

Welcome to **Week 6 of the 14-Week Equity Challenge!** This week is dedicated to the Racial Equity Indigenous Challenge where we, in a small but important way, turn our lens on the process of reclaiming indigenous history from perspectives and experiences as diverse as the millions of descendants from the 574 nations on whose land we in the United States now stand.

Before we get too far, we want to draw your attention to an event happening this evening (Monday, October 9 at 7:00pm) at the North Park Theatre (1428 Hertel Avenue) in Buffalo.

As part of the Buffalo International Film Festival, North Park will be hosting a free screening (it's actually the film's WNY premiere) of the film Fancy Dance (Director, Erica Tremblay, Seneca-Cayuga Nation). Here is a brief synopsis of the film.

Since her sister's disappearance, Jax has cared for her niece Roki by scraping by on the Seneca-Cayuga Reservation in Oklahoma. Every spare minute goes into finding her missing sister while also helping Roki prepare for an upcoming powwow. At the risk of losing custody to Jax's grandfather, Frank, the pair hit the road and scour the backcountry to track down Roki's mother in time for the powwow. What begins as a search gradually turns into a far deeper investigation into the complexities and contradictions of Indigenous women moving through a colonized world and at the mercy of a failed justice system.

As we did last year in our inaugural Challenge, we made a commitment to make as much of the content as possible unique both to our WNY community and history and to our audience which includes Niagara University and Niagara County Community College students.

As you open this week's content, most high school and university students are off today in recognition of the federal holiday called Columbus Day. They likely left for the long weekend without giving much thought to today's October holiday. Yes, this week's challenge comes to you on what has traditionally been called the Columbus Day holiday.

A simple (and definitely not complete nor scientific) Google search of the official 2023-2024 academic calendars of local school districts (as well as colleges and universities) will still find any combination of names for the holiday.

While at least one school still simply refers to today as the Columbus Day Holiday, another refers to it as Indigenous People's Day. Another simply lists "Holiday" on their academic calendar, and still one uses the rather odd listing of "Columbus Day/Indigenous People's Day." The New York City public school district last year took the step to rename their holiday "Italian Heritage Day/Indigenous People's Day."

As we continue to uncover our hidden North American history and grapple with the horrific atrocities committed by Christopher Columbus and European settlers, we offer this week's challenge to increase awareness and encourage dialogue.

The following summary is offered and curated by Claudia A. Fox Tree (Arawak), Debby Irving, Eddie Moore, Jr. and Margueritte Penick-Parks:

Too often the framing of racial justice gets limited to the Black/white experience. We find that by broadening our lens of how white supremacy marginalizes multiple groups, we both deepen our understanding of white supremacist strategy and impacts and learn about particular histories and current issues of historically targeted groups. [The attempted erasure of] indigenous people, the first to feel the wrath of white supremacy on what we now call US soil, sets the stage for the human and environmental destruction that has unfolded since. As you work through this challenge, bear in mind the degree of invisibility experienced in US Native communities. Not only did European colonial settlers rob Indigenous people of their land, their culture, and their lives, they erased their 20,000+ year old history through omission and myths. The process of reclaiming Indigenous history is a work in progress and therefore not always complete or aligned. Not to worry. Take in what you can in the spirit it is offered – from perspectives and experiences as diverse as the millions of descendants from the 574 nations on whose land we in the US now stand.

These Equity Challenges around the country are hosted by different organizations and agencies and even school districts and companies. A feature of many challenges is ... ACT! This is a great week to incorporate Action into the Challenge and pick one or two things that you can do to raise awareness of the issues and work to make a difference in your own community. If you are looking for some guidance, there is a helpful document titled: *For Our Future: An Advocate's Guide to Supporting Indigenous Peoples Day*. You can find the guide [here](#). Other ideas or steps you can take are listed below:

- Stop using offensive words and phrases like “squaw” and “too many chiefs and not enough Indians” and stop appropriating words like “powwow” and “tribe” to describe your planned office meeting or your tight-knit group of friends. For more examples, please read the article below titled, “100 Ways to Support – Not Appropriate from – Native People.”
- Prepare yourself to interrupt racial jokes about Indigenous people
- Research an indigenous issue in your area and take action:
 - Removing monuments or placing new monuments/placards nearby
 - Not Your Mascot campaign (writing letters to public officials)
 - Environmental racism/damage
 - Controversies around building a casino
 - Water/hunting/fishing rights
- For teachers, include Native voices and authors in your courses
- Here locally, get to know the work of organizations like [Native American Community Services \(NACS\)](#), based out of Buffalo, or the [Seven Dancers Coalition](#) in Lockport.

Ok, let's get to our content for this week.

