

Indigenous Voices

A Prized Writing Curated Collection

“Our Ancestors Have Gone Through This Before”: COVID-19 and Its Disproportionate Consequences in Indigenous Communities (2020-2021)

UC Davis Patwin Memorial: Resistance in Plain Sight (2018-2019)

Native America: The Struggle To Be Seen (2016-2017)

For centuries, Indigenous peoples have nurtured their families and cultures, stewarded their land, and fought for the rights deprived of them by the American government. Their stories are widely varied, culturally rich and—most importantly—meant to be told directly by Indigenous people.

Each paper in this collection centers the experiences and voices of Indigenous people. These writers have highlighted some of the challenges that American institutions pose for Indigenous communities, such as healthcare disparities and the expression of Indigenous perspectives on college campuses. There may be no perfect solution to these challenges, but listening to Indigenous voices is a vital first step.

“Our Ancestors Have Gone Through This Before”: COVID-19 and It's Disproportionate Consequences in Indigenous Communities



ANNALIESE DIVNEY

WRITER'S COMMENT: For this assignment, I wrote about the impact of COVID-19 among Indigenous communities. The prompt was extremely open-ended, which intimidated me at first. I am extremely passionate about environmental justice, which is intrinsically related to Indigenous rights, Land Back, and decolonization. Related to this topic, of course, is public health among Indigenous communities, as it forms a feedback loop with environmental conditions, each affecting the other through countless interconnected pathways. While writing this article, I had the honor of interviewing many inspiring community leaders. I learned about the consequences of the pandemic that are not at the forefront of the general public's consciousness and are typically not even considered by public health specialists or academics, such as the pandemic's threat to culture and language. Listening to and amplifying the experiences of Indigenous people is crucial to understanding long term socioeconomic and cultural effects of the pandemic, and to documenting and demonstrating the ways in which inequities and systemic discrimination compound and intensify, especially during times of crisis.

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: Annaliese Divney's extraordinary exploration of the ways in which Covid has impacted Native American communities drew me in as soon as I started reading it. She found powerful data, and, at least as important, powerful stories. Annaliese has what I can

“Our Ancestors Have Gone Through This Before”

only call an instinct for story-telling, knowing how to pace her work, how to intrigue her readers, and, perhaps above all, how to tell a hard hitting story in a way that, ultimately, is empowering. I'm delighted that Prized Writing has recognized her work, and I am sure it is only the first of many, many published works that Annaliese shall put out into the world in the years to come. Hers is a powerful voice . . .

—*Sasha Abramsky, University Writing Program*

Christina Thomas speaks in an earnest and somber tone, reflecting on the knowledge and experiences of the many generations of Northern Paiute, Western Shoshone, and Hopi that shape the branches of her family tree. About the COVID-19 pandemic, she states in simple terms: “Our ancestors have gone through this before.”

Since the arrival of colonizers who carried with them an array of deadly diseases like smallpox, measles, and cholera, public health crises have disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception to this pattern.

Unequal distribution of public health consequences is caused by a multitude of underlying social and economic factors originating from systematic discrimination. Indigenous peoples fall into some of the most vulnerable categories when it comes to health. Compounding factors that augment Indigenous people’s vulnerability to infectious diseases include access to proper sanitation, clean water, quality healthcare, and healthy food sources. According to a paper published in the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, these “social and health inequities [stem] from invasion and subsequent colonization,” the legacy of which “includes intergenerational and concentrated poverty, poor physical and mental health, transport and housing issues, increased rates of domestic and family violence, shorter life expectancy, and inadequate access to culturally safe care” (Power et al., 2020). The United Nations (2020) found that American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations have higher rates of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, higher mortality rates, and shorter life spans than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Health issues like heart and liver disease, hypertension, cancers, and diabetes are also more common among Indigenous peoples, according to information released by the International Indian Treaty Council (2020). All of these risk factors have come to a head during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent

evidence suggests that average COVID-19 incidence rates are 3.5 times higher for AI/AN persons than non-Hispanic Whites and that death rates are higher for AI/AN persons as well (Yellow Horse & Huyser, 2021). Further, the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (2020) found that AI/AN persons make up 0.7 percent of the U.S. population, yet are overrepresented in COVID-19 infection rates, as 1.3 percent of all COVID-19 cases reported to the CDC from January 22, 2020, to May 30, 2020, were among AI/AN persons.

Allie Hostler is an editor of the *Two Rivers Tribune*, a community newspaper that serves the Trinity and Klamath River Communities in Northern California. Hostler spoke on how these conditions are all inextricably linked to the centuries of systematic oppression that Indigenous people face: “We struggle with health disparities, unusually high rates of heart disease, diabetes, and substance abuse. That all comes with being oppressed, that comes with poverty.” The magnitude of the effects of the pandemic has pushed smaller operations like the *Two Rivers Tribune* to their limits. Hostler works nights for the newspaper, making sure crucial information is readily available to the public, and during the day she spends 40 to 60 hours per week working as the Operations Section Chief for the local COVID-19 Incident Management Team. “We get hit with Covid when we’re already struggling to keep up academically, financially, mentally, and emotionally,” Hostler explained. “And it’s just this big boom.” The shock waves of this boom know no boundaries, reverberating through countless spheres of society, leaving nothing untouched.

