, a more responsible and robust foundation for social change may be established.

**First Affirmation: Relatedness**

Vine Deloria foregrounds the centrality of a relational approach in indigenous perspectives: “We are all relatives” (Deloria, *Sprit and Reason* 33-34). This statement is a crucial part of indigenous ceremonies, shapes views of existence, and affects information gathering concerning the world and its processes: it provides an orientation “for understanding nature and living comfortably within it” (34). For example, to understand vegetation that will be harvested is to understand the activities of other plants in the region and the seasons in which they grow; indicator plants, for example, helped the Pawnees to know when to return home from their bison hunts, so they could harvest corn. If everything is in a relationship, and since relationships change from moment to moment, all existence is in a process of fluctuation. An important part of life, then, is working to maintain proper relationships and the conditions that sustain them. Furthermore, these relationships are not only in the human realm; every aspect of creation is part of relationally dynamic processes, and all things have their unique ways of being. Knowledge of the deep relational, processual dimensions is maintained through good relationships grounded in sharing wisdom with future generations; through the proper sharing of knowledge
and right practices across generations, better relationships with the rest of creation are cultivated. To be is to exist interdependently.

This relational, processual view acquires deeper significance through the language used to talk about relationships; a familial discourse identifies connections with human and nonhuman beings, and this is a common approach from the Osage Nation to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. George Tinker writes his essay for his human relatives: “We humans are all related” (196). Ethically, this shifts our understanding; instead of seeing other people or groups as inferior, the emphasis on being relatives undermines our tendency to dehumanize one another. Tinker, however, indicates that this orientation extends to all beings: “Thus, ‘my relatives’ include many more than all you readers or all two-legged folk of the world. Indeed, it necessarily includes all of life on our planet” (197). This concept of life is broad enough to include mountains, rivers, and rocks; it destabilizes boundaries and values that foster exclusionary practices and actions intent on eliminating parts of this familial web. The challenge, however, is to acknowledge that to live is to engage in some acts of violence against members of our extended family, to honor those who are harmed, and to maintain balance through proper ceremonies:

These acts of violence disrupt the harmony of the world around us; they create imbalance that must somehow be repaired. Thus, it is important to Indian people to remember how to perform those ceremonies needed to re-create balance in the world, to maintain balance in our relationships with those other-than-human people around us. (Tinker 198)

To neglect relationships, which includes our relationship with the land on which we dwell, is to create imbalance. Care and the cultivation of balance are ultimate concerns; being mindful of interdependence and preserving it are significant for present and future generations.

A similar orientation exists in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. This is not a prayer or a petition, but a way of opening and closing ceremonies and government meetings with gratitude to bring people’s minds together in thankfulness for all creation (Arnold, “Haudenosaunee Confederacy” 747; Gonyea 11-12; Jacques 13-14). It begins by recognizing one’s local community and all living things:
Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People. Now our minds are one. (Native Self Sufficiency Center et al. 2)

This communal gratitude expands to include Mother Earth, the waters, fish, plants, and medicinal herbs; it finally expands to the Creator who has given us “everything we need to live a good life” (Native Self Sufficiency Center et al. 34). The last part of the address reinforces inclusivity by instructing those listening to give thanks for anyone left out. It is not only the expansive, inclusive nature of the address that is important, but also the titles given, which reinforce Deloria’s and Tinker’s focus on relatedness. The Haudenosaunee speak of Mother Earth, the Thunder Beings whom they call Grandfathers, the Sun whom they call their eldest Brother, and the Moon whom they call Grandmother. The Haudenosaunee are focusing on their relationships with all creation, putting them in the position of an extended family through the names given. All beings exist in a web of relatedness that places them beyond the monetary economy; they are not resources, but part of an extended family. Humans are not separate from creation, but part of it, part of the environment and its ecosystems, and expected to maintain harmony guided through individual and communal gratitude for all creation.

