

## Transitioning From an Archaeology of Victimhood to Healing and Restorative Justice

**Personal statement to be presented by Randy Kritkausky along with formal paper, at Syracuse University conference on *The Religious Origins of White Supremacy: Johnson v. M'Intosh and the Doctrine of Christian Discovery*, December 10, 2023**

I come to this conference as a Native American tribal member bearing a message of healing offered in the spirit of one of our culture's greatest moral pillars: restorative justice. Our societies were organized on principles of maintaining harmony amongst ourselves and with Mother Earth. When crimes were committed we did not seek justice in mere punishment of perpetrators. We sought to guide and *reintegrate them* back into our communities.

The time has come to view the Doctrine of Discovery in this light. We have an abundance of outrage directed at the long dead perpetrators of colonial injustice. Our anger and resentment cannot touch those who inflicted harm on us in the past. It destroys us. As Nelson Mandela, who knew a great deal about colonial injustice, noted "Resentment is like drinking poison and then *hoping* it will kill your enemies."

I bear an invitation, a profoundly personal one, to join me in moving on. In recent years I have found myself assaulted by daily news stories about the injustices of our colonial past. These accounts often headline connections between the DoD and obstacles in our paths, or they attribute dysfunctional aspects of Native American life to the DoD. New revelations about residential schools capture headlines. For Thanksgiving 2022 a major newspaper in my home state of Vermont "celebrated" the day and its Indigenous connections with a banner headline and feature story titled "Erasing Native America: A Tragic Tale" (Burlington Free Press, Nov 27 2022). The story involved two young Potawatomi sent to a Vermont college in 1837. They were to be educated in white ways and become doctors. Both died of neglect and tuberculosis. I read the tale in shock as I too am Potawatomi. The college involved is a short drive from my house. Distant history struck home.

Such continual recitations, typically told in almost prurient detail, trigger intergenerational trauma despite my growing up in white mainstream society and being insulated from the poverty and challenges often found in reservation life.

In part this is due to the fact that my grandfather attended three residential schools, including Carlisle. He was never able to discuss this experience with his children or grandchildren. I suspected what he had encountered but only experienced it when I attended a Canadian play, *Children of God*, which presented residential school life on a stage a few feet in front of me. I found the encounter unbearable until I felt the presence of my grandfather's spirit and heard his voice whisper "this is the story I could never share." Then I felt relief because I understood that moment as a long-delayed moment of moving on and healing for my grandfather.

Knowing the power of such moments I am attending this conference inviting attendees to engage in a similar process of working through the grief *and beginning the process of moving on*. We live in a time when Indigenous teachings and wisdom are increasingly showcased and embraced. We need to focus

on our accomplishments, celebrate them and move on *without forgetting the past*. The time has come to disentangle ourselves from the tentacles of a distant past. We need to build bridges with the descendants of colonists, make peace with those who are recent adversaries, and heal together. Or, to put this in terms uniquely appropriate to our setting, we need to bury the hatchet. A wounded Mother Earth is beckoning us all to work together in the great healing.