One specific health disparity that has been exacerbated by the pandemic is substance abuse. Indigenous people suffer from alcohol use disorder at rates 14.9 percent greater than those of other racial demographics and also exhibit increased rates of general drug usage and mental health concerns (Fuller, 2019). “You could ask anyone here if there’s been increased drug activity over the course of the pandemic and they’re going to say ‘yes,’” Hostler stated. “There’s also a huge risk of the loss of culture,” she continued, “not only from Covid but also from the drug epidemic. People who are keepers of knowledge, if they aren’t healthy in a way that allows them to meaningfully participate and share their wisdom, then we risk losing that knowledge.”

Rhonda Bigovich, a member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe and lead reporter for the *Two Rivers Tribune*, is closely involved with community

support groups for people recovering from addiction. There have been several youth overdoses during the past year in her community, she said as she explained the impact that the pandemic has had on substance usage. The cancellation of support group meetings per COVID-19 restrictions has left people without their core means of support for over a year. “Typically, we’d have these resources to go to for support, but it’s all fallen apart completely,” Bigovich commented. Her biggest concern lies with the community’s Narcotics Anonymous (NA) group. Because members of their NA group do not keep in contact with each other outside of their in-person meetings, Bigovich explained that the impact of having these services completely shut down for such a long period of time could lead to people not returning to meetings, even once they are back up and running.

Jeanine Gaines, a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, also remarked on how these behavioral health problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Gaines is the Communications Manager for the Sacramento Native American Health Center (SNAHC), overseeing its internal and external communications, outreach, marketing, advertising, and social media—to name only a few of her responsibilities. Gaines’ packed schedule was projected onto the background of her Zoom window, with boxes and books stacked high behind her desk and a ceiling-to-floor whiteboard so full of writing it barely had any blank space to spare. And if that isn’t enough evidence of her crammed workdays, since the start of the pandemic, the Behavioral Health Department at SNAHC has seen a 106 percent increase in the number of appointments and outreach initiatives, Gaines said as she leafed through the various stacks of numbers and charts that would soon be transformed into SNAHC’s 2019–2020 Report. She said it’s a good thing that people are able to get support through SNAHC, “but we also know there’s still a huge population of people struggling out there who we just aren’t able to reach.”

Another factor of the pandemic that affects Indigenous communities in a crucially significant way is the threat that COVID-19 poses to older demographics. Christina Thomas shared that “the threat that Covid poses to our elders, our knowledge-keepers and culture-protectors, is a really scary thing.” In some Indigenous communities, elders are among the last remaining fluent speakers of the language, and COVID-19 threatens to sever that flow of knowledge before it has the chance to be passed on to the next generation.

Gaines remarked on how it was interesting to see the public's reaction when the pandemic first started, as many dismissed it as only a danger for old people. "Our elders are sacred," Gaines said passionately. "Dismissing Covid because it poses the greatest threat to elders is just not our way." She continued, "Unfortunately a lot of our elders have been lost through the pandemic, and it was very hard not being able to hold ceremonies while they were still here." Dozens of Native elders from the SNAHC community alone have passed. "It's been difficult. A lot of the ceremonies, songs, and dances are not supposed to be filmed, so then we're faced with the question of whether or not to break tradition and film the ceremonies so that the elders can see it and participate from their homes," said Gaines. Not only does COVID-19 threaten to take the lives of loved ones, but it also endangers culture and language, a burden that is largely specific to Indigenous communities.

The pandemic likewise brought about an unprecedented disruption of traditions and ceremonies. Hostler spoke about how their major community gatherings have not taken place in over a year, which has significant impacts on mental health in the community. "Public ceremonies are some of the most important events for people who have it rough, who may not have much hope, or who, for instance, struggle with substance abuse," Hostler elaborated. They rely on those public ceremonies for mental and emotional fortitude.

Indigenous children also rely on social groups that have been affected by the pandemic. Councilmember Joe Davis is a thirty-six-year-old representative for the Soctish-Chenone District of the Hoopa Valley Tribe and is the head organizer for the local youth football and cheerleading programs as well. He explained that athletics are a huge deal on the reservation: "There's not a lot else going on to keep the kids excited." With the cancelation of the athletic season and the closure of schools, the kids on the reservation have had an extremely rough time regarding lack of social interaction and physical exercise, combined with the ever-present stress of living through a pandemic.