V. F. Cordova emphasizes the implications of this relational orientation; she examines ethics as a philosophical activity grounded in the reality that most humans do not live in complete isolation, but take part in social interactions. Cordova describes a difference between indigenous thought and Western thought, with the United States as a prime example. The former focuses on the “We,” and the latter focuses on the “I” (173-81). Modern ethics in the West focuses more on the lone, autonomous self that is set against others, which is clear in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Indigenous thought, however, focuses on the interplay between self and other: the community is composed of selves who benefit and constitute the community, and the community helps to sustain and shape different selves. This is not an antagonistic interdependence, but one grounded in respect for differences and how those differences
contribute uniquely to the social fabric. Each community also exists in a network of relations with other communities, both human and nonhuman; all creation is part of one life process where all things exist, optimally, in mutually-beneficial relationships without severe hierarchies and processes of subordination or exclusion (Cordova 176-77). Indigenous thought begins from the idea that human beings want to be in community, to be part of consensual decision-making processes, and to contribute beneficially to the “We,” in the broadest sense of the term. Cordova is right to emphasize how the action of defining humanness is not neutral; how we define humanness makes a significant difference: “The We and the I produce different lifestyles, different ethical systems, different worlds” (181).

**Second Affirmation: Politics and Sustained Peace**

Indigenous relational outlooks shaped their communities and political organizations differently from those in Europe. While indigenous political ideas helped to influence democracy later in the United States, specifically through exchanges with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Arnold, “Haudenosaunee Confederacy” 748; Bigtree 19-21), non-indigenous, Western political structures have remained strongly wedded to the idea of individualism, self-interest, male hierarchies, and capitalist politico-economic orientations. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, its values, and oral history have allowed something different to emerge, namely, a socio-political structure focused on peace, equality, and long-range ethical thinking supportive of the common good. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy developed a way of shaping its socio-political structures to preserve the best in all their people and to nurture fragile balances within the Confederacy, between other groups of people, and with the natural world. The Confederacy’s history and origins emphasize that it is through peace that life and relationships can flourish. Understanding this tradition better illustrates ways of relating that often are foreclosed in Western philosophy, politics, and economics; common U.S. approaches are not working, as is clear from environmental degradation, high violence rates, sexual assault, and other ways of harming human and nonhuman
beings. Reflecting on and affirming Haudenosaunee history strengthens the ability to end cycles of violence.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy dates back to at least 909 C.E.; the nations of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca merged to form a democratic society, which is the oldest continuous participatory democracy (Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation; Rosen 196-199). While grounded in peace, gratitude, respect, sharing, and consensus, the Confederacy emerged from long-standing violence. The five nations had been engaged in sustained violence against each other; deep insecurity gripped much of the region now called New York State. Violence erupted for slight offenses, but eventually a person, the Peacemaker, crossed what is now called Lake Ontario, landing on its southern shore (Lyons “Faithkeeper”). Finally, he convinced the nations that peace was the best approach, that the Creator did not make humans to live in such a violent way. The problem was that one person remained stubborn. This was Thadodá’ho’, who is said to have been quite monstrous with a twisted body and snakes growing from his head (Gonyea 9-10). Through words and songs of peace, Thadodá’ho’ was transformed; in the last meeting, the Peacemaker approached Thadodá’ho’, who was about to eat a meal of human flesh, but the Peacemaker offered him kindness, helping to restore his mind. Through the peaceful consensus of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, a democratic foundation was established: chiefs, clanmothers, faithkeepers, and the Grand Council continue to work for the people, the community, the Confederacy, and future generations. From discord and long-standing violence, an enduring democracy emerged focused on sustained peace; processes ushering peace into the world may take time, but they can be successful, transforming even the most violent into peaceful members of the community.

