

Conquest – Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide

by Andrea Smith

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[Youtube.com/watch?v=Neg-RIbi764](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Neg-RIbi764)

Debra (Debbie) Muller, emcee: [Introduces herself]. I've been taught by my elders to introduce myself that way, in our sacred language.

Unfortunately I'm not fluent, so I can't tell you much more, other than my name. I'm also known as my foreign name, which is Debra Muller. And it is my privilege and my honor to have been given the opportunity to introduce Andrea Smith. I asked if there was anything in particular that she would like me to say. And she basically said no, just say, "Here's Andy!" [Laughs] And I said well, wait a minute here, there's more to the story than just that. Which in fact there is. She has travelled from coast to coast, and communities to communities, in various initiatives and various movements for the sake of helping people address various perspectives on violence, and sexual violence as well.

She is Oklahoma Cherokee and while she was in Chicago she became very involved in the American Indian Movement. And at that time a group was initiated that was called the Women of All Red Nations. She served on that. She then went to New York. And there she pursued her Master's; she was going to be an MSW, get her Master's in Social Work.

Changed her mind. And in the meeting this afternoon, it was really delightful because she says – really, she says, "My education is kind of like, just an accident." And [laughs] I, I thought that that was really a very appropriate way of putting that. Because she seems that she just kind of stumbled upon all of these wonderful intellectual gifts. But they are gifts from Gitche Manitou that she certainly has known about throughout her whole life.

Yet she has the humbleness, and the simplicity, to say that, "My education's just kind of an accident." She has her doctorate in the History of Consciousness. And right now [2011] she's an Associate Professor at University of Michigan, Native American Studies. And also Women's Studies. I also asked her about the awards and recognitions that she had been given, and she says well, "we're not going to talk about those."

And of course I said, oh, come on. "No, we're not." So, I guess we're not. But I'm sure that she has many that have followed her from all of the areas that she has been in, from the coasts of

California on through and finally she's landed in Michigan for a spell. And so we are really very fortunate to have her here. So in honor of Andrea's being with us, we also have Benjamin Williams and Tim Moosewood from the Native American community.

And we would like you to ask you to stand if you could. Remove your hats – unless you have, of course, our sacred feather in it – in honor of Andrea's visit. Thank you.

Benjamin Williams and Tim Moosewood: [Singing]

---- [Lecture begins at 9:25] ----

Andrea Smith: Hello. I just wanted to thank you. I'm really kind of overwhelmed by the introduction and the song. I feel really like, I feel very humbled. Especially hearing about all the great work being done here, by the Native peoples in this community. So I really want to thank you, and also just acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of this land that provide the opportunity for us to even be here at all.

And also I just should clarify that even though, like, my name is on a book, it's the case that ideas don't come from one person alone. And so I see the book not so much about my particular brilliant analysis, but more me having the opportunity to hear from other people, and being part of collective struggles and collective movements. And being able to learn from other people. So it's more of a recording of the ideas that I've been able to come across that I thought might be good to share with other people as well, who are thinking about these same issues.

In any case, kind of how I came to be working on this. I could think of three kind of pivotal incidents. One time, when I was living in Oklahoma, I got an opportunity to go to this kind of gathering for one of the Native ministry programs. And one person came to visit. And he was a spiritual leader.

And he said, he said the most important thing that we have to worry about is violence against women and children. He said, because as long as we are destroying ourselves from within, we don't even have to worry about the enemies from outside. So that, that was pivotal to me.

But then the next thing that happened was that I went back home, and I was telling a friend who was herself a sexual assault survivor. And I told her about what he said. And she said, do you mean other Indians have been raped too? And I said well, yes. And she said, why aren't we ever talking about it? So then I was kind of struck by the silence that's in our communities about the issue.

But then the next thing that was kind of pivotal to me was when I was working in Chicago, a young woman was gang raped by prominent members of the community. And the response of the community when she threatened to go to the police was to basically put her on trial. And say, how dare you air our dirty laundry to other people. And on the other hand, when she went to get services, there was nothing that was really helpful for her either.

Because a response of the mainstream movement was, well, why don't you just leave your community? So in all these cases, what I was seeing was a major issue of sexual violence, and yet there was no vocabulary for how to understand what was happening to Native women. And what I could begin to conclude was that there was a problem with our analysis. That we were seeing violence against women as a separate thing from colonization – we need to worry about colonization first, and then later we will worry about violence against women.

Or conversely, in the white feminist movement, we'll just worry about violence, and all these other issues will take care of themselves. And we were not seeing that these two processes were actually part of the same thing.

And that it's precisely through sexual violence that American Indian genocide is successful. And that we can't decolonize without addressing sexual violence as central to our organizing work. So the way that I see sexual violence as part of the logic of genocide is that, I borrow from Ann Stoler, who says that racism is a process by which certain peoples become marked as inherently dirty, or as inherently pure, from which the larger colonial body is always trying to clean itself. And if we look at the history of Native genocide, we see again and again this rhetoric of Native bodies being equated with pollution or dirt. Just to give one example, this was a Ivory Soap ad from 1885. And there's kind of a cartoonish figure of an Indian man and woman. And this is the slogan that goes with the cartoon:

*We were once factious, fierce and wild,
in peaceful arts unreconciled.
Our blankets smeared with grease and stains,
from buffalo meat and settler's veins.
Through summer's dust and heat content,
from moon to moon unwashed we went.
But Ivory Soap came like a ray
of light across our darkened way.
And now we're civil, kind and good,
and keep the laws as people should.
We wear our linen, long and lace,
as well as folks with paler face.
And now I take wherever we go,
this cake of Ivory Soap to show.
That civilized my squaw and me,
and made us clean and fair to see.*

So you can see the joke of this ad is because Indian bodies can't be white, they can never be clean. And under a patriarchal worldview, only a body that is seen as pure can be violated. The violation or rape of bodies that are seen as impure don't count. They are seen as inherently rapeable. So to give an example, when sex workers are raped, nobody cares because they are seen as inherently rapeable, and inherently violable.