As COVID-19 left no sector unscathed, it is not surprising that weaknesses in local infrastructure were brought to light over the past year as well. AI/AN people suffer from higher rates of food insecurity due to centuries of institutionalized inequities. Research conducted by Blue Bird Jernigan et al. (2017) found that one in four Indigenous people experiences consistent food insecurity, compared to one in nine Americans

nationally. “We don’t have five grocery stores to choose from; we have one,” Hostler stated. “So if there’s an outbreak at the store and it closes down, our entire community doesn’t have access to food. The pandemic really exposed the weaknesses in our food systems.” Councilmember Davis further elaborated on how COVID-19 has affected the food supply by causing issues in the community’s supply lines, leaving shelves at the local grocery store barren. “I think we can’t be so dependent on outside sources,” Councilmember Davis said, as he explained that this was a wake-up call to start increasing production of food locally and further build self-sufficiency wherever possible. For him, this incident exposed how a seemingly unrelated catastrophe, like the spread of a virus, affects things as crucial as the supply of food when infrastructure and resources are already stretched so thin. Gaines likewise explained how it has been a challenge to keep vital services like grocery stores and gas stations operational, and how necessities as basic as water access have been threatened by the pandemic. “Our water treatment plant has two guys that know how to treat the water. If one of them got Covid and the other one was exposed and had to be quarantined, then all of a sudden our entire community’s source of clean water is threatened.”

Inadequate access to the internet has posed another problem throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, especially regarding distance learning for students. Large portions of the Trinity and Klamath River communities do not have internet access, which is part of why print media like the *Two Rivers Tribune* is such a vital source of information. “To have missed a whole year of school and also not have internet access for much of that time,” Hostler said, “it’s been a rough year for our students.” As cited in Feir et al. (2019), the U.S. Census Bureau released estimates that demonstrate significant disparities in internet access, with some AI/AN reservations having fewer than 55 percent of households with broadband access, compared to the national average of almost 80 percent. Having no internet access tends to throw a wrench into the process of taking classes online, not to mention being able to access crucial public health information, guidelines, and news.

During public health crises, visibility can be a matter of life and death, affecting everything from federal funding to epidemiology and data collection. “Ours is a part of the world that gets very little press coverage,” Hostler remarked. When asked about the role of visibility in SNAHC’s work, Gaines spoke about how accurate data collection surrounding

COVID-19 cases and mortality among Indigenous populations is crucial. “Our Native people are being hidden,” she explained. COVID-19 death rates, especially in urban areas, are inaccurately recorded because of restrictive options for Indigenous people when it comes to denoting their race and ethnicity. For instance, racial misclassification is a common occurrence, which leads to underestimates when it comes to COVID-19 data in specific demographics. According to the CDC (Arias et al. 2016), Indigenous people were racially misclassified on their official death certificates up to 40 percent of the time. “So there’s been this huge push to get accurate numbers,” Gaines explained. “We see these Covid death rates, but we know that they’re probably even higher for Indigenous people, it’s just that the data is not reflective of our community.” A friend of Gaines’s, a young woman, lost both her grandmother and her aunt to COVID-19 and, “instead of grieving, she was trying to fight to make sure they were visible She said the last thing she could do for them was to try to make sure they were accurately represented.”

And yet in the midst of this crisis we see rays of hope, shining outpourings of solidarity and support, and an astounding willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. “At SNAHC, we’ve had to pivot a lot to support our patients,” explained Gaines. Fifty percent of patients served by SNAHC have multiple chronic health issues, putting them at an increased risk for severe disease and death from COVID-19. One major change that happened at SNAHC was a shift to telehealth. At the beginning of the pandemic, SNAHC’s Behavioral Health Department transferred completely to online visits, and medical health departments went 80 percent online. And this transition all happened in the blink of an eye; the change was drastic, to say the least. SNAHC employees found themselves rearranging in-clinic activities to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, organizing virtual telehealth appointment systems, and setting up and implementing huge testing and then vaccination campaigns, on top of all of the other basic services provided by the center. And still, every week the medical team improved their processes to be faster, safer, and more efficient. “Their willingness to change processes at a moment’s notice—it’s like a well-oiled machine,” Gaines explained with passionate admiration.

Hostler reported a similarly bright outlook regarding vaccinations among the Hoopa Valley Tribe, where over 45 percent (around 1,450 people) of the eligible population had been vaccinated by mid-April

2021. Tribal leaders even made the effort to call every tribal elder to offer vaccines, schedule appointments, answer questions, and make home visits when requested. For a small community with a significant proportion of the population being under sixteen years of age, having vaccines in at least 1,450 arms is an incredible feat.

However, testing and vaccinations are not the only ways in which communities have worked to battle this pandemic. A care package program started by Christina Thomas helped connect and comfort many families. Initially, Thomas established the program as a way to get personal protective equipment (PPE) and traditional medicines into the hands of community members. However, as support increased and donations grew, the lucky recipients opened their doors to packages filled with much more than just PPE. Alongside masks and hand sanitizer sat bread, potatoes, fruit, veggies, canned goods, puzzles, books, and more. But Thomas didn't stop there—she wanted to do a little something extra for the kids. By the time August 2020 rolled around and (virtual) school was back in session, Thomas and her partners were able to donate over three hundred backpacks, each stuffed with school supplies, PPE, and some extra goodies too.