This approach shows that alternatives are possible. Violence and unsupportive relationships result from choices and conditioning, whether in the realms of actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Likewise, peace and caring relationships result from choices and conditioning, whether in the realms of actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values. These cultural choices and conditioning shape individuals and interactions with human and nonhuman beings. John Mohawk writes,
The culture we were born into nurtured each and every one of us to a belief in certain premises, and our socialization in that respect is surprisingly complete. We are each of us ‘prejudiced’ to certain beliefs, certain ways of seeing the world, and certain ways of being in the world. (92)

People exist in societies with specific orientations. Thinking about U.S. culture, the dominant values are linked to self-interest, acquisition and consumption, private property, and efficiency. Indigenous thinkers, such as Lyons, address what matters in traditional Haudenosaunee culture; they have chosen a different path:

We were instructed to be generous and to share equally with our brothers and sisters so that all may be content. We were instructed to respect and love our Elders, to serve them in their declining years, to cherish one another. We were instructed to love our children, indeed, to love ALL children... we could judge the decline of humanity by how we treat our children. (“Keepers of Life” 43)

There is no pre-established way a society has to be; the path is left open: Every society can make the choice to be more or less peaceful, more or less violent.

The world the Haudenosaunee cultivated was one focused on communal care. All things exist as part of creation, and all creation should be nurtured and protected. The underlying belief is that the Creator did not create the world and its inhabitants to be violent and to seek the blood of others. Instead, the relations we enter into, whether with other human or nonhuman beings, are intended to be for the benefit of all creation, so that all life will continue in a balanced way. The socio-political structure is one way of organizing humans to nurture this balanced dimension of creation. Every socio-political structure seen from this orientation is responsible for helping to ensure peaceful, balanced interactions. This indigenous worldview offers an ethical standard to assess all socio-political structures. Not only can we evaluate socio-political structures according to their contributions to the overall peace and balance of the created world, but we can evaluate them according to how they value the uniqueness of all members of society and beyond, and whether they are sustainable. Lyons writes, “In our way of life, in our government, with every decision
we make, we always keep in mind the seventh generation to come” (qtd. in Lyons, “Keepers of Life” 42). Being deeply committed to those in the present is good, but not enough; we must think about what we will leave for others, the options and resources they will have. Respect for all creation, responsibility for future generations, and being mindful of the far-reaching web of relationships in which we exist provide a way to cultivate sustained peace that will endure for years to come and will transcend the mere absence of violence.

**THIRD AFFIRMATION: GIFTS AND AN ETHIC OF PRESERVATIVE CARE**

At the heart of the Haudenosaunee worldview, and many indigenous perspectives globally, is the belief in the giftedness of all creation: all creation has been given as a gift for every human and nonhuman being. While it is common for people in Euro-American cultures to think in terms of private property, self-interested individualism, and the need for more accumulations to increase one’s net worth, the Haudenosaunee emphasize a lack of ownership because the Great Creator generated all there is. Humans are one dimension of creation, and we were given the opportunity to live, but we do not fully control our destinies. Much of who we are and where we are going in life is dependent on the ordering of the universe, our place in it, and the conditions that sustain our existence. Life is not something we earned, and much of the wealth or benefits we have has nothing to do with our activities because the causes and conditions that have allowed us to work, to save, and to thrive are largely beyond our control. To recognize this fact in all we do is to encourage a new way of being with each other that is focused more on giving than receiving, on peace than on violence, and on community than individualism. Ultimately, this worldview redirects us to live a life of gratitude directed by an ethic of preservative care.

Around the world, indigenous peoples have believed that Earth does not belong to us, but we belong to Earth; we are born from, and sustained by Earth, and the place in which one lives matters significantly (Whitt et al. 3-20). Existing in a specific location and taking part in specific social relationships are part of the giftedness of existence, which means
our life, relationships, and the things that nurture us are gifts. Mohawk explains the implications of this outlook:

The world does not belong to humans—it is the rightful property of the Great Creator. The gifts and benefits of the world, therefore, belong to all equally. The things that humans need for survival—food, clothing, shelter, protection—are things to which all are entitled because they are gifts of the creator. Nothing belongs to humans, not even their labor or their skills, for ambition and ability are also the gifts of the Great Creator.... all people have a right to the things they need for survival, even those who do not or cannot work, and no person or people has a right to deprive others of the fruits of those gifts. (242)

These gifts rightfully belong to nobody; they should be shared with others. Instead of seeing the world and its resources, whether natural or human, as something to be efficiently used and deployed for financial gain, the giftedness of all aspects of creation, including oneself and one’s labor, demands a more generous approach that sustains and enhances life. Replacing the values of self-interest, acquisitiveness, and greed, this gifted view teaches generosity, sharing for the benefit of all, and protecting and nurturing the gifts of creation.