READ

[The Emergence of Indigenous Peoples Day, on Calendars and in Buffalo Area Classrooms](#)

Over the past five years, students and teachers in school districts with significant Native populations have petitioned boards of education against the Columbus Day designation. This 2022 article from the Buffalo News talks about efforts in WNY to reclaim this day to not only acknowledge the trials of indigenous populations at the hands of explorers but also to celebrate Native culture and recognize the many contributions of indigenous peoples. (About a 4-minute read)

[A Day of Reckoning: Pushing to End Myth of Columbus and Honor History of Indigenous Peoples](#)

Celebrated by Italian immigrants in the United States since 1792, Columbus Day became a federal holiday in 1937 to commemorate the “arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas.” The explorer’s reputation has darkened in recent years as scholars have focused more attention on the killings and other atrocities he committed against Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. The Harvard Gazette asks the question, “Is this the end of Columbus Day, and how can America best replace it?” (About a 7-minute read)

[100 Ways to Support - Not Appropriate From – Native People](#)

When working with indigenous communities, there isn’t one way to be an ally. But Simon Moya-Smith, a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, offers some suggestions that will help us get started. (About a 9-minute read)

[Cultural Appropriation and the Plains’ Indian Headdress](#)

The headdress is a symbolic image for Native culture, but it is more than the headdress for the Native community—this issue represents the disregard of Native American histories and of their relevancy in the 21st century; it represents the faults in the educational systems that are meant to provide young citizens with a well-rounded and unbiased perspective of history. Hipsters appropriate the headdress due to a convoluted understanding of Native American’s past, present, and future. (About a 28-minute read)

[Teaching Native American Histories](#)

Are you a teacher looking for curriculum ideas or other resources? Teaching Native American histories in a positive way requires both specific, local knowledge and a broad understanding of how colonization manifests across time and space in the Americas and around the world. This website is both a clearing house and a resource for teaching at every grade level. It includes two important resources: *10 Tips to Decolonize Your Classroom* and *Key Concepts for Native American History*.

WATCH

[6 Misconceptions about Native American People](#)

7 Native American girls debunk the common misconceptions about their culture. (About 3 Minutes).

['We the People' – The Three Most Misunderstood Words in U.S. History](#)

In this TED Talk, Mark Charles (Navajo) explains the history of the Papal Bulls of the 15th Century which are embedded in our founding documents in the 18th Century, codified as legal precedent in the 19th Century and referenced by the Supreme Court in the 20th and 21st Centuries, the Doctrine of Discovery has been used throughout the history of the United States to keep “We the People” from including all the people. (About 17 Minutes)

[Indigenous Peoples Day](#)

WKBW TV (Channel 7) Buffalo takes a look at how this holiday, reserved for the second Monday in October, evolved. (About 3 Minutes).

[Higher Education and the Legacy of Land Theft](#)

Many colleges and universities around the country now begin most high-profile events and meetings on campus with a land acknowledgement. Yet few students probably ever inquire about the land on which their university sits. And for some of these schools, particularly the land grant institutions, they benefited from the violent taking of Indian lands which was prompted by several acts signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. Please note: This particular segment begins at about the 6-minute mark of the video; also, the video takes a little bit to show up and load on the page. (About 20 Minutes)

['Incredibly Harmful': Trudeau Apologizes for History of Residential Schools Following Discovery of Unmarked Graves](#)

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau apologized for Canada’s history of residential schools following the discovery in June 2021 of an estimated 751 unmarked graves at a former residential school in Saskatchewan. “This was an incredibly harmful government policy that was Canada’s reality,” he said. “Specifically, to the members of the Cowessess community and Treaty Four communities: we are sorry.” (About 6 Minutes)

LISTEN

[The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Across the U. S.](#)

NPR's Sacha Pfeiffer speaks with Annita Lucchesi (Cheyenne) about her report looking at missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in 71 cities across the U.S. (About 4 minutes)

[Teaching While White: Recovering the Voice of Native Americans in the Classroom](#)

Jenna Chandler interviews Native American educator Claudia Fox Tree (Arawak) about the ways we learn about Indigenous Peoples in school – or don't. (About 30 minutes)

[Little War on the Prairie](#)

Growing up in Mankato, Minnesota, John Biewen heard next to nothing about the town's most important historical event. In 1862, Mankato was the site of the largest mass execution in U.S. history – the hanging of 38 Dakota warriors – following one of the major wars between Plains Indians and settlers. In this documentary, originally produced for *This American Life*, John goes back to Minnesota to explore what happened, and why Minnesotans didn't talk about it afterwards. A very poignant moment occurs at about 54:00 of the podcast where a third grade teacher in Mankato, just across the river from the site of the mass hanging, attempts to explain to her students what took place at the Dakota war in 1862. As Biewen concludes the segment ... "My guess is that no Dakota children were in the room to take offense."

A Few Notes on the Materials Offered in this Week's Challenge:

In the WKBW TV Buffalo report below (see the Watch section), they reference a 2018 report (titled, "Indigenous People of Western New York") produced by our friends at the Partnership for the Public Good (PPG). If you wish to explore that report, please click [here](#).

In the resource "Higher Education and the Legacy of Land Theft" (also in the Watch section), they reference an entire report/issue dedicated to this topic. If you wish to learn more, please click [here](#).

One additional local resource (updated December 2022) is compiled by Pachamama Alliance Rochester Area Community. This list provides information about indigenous peoples' ancestral culture and contemporary presence, current issues, activism, allyship, and more. The guide can be found [here](#).