In quiet reflection, Allie Hostler spoke of the things that fortify her: a recent decline of COVID-19 cases among the Hoopa Valley Tribe, the strength of her community, the gradual re-opening of schools, the beautiful weather. And as she spoke, birds chirped in the background, affirming the arrival of spring—nature's song of solidarity. Hostler elaborated, “There's a sense of hope here. We've been very resilient so far, and my hope is that we continue that resiliency, that we appreciate our community events even more, and that we cherish every chance we get to be together.”

Author's Note: I would like to express my sincerest thanks and deepest appreciation to Jeanine Gaines (Citizen Potawatomi Nation), Allie Hostler (Hoopa Valley Tribe), Christina Thomas (Northern Paiute, Western Shoshone, and Hopi), Rhonda Bigovich (Hoopa Valley Tribe), and Councilmember Joe Davis (Hoopa Valley Tribe) for sharing with me their invaluable knowledge, insight, and experiences.

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UC Davis Patwin Memorial: Resistance in Plain Sight

ARISA BUNANAN



WRITER'S COMMENT: When I set out to write this paper for a UWP 101 class, it was initially going to be about why European colonization of the Americas should be taught as genocides. However, after a discussion with my professor, I realized the endeavor would be a herculean one, and with her encouragement to select a local topic, decided to analyze the Patwin Memorial on campus, and how monuments of a "post-colonial" world teach us about a colonial past. Throughout the process of writing this paper, I found my voice as an art historian. By considering the entirety of this monument, its aesthetics, its history, its creation, I discovered a space of reflection that asked of me to consider all of the nuances, the downfalls, and the triumphs of the memorial's existence. I would like to thank Dr. Karma Waltonen for her fearlessness and unapologetic teaching style that made me a braver writer, and Native American Studies PhD Candidate Jessa Rae Growing Thunder, for her wisdom and vivaciousness as a teacher of Native American Studies.

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: In UWP 101, students are allowed to choose their own topic for their term paper. I was excited when Arisa Bunanan chose a memorial site to evaluate. The narratives we create about the past are powerful, meaning we have to be careful in crafting them—we have the responsibility to tell stories ethically and to understand how stories about the past shape our future. Exploring how UC Davis grapples with the history of the land and its peoples is part of that work. Arisa's essay is powerful. When it was finished, I urged her to send it to Prized Writing, but I also offered to let it be

a guest column on my museum blog. The Prized Writing judges were right to steal that opportunity from me.

—Karma Waltonen, University Writing Program

Parceled within a dappled pocket of sunshine, a small, embedded garden sits along a dirt path, carved out in its own spatial and temporal niche. Pedestal-like basalt pillars mark the path winding down into a spiral sitting area beneath the shade of a monumental tree by the banks of the waterway; these pillars tell stories of “air . . . thick with the smoke of . . . cooking fires, as the women . . . prepare a meal for the children and the elders” (UC Davis, *Patwin Memorial*). The Patwin Memorial (Fig. 1) on the UC Davis campus plays a secluded, yet momentous role. Dedicated in 2011 after the discovery of Patwin Native remains beneath the construction site of the Mondavi Center in 2002 (UC Davis, *Native American Contemplative Garden*), it was installed as a tribute to the Indigenous peoples who once inhabited the area. The tribute can be construed as a placating measure on the part of the university for continuing the construction, despite of having found remains at the location of the multi-million dollar performance center. Neither this memorial, nor its task of commemorating Patwin people, is well known on campus, and while its size does not diminish its significance, the circumstances

surrounding its construction warrant an evaluation.

The Patwin Memorial, also known as the Native American Contemplative Garden, is located between the Mondavi Center and the School of Law’s King Hall. It was conceptualized by UC Davis students and faculty of Native descent, members of the Patwin



Figure 1. UC Davis, UC Davis Patwin Memorial, UC Davis Arboretum, Davis, California, 2011.

community, Sid England (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Sustainability

and Environmental Stewardship), campus arboretum officials, and Tammara Norton and her team from the Far Western Anthropological Research Group.

The present evaluation of this memorial is not meant to indict UCD's handling of the Mondavi gravesite. Rather, it examines the effects of two events side by side: the discovery of the gravesite, and the construction of the memorial. The success of the artistic elements and placement of the memorial, will also be examined alongside the nuances that prevent a judgment about the rightness or wrongness of its creation. These include whether or not it respectfully represents the ancestors of the Patwin people, and its contribution to the awareness of Native presence on campus and overall progress towards decolonization.

In his article "Democratizing Monuments," Michael Kammen defines the criteria a monument must meet in order to be considered democratic. He reasons that in order for a monument to come into existence within a democracy, it must include aspects of non-specificity, memory, and didacticism (Kammen 287). The Patwin memorial possesses all three aspects, due to its non-specific representation of people with stone pillars, the element of memory embedded in the non-specific shapes (a circle), and the didactic (teaching) purpose of the words written on the stones. The memorial's spiral motif, as Sid England explained, intends "to evoke California Native basketry" (Parker), an art form and utilitarian practice pivotal to Natives in California. The memorial also alludes to the shape of a circle, a powerful symbol in Native American culture and religion. A Native monument at the Smithsonian implements a similar focus: the *Warriors' Circle of Honor*, designed by Harvey Pratt (Fig. 2), as explained in the Native American publication *Indian Country Today* (Schilling). Pratt—a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribe, a Marine Corps veteran, and a forensic artist—submitted the concept and design for the *Warriors' Circle of Honor*, and explains the sacredness of the "circle of life," as timeless, unwavering in Native culture, "a matter of simplicity . . . strong among people" (qtd. in Schilling). Both of these monuments share a contemplative purpose and seek to create a space for reflection. Given the surface-level evaluation of its physical elements, then, the Patwin Memorial clearly meets the democratic criteria laid out by Kammen.