The result is a life focused on cultivating the unique gifts of others. Humans and nonhumans should not be disparaged because they have unique gifts, but should be respected for their distinctiveness. This lesson is exemplified in the Haudenosaunee story about animals who played a game of lacrosse against each other (Calder and Fletcher 31). The four-legged animals and the animals of the air were opposing each other. While establishing the players, they came to the bat: it seemed to be a bird, but it had no feathers; neither side wanted the bat, but eventually the animals of the air accepted it. The different animals’ gifts were important. The deer had speed and agility. The owl had great vision. The bear had great strength and size. The eagle was strong. Despite the fact that all beings have unique gifts, the animals marginalized the bat; they could not see the bat’s value at first. As the game progressed, however, the bat played a crucial role. As the game was near the end, he was given the ball and able to fly with great agility, which allowed him to score the winning goal. As Calder and Fletcher comment, “This particular story teaches us that
everyone is important, everyone has a particular talent, and these talents can make a difference in the final outcome of events” (31). The energy of the game, then, comes from placing gifts against each other; as the cosmos is composed of opposing forces, so is lacrosse and all life (Arnold, Gift 105-109). Life and creation are enhanced through inclusion, diversity, and the exchange of gifts (Arnold, Gift 1-2). This story reveals the significance of preserving the unique gifts of all beings.

From a worldview that values relationships and the uniqueness of all beings, esteems peace, and focuses on nurturing the world for seven generations to come, it is possible to extract a different ethical orientation, namely, what I call an “ethic of preservative care.” Instead of beginning from an abstract position, such as thinking about the greatest overall net good or one’s rational duty, indigenous philosophy and Haudenosaunee insights embed us in concrete relationships with responsibilities and respect for the uniqueness and well-being of the one to whom you are relating. An ethic of preservative care begins, then, from relationships and genuine concern for nurturing the gifts of others. To be able to nurture the other, deep understanding must be present; going beyond surface awareness, receptivity and deep understanding need to be cultivated. Interactions are about enhancing the other’s gifts and freeing the other from things that could be detrimental. The individual and community are not separate; the gifts of the individual bring well-being to the larger community, and the flourishing larger community helps the individual to thrive. This is the foundation for sustained peace. By seeing the self as always interconnected and nourished by a complex web of relationships, preservative care aims to cultivate a harmony where all things can flourish. This is not just the absence of violence, but it is an active, continuous cultivation of peace through preserving others’ gifts. To care in this way, and to shape one’s life and community around these values, all aspects of creation take on more significance; preservative care and gratitude bring fullness to life as every interaction becomes more important.

Worries about Appropriating Indigenous Cultures
Existing alongside the above topics are worries about engaging and incorporating other cultures into one's work. The potential of cultural appropriation cannot be avoided, and concerns about it have existed in U.S. higher education in a sustained way for decades. For example, Edward Said has researched how one society can create “knowledge” about another culture through contact, research, and misrepresentation, especially through such areas as archeology and philology, and he has argued that such misrepresentations have sustained imperialistic processes: “What we must reckon with is a long and slow process of appropriation by which Europe, or the European awareness of the Orient, transformed itself from being textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military” (210). Said’s approach has helped to shape other scholarship, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

Said’s notion of ‘positional superiority’ is useful here for conceptualizing the ways in which knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed. Processes for enabling these things to occur became organized and systematic. They not only informed the field of study referred to by Said as ‘Orientalism’ but other disciplines of knowledge and ‘regimes of truth.’ It is through these disciplines that the indigenous world has been represented to the West and it is through these disciplines that indigenous peoples often research for the fragments of ourselves which were taken, catalogued, studied and stored. (61)