A closer examination of the basalt stones, carved with descriptions



Figure 2. Harvey Pratt, Warriors' Circle of Honor, Smithsonian Washington D.C., 2018. The scheduled ground breaking is in 2019; it will be open sometime to the public in 2020.

of Patwin life in the area intended to put the visitor in the same space that Natives inhabited, reveals a striking duality within the monument. These vague, idyllic snippets of painted scenes of daily life of the Patwin “[i]magine this path without buildings or roads” (UC Davis *Patwin Memorial*), reminding one of mission plaques bearing sanitized versions

of American history devoid of the brutalities of settler colonialism. In “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” (2012), Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang examine the power structure imposed by settler colonialism at the founding of the United States. Settler colonialism—as opposed to external colonialism, which focuses on exploiting goods for the betterment of the imperial country’s economy—requires the destruction of a population inhabiting the land that the settlers wish to occupy. This means that the construction of a settler colonial power structure must be re-asserted onto the inhabitants daily, in order for the settlers to maintain their status at the top of the hierarchy (Tuck and Yang 5). This concept encapsulates all past and modern day institutions of the United States, including UC Davis, whether a system’s acts of Native erasure are implemented consciously or unconsciously.

The pervasive unconscious rhetoric of settler colonialism is enforced by hegemony, or the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group. Related to the history of hegemony is Manifest Destiny, the settler colonist belief in the God-given right to expand into the west of North America. One may imagine the concept of Manifest Destiny—an expression of Western belief in technological and industrial progress as the ultimate goal of civilization—as a drop of red food coloring, hegemony (dominance by a group) as a spoon, and society as a glass of milk. The harmful rhetoric is stirred into society until such rhetoric becomes indistinguishable from society and difficult, if not impossible, to filter out. Hegemonic ideology of settler colonialism

creates an assumption that somehow the Natives simply just faded away, that the “savage” gave way to the “progressive,” because of the concept of Manifest Destiny. By only addressing the past and not the events that led to the present, vast swaths of oppressive history of movement into California, which employed tactics of genocide, are erased. Despite the memorial’s presence, it becomes a ghost-like stand in. Visitors can read the stone pillars and feel shallow nostalgia about the beautiful wilderness and people who once lived on this land without feeling guilty about being a part of a system that perpetuates the myth of peaceful colonization.

This bias and oversight would be worse if the memorial didn’t also have a central stone in the middle of the sitting space listing “the names of 51 members of the Patwin known to have inhabited the region and forcibly been relocated to missions from 1817 to 1836” (Parker). Although these names powerfully acknowledge the people lost, the pillar’s words leave out the settler colonist in the historic narrative: “Then, now, and always a part of this land. The names you see on this column come from mission records and are of Patwin people who lived on this land and were removed to missions between 1817 and 1836” (UC Davis *Patwin Memorial*). Because there is no mention of the forced labor, abuse, and cultural displacement inflicted upon the Patwin who were relocated and upon their families and tribes, the white settler is given the omnipresent, invisible status of being present in history without being blamed. There persists a haunting feeling, one that maintains an inability to identify the exploitation of Native peoples that occurred because Western institutions were, in no small part, built upon cruelty and disregard for (non-White) life.

Measured by Kammen’s standards, the memorial seems to satisfy all the requirements for a democratic monument. This measure falters, however, when contrasted with the manifestos of Indigenous scholars like Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, who reassert the fact that the United States was founded upon stolen land, regardless of honorific memorials. No amount of democratic monuments will inspire an acceptance of a placating apology without actual redistribution of land to the descendants of the Patwin tribe. Regardless of Kammen’s credibility as a writer and a scholar, he maintains a stance rooted in a Western perspective, denying or effectively downplaying that this land was forcibly taken from Indigenous peoples and, as such, that the democracy constructed upon it—and any standards for compensatory monuments—is of questionable legitimacy.

Just as removing statues of Confederate generals does not equate the erasure of the historical event of Confederate secession and its racist values, “righting” the wrongs of historical narrative by including Native Americans in memorials does not change the fundamental fact that their lands were stolen, the United States Federal Government committed genocide against their peoples, and they live in resistance to the settler colonial regime. In the same vein, just because UC Davis implemented the Patwin Memorial doesn’t mean they didn’t still build the Mondavi Center on top of Patwin burial grounds.

What if more students became aware of circumstances surrounding the Mondavi Center and the Patwin Memorial? Might demonstrations follow? Awareness is undoubtedly important. Still, educational efforts and even protest should unfold in consultation with and guidance from the Native community. Vine Deloria Jr., a Standing Rock Sioux widely regarded as the father of Native American Studies, writes, “[E]verywhere an Indian turns, he is deluged with offers of assistance . . . but rarely does anyone ask an Indian what he thinks” (225). Eve Tuck attributes this eagerness to “inquiry as invasion,” a result of neo-liberal faith in research, a product of the settler’s colonial rhetoric of Western progress being the ultimate goal of civilization. She asks of scholars and researchers to consider three things about “inquiry as invasion” in universities: one, that minorities are asked to speak only about their pain; two, that there are some forms of knowledge institutions do not deserve; and three, that scholarly intervention may not be the kind needed (Tuck). While it is very easy to issue a collective call to action, it is just as important to take a step back and evaluate the implications of said call. To view this memorial as either a triumph of education of Patwin struggles or as simply a blundering token of compensation would be a mistake. While non-Indigenous students’ and scholars’ aid in helping Indigenous students and scholars to expand their platform and influence in academia is welcome, any deliberation by a non-Indigenous person regarding something Native (in this case, what to do with a complex monument) prevents true coalition and support. Since the past cannot be altered, examination of what was produced as a result of this situation is crucial.

Despite its smallness, its underlying influences of a settler colonial regime, and the circumstances around its construction, the Patwin Memorial possesses an emotional potency that cannot—indeed, must

not—be ignored. It is just as important to acknowledge the memorial's presence as it is to critique its underlying rhetoric because, despite its imperfections, it is still a product of collaboration that included Patwin members and students and faculty of Native descent. Rather than viewing the location beside King Hall as a diminishment, we should view the Patwin Memorial's presence here as a sign of resistance and endurance of the Native community. Jessa Rae Growing Thunder, an Assiniboine-Sioux and Ph.D. candidate from the Native American Studies Department of UC Davis, describes Native resistance as persistent, enduring, and omnipresent regardless of the iron grip of the settler colonist regime. She asked her Intro to Native American Studies students to look at the Patwin Memorial's modest size not as something inhibiting its influence, but as something that still communicates a powerful message through a dialogue spoken through architectural interplay. By placing the memorial next to the imposing rectangular length of the School of Law, the university intentionally or not enshrined the space as a symbol of Indigenous resistance. The memorial reminds us of the injustices done to the Indigenous peoples by the United States Federal Government and its unjust laws. The little garden, the personification of Indigenous populations reduced to a minority by the grueling settler colonial machine, stands tall and unwavering between two giants: the Mondavi Center, with its feet rooted in gravesite soil, and the School of Law, with historic blood on its hands.

This duality makes it difficult to classify the memorial as a benign act on the part of the university or as cynical compensation. The solution is to take to heart Growing Thunder's proposition to interpret it as a symbol of resistance, to enter this university-designated "Native American Contemplative Garden" and to use the space to contemplate—regardless of whether or not the resulting thoughts are what the university intended. We can use it perhaps to contemplate the events that brought the memorial into fruition, the disparity between funds allocated for the Mondavi Center (\$57 million) versus the Patwin Memorial (\$214,000), or the better purpose those funds could have served had they simply been given to the Native American Studies Department. The inherently contradictory nature of this memorial that is neither right nor wrong, neither black nor white, may encourage visitors and readers of this essay to understand that not everything is so clean cut. Something born of good intentions can have bad underlying motivations; this does not make

the product inherently good or bad, but complex and worthy of lengthy examination and discussion that can facilitate true change.

Clearly, we should not conflate the Patwin Memorial with something that it is not. It is not a step towards decolonization. It is not an authentic apology issued by the University of California, Davis for the construction of the Mondavi Center. And it is not the most adequate representation of the Patwin people. The memorial is, rather, an act of social activism, mixed with the pangs of a Western institution's attempt to mitigate a literal act of sacrilege. But the creation of the monument itself displays a willingness by the university to acknowledge a wrong that was done, and to extend a hand towards a better future built upon mutual understanding.

So what is the Patwin Memorial? It is neither an official apology issued by UC Davis, nor is it an untainted symbol of Patwin representation. It is, however, still a product of Native collaboration, despite the circumstances around which it rose, and due to its duality as a reminder of injustice and a representative space, it is a symbol of Indigenous resistance.

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Native America: The Struggle to Be Heard

AMANDA AGUILAR



WRITER'S COMMENT: When my professor told us to write a story about a "living saint," I hadn't a clue where to find one. Yes, there are people who do good all around, but I didn't want just anyone. I wanted someone who was doing something that I could connect to and which had an impact. It was early morning when I had the epiphany to write about Chiitaanibah Johnson. I quickly Googled Johnson, found her Twitter account and sent her a message. I had learned about Johnson just a week before in my Native American Literature class. Her story is not an uncommon one, but it is a vital one. I personally have watched classmates stay silent as Native Americans were discussed in a stereotypical and racist manner. It is important that such stories finally get told to the world.