A few examples of struggles against cultural appropriation follow: the early twentieth-century controversy surrounding Robert Bringhurst’s translations of Haida poems; the litigation in the 1980s surrounding Michael Heller’s aerial photographs of an indigenous ceremonial dance that was sacred and private; and the 1999 case in Phillips County, Arkansas, against the theft of the African-American blues legacy (Rholetter 299-302). How may we think of cultural appropriation? Is there a way to engage a culture in a responsible way that avoids cultural appropriation? And how do the answers to these questions inform the practices of being an ally to indigenous nations and peoples? These are the
questions this section will seek to answer in a brief way to help ensure more ethical treatment of indigenous ideas and the cultivation of healthier relationships across cultures. So while the approach here is not meant to be exhaustive in any sense, it is meant to offer a way to assess work for cultural appropriation.

Unfortunately, the idea of cultural appropriation is not well defined because the taking of another’s culture or property is not straightforward in every situation. The unapproved possession of artifacts, such as bones or tools, provides a simpler case, but how does one “possess” language, for example, and what does it mean to put restrictions on the use of language or concepts? This starting point is limited, however, because of the colonial context and its concerns for the property rights of authors and Western views of property. Instead of getting stuck within the skein of Western concepts, it is better to understand cultural appropriation as having at least three characteristics: (1) “relationships among people,” (2) a “wide range of modes through which” appropriation occurs, and (3) a wide practice (Ziff and Rao 3). The first point is, arguably, the most important; cultural appropriation takes place in relationships of unequal power, which includes such things as greater military and economic strength. The history of this imbalance is important. Cultural appropriation takes place to enhance the more powerful group, and this is unidirectional and, therefore, exploitative: from the perspective of the violated group, the exchange does not provide a benefit to its members, and the exchange often tends to have a coercive or non-voluntary dimension to it. Reciprocity is lacking. This leads to the second point, as the many modes can include archeologists studying a specific indigenous nation, or it can be the use of indigenous botanical knowledge to further pharmaceutical advancements and profits. The modes should not be limited, but they should be assessed based on exploitative practices, which means new modes of cultural appropriation will emerge as people attempt to exploit others in new ways. The third point makes it clear that cultural appropriation is an ongoing phenomenon shaping popular culture, the business world, and academia. With these three points in mind, exploitation becomes an important focal point: as colonizers occupied and seized indigenous lands for their own
benefit, similar seizures occur today that disregard the welfare, rights, and sovereignty of indigenous nations and peoples.

This emphasis on exploitation, and the lack of reciprocal benefit, is clear in various responses to cultural appropriations. For example, in his chapter condemning anthropologists and anthropological practices, Vine Deloria argues for an equitable relationship between indigenous research subjects and academia.

Every summer when school is out a veritable stream of immigrants heads into Indian country. From every rock and cranny in the East they emerge, as if responding to some primeval fertility rite, and flock to the reservations.... An anthropologist comes out to Indian reservations to make OBSERVATIONS... After the books are written, summaries of the books appear in the scholarly journals in the guise of articles. These articles “tell it like it is” and serve as a catalyst to inspire other anthropologists to make the great pilgrimage next summer. (Custer Died 78-79)

Not only do the anthropologists get things wrong and, in Deloria’s assessment, play an uncritical role in the perpetuation of colonizing practices, but implied in his observation is also the problem of exploitation:

Several years ago an anthropologist stated that over a period of some twenty years he had spent, from all sources, close to ten million dollars studying a tribe of less than a thousand people! Imagine what that amount of money would have meant to that group of people had it been invested in buildings and businesses. There would have been no problems to study! (Custer Died 93)