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENT: One of the major assignments in my UWP 111A Photojournalism course is the Saints Alive Project, for which each student must find a local living "saint" and document some specific aspect of her or his life that makes that person saint-worthy. The subjects of the articles my students write don't necessarily need to be religious; they may simply be humanitarians who make efforts at improving the lives of others. Amanda Aguilar wrote her article on Chiitaanibah Johnson, who is Navajo and Maidu, and who was thrust into a leadership role within the Native American community after publicly standing her ground against an ill-informed professor. In her article, Amanda deftly paints an honest and compelling picture of this courageous young woman while also shedding light on the everyday challenges Native Americans face. In her article, Amanda

gets to the essence of Johnson, who boldly encourages her fellow Native Americans to “stand up for themselves and for the accurate representation of their histories.”

— Ken Andersen, University Writing Program

DAVIS, Calif. — The stage lights shone on Chiitaanibah Johnson as she sat in a wooden chair with her head down, showing a timidity wholly absent off stage. A leather and beaded turtle totem hung from her neck.

Across from her sat Rich Hebert, who plays Beverly Weston in Capital Stage’s production of *August: Osage County*. “If you’re going to live here,” said Hebert, “I *want* you to live here. You understand?”

Johnson replied softly, barely lifting her head, “Yes, sir.”

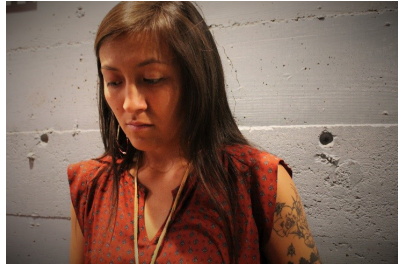
The quiet words and downturned eyes of her character Johnna Monevata were gone a week later as 21-year-old Johnson sat in an empty classroom recalling the events that occurred last fall on the California State University, Sacramento campus (Sac State).

“That story got so big,” she said.

In September of 2015, Johnson, who is a junior English major at Sac State, publicly disagreed with her American History professor, Maury Wiseman, who, during a lecture, stated “genocide” was too strong of a word to describe what happened to Native Americans because it implies intention. Johnson, who is Navajo and Maidu, collected research supporting that genocide did in fact occur; during the next lecture, she raised her hand to present this research to him.

Wiseman did not welcome Johnson’s disagreement, and their discussion became heated.

“When I went into it I was like ‘Don’t sass him,’” Johnson recalled with a smile. “‘Keep it professional.’ But he just started getting rude and defensive.”



Chiitaanibah Johnson stands in costume inside the Capital Stage theatre where she plays Johnna Monevata, a Cheyenne Native, in August: Osage County.

Wiseman accused Johnson of “hijacking” his class before threatening her with expulsion, said Johnson, who stood her ground—despite no support from classmates.



Chiitaanibah Johnson, who spends her time fighting for accurate representation of Native Americans, stands beside a “Lady Justice” painting on a building wall in downtown Sacramento, near Capital Stage.

“How many people here do you see outraged about the fact that you said genocide didn’t happen? It’s me and you,” Johnson told Wiseman. The majority of Americans, Johnson said, “don’t see Native Americans on a daily basis; we’re fucking invisible.”

This “invisibility” is due in large part to the relative lack of media coverage concerning Native Americans. According to CDC data from 1999 to 2011, Natives were more likely to be killed by police than any other group, including African Americans. However, the media rarely cover these deaths. Matt Agorist, in an article for The Free Thought Project, theorizes the topic is not “divisive” enough, meaning most Americans don’t feel strongly one way or another about police brutality against Natives.

“I care because I’m Native,” said Johnson, “and unfortunately, that’s really how it works in this country.”

Kaitlin Reed, a Ph.D. student in Native American Studies at UC Davis, and a Hupa and Yurok Native, agreed that few people in class, even her graduate classes, bring up Indigenous issues, and when they do they are not taken seriously.

“Often times, when I’m that person [bringing up settler colonialism and Indigenous issues], I feel like the rest of the class is like ‘Alright, she said her bit about colonialism, let’s move on,’” said Reed.

According to the U.S. Census, Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up only 0.9% of the U.S. population. They are one of the smallest minorities in the country—and in the classroom. Moreover, when students like Johnson speak against the status quo, frequently they are deemed out of line. Johnson still recalls how her classmates laughed at her and were excited to see her get in trouble for speaking against her professor. Johnson is not, however, the first Native student to stand up asking a teacher or professor to speak the truth.

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“Johnson’s isn’t an isolated event,” says Reed. “She’s special because she made it so public. She didn’t let it be just an instance in that class. She made sure it started a bigger conversation.” However, Reed notes that standing up and being vulnerable in these situations, as both she and Johnson have done, is an emotionally draining experience.

“I bawled my eyes out after I left that classroom,” said Johnson, “I called my dad, and I could not calm down. I was like, ‘I just got in trouble.’”

What Johnson didn’t know when she walked out of class distraught last September was her fight had only begun. An unprecedented media frenzy descended, and Johnson was left drowning in it.