The anthropologist receives funding to study a problem; the person in this role publishes articles and books on the topic. The publishers, journals, and colleges or universities gain money or prestige from the publications, and the scholar secures a better foothold in the field, may gain tenure through the publications, and adds to their professional reputation. Indigenous nations and peoples do not benefit, and often, the scholars have not consulted the indigenous group before publishing the “insights.” There is no significant reciprocal benefit; these relationships are exploitative in nature.
Confronting cultural appropriation through the lens of exploitation and a lack of mutual benefit is present not only in Deloria’s writings, but in practice. The first issue is direct engagement with indigenous peoples; in situations of anthropological research, for example, it has become more common to have strict research protocols and indigenous boards overseeing the practices, collection of data, and the interpretation of data (Kovach 141-155). For those writing books and articles, it is crucial to focus on indigenous publications and articles, using indigenous writers and scholars as the foundational source. This means respecting indigenous evaluations, guidance, values, concerns, and welfare. Instead of assuming positions of power and authority, the approach should be a deferential one marked by a deep desire to listen carefully and learn; and this means openness to being corrected, acknowledging mistakes, and correcting those mistakes. This has important implications for research: research is no longer about taking an objective view of a subject that is written about from a disembodied perspective. Instead, research and scholarship should take on a peacebuilding dimension. The question for those doing research is this: How will I use my research and communication of that research to build better relationships for all people affected by my scholarship, and how will I direct my research toward promoting sustained peace for all humans and nonhumans alike? A fundamental paradigm shift is needed: losing the naïve assumption that education and research are impartial and objective, while foregrounding the intention to make all research activity conform to a larger strategy for peacebuilding.

How, then, is it possible to reduce cultural appropriations? The answer may begin with violence, which has three clear dimensions: direct violence; cultural violence; and institutional violence (Galtung 291-305). This means that the cultivation of peace should focus on three different dimensions: direct peacebuilding, cultural peacebuilding, and institutional peacebuilding. Individuals need to bring peacebuilding behaviors into everything they do. Transformations in attitudes, beliefs, and values need to occur; cultures need to embrace and advance peacebuilding. Finally, institutions need to reorient themselves around missions, practices, and values that promote peacebuilding in every dimension of life. On the individual level, researchers need to approach
research as an ally to indigenous peoples, seeking to infuse indigenous values into their research. This also means embedding research, communication of findings, and service work within the context of colonization and working to challenge it. In the cultural dimension, this means believing indigenous values and history matter, paying attention to indigenous struggles for justice, and cultivating positive attitudes toward indigenous studies. In the institutional dimension, this means that educational institutions, peer reviewers, and publishers need to not only embrace indigenous values and respect them, but also seek to advance and publish writings on indigenous issues and ideas, being sure to be an ally in decolonization and peacebuilding practices. Following the ideas expressed above, to avoid cultural appropriation, it is important to honor interdependence and the many relational webs that sustain all of us. It is important to direct all research and publications toward sustained peace and to think about how it will help to ensure the thriving of all beings for seven generations. It is important to structure research and publications in a way that includes an ethic of preservative care, making sure that all research, publications, and teaching are not grounded in exclusionary, non-reciprocal practices, but also grounded in inclusive practices intent on nurturing the unique gifts of others for the mutual wellbeing of all those we encounter and for the betterment of future generations.