“I’m speaking for my entire race every time I open my mouth,” said Johnson, remembering how panicked she felt last fall as she went to media interviews and to Sac State’s Office of the President.

Johnson walked a precarious line when she suddenly became the voice of her “entire race.” Popular thinking often groups all Native Americans as one, when in fact they are vastly diverse groups of people with differing perspectives, values, traditions, and languages.

According to Johnson, at a panel held by Sac State after the incident between Wiseman and herself, a Navajo man, and member of Sac State’s Native American club, stated the “issue” involving Johnson “has been extremely divisive to the Native community on campus.” While some applauded her, Johnson said, others felt she was causing unnecessary trouble for the Native community.

“I feel like I’ve been thrown all these responsibilities,” said Johnson, reflecting on the effect her actions have had on the Native community, “and now I’m Speaker of the House for every Indian in America when I didn’t ask to be. I just asked for the teacher to tell the truth.”

Johnson doesn’t regret her actions, though. In retrospect, she is grateful that her story has touched many people who were in her same situation and didn’t know what to do and either got in trouble or made themselves feel guilty because they stayed quiet. Johnson has shown Native Students it’s okay to stand up for themselves and for the accurate representation of their histories.

In an Op-Ed by the American Indian Students Association at California State University, Northridge, titled “Solidarity with Chiitaanibah Johnson,” Association members said they “have been very timid about revealing [they] are Native American, because people change

their views and opinions once they know.”

However, after hearing about Johnson’s courage to speak up, one member “committed to never again being timid to raise her hand in class and defend her culture.”

While Johnson has taken on the fight to voice the truth of Native America, her face still scrunches up at the word “activist.”

“I think just being a Native person in America, if you ever stand up for yourself, if you ever speak up for yourself, that’s considered activism. There are so few of us left, and there is so little of what we have that is ours that [when] a Native person stands up and says, ‘Hey! You can’t do this,’ everyone says ‘Activism!’ To me that’s not activism, but to [others] it is.”

Today, Johnson’s “activism” comes in her social media and her acting, through which she is working to improve the representation of Native Americans on stage. In *August: Osage County*, Johnson’s character Moneveta is a Cheyenne Native. It’s one of the only plays Johnson’s read, she says, with a portrayal of a Native American freed from stereotypes. For Johnson, acting is just another



Chiitaanibah Johnson and her cast mate, Jessica Brooks, put on make-up in their dressing room at Capital Stage before a showing of August: Osage County.

way to inform the world of Native America, and according to her *August: Osage County* cast mates, Johnson approaches her acting with the same amount of passion and boldness that fuels her fight for Indigenous people.

In recent months, her fight has centered on the Dakota Access Pipeline, a \$3.78 billion project to transport up to 570,000 barrels a day of crude oil from North Dakota to Illinois. The pipeline is being built near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota, upsetting the tribe, who argue it will disturb sacred sites, infringe on past treaty promises and tribal sovereignty, and poses a significant danger to their water supply. Non-violent protestors have been gathering at the construction site since January, when the government approved the pipeline.

“I’m sure my followers are sick of me on Twitter,” Johnson said. Most of what she posts on the social media site is links to petitions, sites

where people can donate money to help protestors and provide videos reports of what's happening at the construction site. Many of the videos revealed protestors being maced, attacked by dogs, and arrested by armed guards.

For Johnson, the events at Standing Rock are just repeating history. "If this turns into another Wounded Knee or anything like that, I guarantee you," Johnson says punching her fist into her hand to emphasize each word, "after everybody's dead then everyone's going to care."

Johnson is referencing the 1973 siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota by members of AIM, the American Indian Movement, and Oglala Sioux activists, who accused the U.S. government of failing to fulfill their treaties with Native Americans. For 71 days, gunfire erupted on both sides of the conflict, killing two Native activists and paralyzing one federal agent.

The Dakota Access Pipeline protestors are taking a peaceful approach this time, keeping guns out of their movement. However, it took months for some major news networks to air coverage of the protest.

"It makes it really hard to fight when people don't listen," said Johnson. Protestors continue to fight, nevertheless, and media coverage of their efforts and mistreatment has been increasing since September.

If Johnson's experience helping to give voice to the struggle of Native America has taught her anything, it's that she wants to be a leader for her people. Her biggest inspiration is Annie Mae Aquash, a Mi'kmaq Indian from Canada and a powerful figure in AIM. Tears fill Johnson's eyes as she describes Aquash. "She was a leader by just being who she was. She was resilient and optimistic," said Johnson. "People really looked up to her, and she took care of people."

Aquash's body was found on February 24, 1976 with a bullet in the back of her head. While rumors swirled for years about whether the government killed Aquash, two former AIM members were sentenced separately to life in prison in 2004 and 2010 for her murder.

However, for many like Johnson, Aquash is still one of the greatest leaders to come out of AIM, and her death only increases their reverence.

"I want to be like her," Johnson says, her voice breaking. "I know I have a lot of work to do, but, just within my own rights, [I want to] be somebody like that for my people."