What all of this may look like in more detail is a conversation for a later date. Any conversation must be carried out in respectful collaborations with others intent on cultivating peace personally, institutionally, and beyond. The above orientation has offered, therefore, only broad brushstrokes. The affirmations presented in this paper can guide all dimensions of life, including opposition to cultural appropriation. The idea of cultural appropriation with its exploitative, non-reciprocal nature clearly opposes the affirmations offered in the sections above. If this is not enough for some readers, another approach may be helpful when thinking about how to support peacebuilding in the various realms identified by Galtung, an orientation offered in Anita L. Sanchez’s *The Four Sacred Gifts*. Over two decades ago in 1994, a dream came to a Mohican man, Don Coyhis. Eventually, his dream, through consultations with elders, became the foundation for an international movement; it
offered four sacred gifts to bring all humanity together and to heal the pains affecting international and personal relationships (Sanchez 1-28). Represented by a multicolored hoop symbolizing unity and interdependence, the first sacred gift given to every human being is the power of forgiveness. The second is the power to heal. The third is the power of unity, and the fourth is the power of hope. Any personal, cultural, or institutional dimension that resists or undermines the four sacred gifts should be questioned and challenged, and this includes the practice of cultural appropriation that undermines the sacred gifts above. If one’s life, research, education, and publications oppose these gifts or do not advance them, the issues should generate a level of suspicion and should be addressed in a healing way. In other words, it is time to hold ourselves accountable, our cultures accountable, and our institutions accountable. In every dimension, it is time to wage a courageous struggle for healthy peacebuilding, and it is time to hold each other accountable—in a peaceful, healing way—to make sure that life is better for those seven generations in the future. It is time to see research and all education as part of the peacebuilding process and to resist the exploitative dimensions of cultural appropriation that undermines it. Without such a paradigm shift, scholarship, education, and the interpersonal dimensions in academia will likely reproduce contexts and conditions supportive of cultural appropriation and exploitative, unsupportive practices.

**Final Thoughts**

As seen in the first section describing the DoCD and the boarding school experience, U.S. history is grounded in colonizing practices that attempted to exterminate or subdue indigenous nations and peoples, a history leading to unjust institutions, practices, laws, and values that continue to shape the United States, especially through court decisions. To speak of justice and reform without addressing this history and its effects on the present is problematic. By not addressing such issues, critical analyses and attempts at social change are incomplete; the treatment of indigenous nations and peoples remains a blind spot. Second, without paying attention to these dimensions, there is the chance of replicating or
mutating past injustices. The next three portions of this paper addressed dimensions of indigenous philosophy that should be affirmed in social struggles today. Instead of being defensive or reactive, affirmation is a good starting point for resistance. It is time to look beyond the status quo, its foundations, and the actions, beliefs, institutions, and values buttressing it. By turning to indigenous philosophy and by affirming its wisdom, change agents can embrace a different orientation that is more healing, one open to nurturing relationships, interdependence, sustained peace, gifts, and an ethic of preservative care. The last section turned to the topic of cultural appropriation, which is grounded in an exploitative, non-reciprocal relationship. Guided by the three affirmations and the four sacred gifts, some possible criteria exist by which scholars and readers can address whether or not research, publications, and education are contributing to sustained peace or sustained violence. As cultural appropriation perpetuates sustained violence, it should be resisted in a way that honors indigenous values and wisdom, and this means that academia needs a paradigm shift: its focus should be on developing knowledge and practices that support sustained peace for all.

Not only is this essay about indigenous history and how indigenous philosophies can help to improve our lives and actions to change society, but the deeper philosophical issue is this: resistance and struggles for change should not begin in the negative, but in the affirmative. Social change should be grounded in a radical declaration: “Yes!” It concerns avoiding the negation already in the status quo that diminishes human and nonhuman beings, using them as a means to an end. This alternative approach affirms the best in life and thought that will help change agents to allow all beings to flourish. But it also concerns the affirmation to live out this approach in good times and bad; it is about serious commitment to something new, a way of being and relating that disrupts cultural, institutional, and direct forms of violence (Galtung 291-305). It is a way of living that chooses and nourishes cultural, institutional, and direct forms of peace: a way that moves beyond the absence of violence to cultivate peace in a sustained way for seven generations to come. As a society, negativity, belittling, anger, hatred, revenge, and the constant diminishment of others have become the norm; none of this helps to
cultivate peace. Divisions and us-against-them mentalities do not help; guided by the Haudenosaunee example, it is time to offer words of peace and to sing songs of peace to all those around us. If we do not change soon, we may find that our aggression, resentments, entrenched hatred, and limited views of what counts as justice will have eclipsed the possibility of affirming, nurturing, and preserving anything at all. To try to change society for the better through the use of hatred and anger will, at best, bring more of the same, so let us begin with an affirmation that something better is possible. Therefore, let us begin all we do with an affirmation of sustained peace, preservative care, the unique gifts of all beings, and our inescapable interdependence.

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