And that is what has happened through the logic of genocide. Native peoples have become seen as inherently rapeable. Inherently violable. And by extension, our lands are inherently invadable.

So when we look at the history of massacres, it's not just that Indian people were killed off. But this is always accompanied by routine mutilation, sexual violence, etc. I'll just give one example to illustrate this, from the Sand Creek massacre:

I heard one man say he had cut a woman's private parts out and had them for exhibition on a stick. I heard another man say he had cut the fingers off of an Indian to get the rings off of his hand. I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females, stretched them over their saddle bows, and some of them over their hats.

What's happening then, in this process, is that colonizers are not just trying to kill Indian people, but to kill our sense of even being a people. In addition to this, one of the major complaints that colonizers made when they first came to this land is they said, is how are we going to ever colonize them when they themselves are not structured on hierarchy? That is, they're not patriarchal. They don't necessarily have these hierarchical societies in which the leaders get to lead for forever in perpetuity.

So if they're not accepting that kind of leadership within their communities, why are they going to accept it from us? So they said, we will never be able to colonize them. And they said this explicitly. Until Native men start treating Native women the way white men treat white women. And therefore, if you want to colonize a people, it's not going to work until colonization seems natural. Because if you know there's another way to live, you're going to do that. You're not going to accept domination from other people.

So the way to make domination seem natural is to instill it through patriarchy. That is, just as men are naturally supposed to rule over women by virtue of biology, so it is the case that socially, some people are naturally born to rule over other peoples. So sexual violence is a process by which hierarchy becomes literally inscribed on the bodies of Native peoples. So when we're looking at this logic of sexual violence, it's broader than simply looking at rape or sexual assault.

It kind of infuses a variety of practices that Native peoples have to address. I'll just briefly go through a few of them to illustrate what I mean. One policy where you can see this logic of sexual violence is that of environmental racism. That is, certain communities who are seen as inherently impure or dirty then become seen as the worthy repositories of all nuclear waste or toxic waste. Since they're inherently polluting anyway, more pollution on their land doesn't count.

And that's why the United Church of Christ found that the greatest determinant of where toxic wastes are sited is race, even more than class. And Native peoples have been particularly targeted with nuclear and toxic waste dumping. And this is done because, in the end, environmental pollution doesn't actually discriminate on the basis of race. It will impact everybody. But to corporations, by targeting a few communities that nobody cares about, it allows everybody else to be in denial about the fact that it's eventually going to hurt them too.

Just to give an example. In Oklahoma – I don't know if you saw the movie *Silkwood*, the one with Meryl Streep. Well anyway, that company was Sequoia Fuels from Kerr-McGee. It was running a nuclear conversion facility. After she [Karen Silkwood] died under serious, mysterious circumstances, Native Americans for a Clean Environment took up her work to get them shut down. And this is actually another story, a very great victory.

A very small group were successful in kicking Kerr-McGee not only out of Oklahoma, but the entire United States. That's another story. In any case, during the struggle, what they found out was that you have to pay when you want to dispose of nuclear waste. And so it was in the financial interests of Kerr-McGee to kind of make this waste disappear. So what they were doing is, when they were putting the waste in the trucks, they just weren't tying the containers on tight enough. And so this waste was leaking down the freeways.

And there was nothing on these trucks that says, hey, I have nuclear waste here. So again, this was going to be affecting everybody, not just Native people who lived along these roads. The next thing they decided to do was turn this nuclear waste into fertilizer. And they would feed these cows – and they would undersell, undercut the sale of normal fertilizer, because they were just trying to get rid of it. And there was nothing that on these cows, if you were to buy milk from these cows, beef from these cows, there was nothing that would be a mark that said, hey, this cow was fed on nuclear waste.

Again, this is an example of a thing that seems to be just affecting Native peoples but would eventually affect everybody as well. But as Katsi Cook [of the Mother's Milk Project] further notes, we can also see environmental racism as another form of sexual violence because the effects of environmental contamination tend to first become manifest in women's reproductive systems. So for instance we see areas like Akwasasne where women have PCBs in their breast milk.

In the areas of the Four Corners we see major birth defect rates, etc. where there's um, been nuclear contamination and where the most intense effects, um, of this, can be found in the Indigenous women of Marshall Islands, where the US basically used them as guinea pigs. They exploded these uh, nuclear bombs that were much more powerful than the bombs thrown in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and didn't evacuate the people's there. And the results, uh, the devastating effects on women's reproductive systems is, is almost kind of mind boggling.

Here's a testimony:

The most common birth defect has been jellyfish babies. These babies are born with no bones in their bodies, and with transparent skin. We can see their brains and hearts beating. The babies usually live for a day or two before they stop breathing. Many women die from abnormal pregnancies, and those who survive give birth to what look like purple grapes, that we quickly bury.

[There are] reports that the life expectancy has gone down to 40 years in the area, and that some communities have decided to go extinct because their DNA has been permanently altered and they can't give birth now to children that don't have major birth defects.

I was just recently at this International Women and Health meeting in India, and representatives came from the Marshall Islands. And I was very much struck with what they said... They talked about how they had eight or nine miscarriages. Nobody had ever been able to give birth to a baby that didn't have major birth defects.

And they said that the reason they were there was not to organize on their own behalf, they said it's too late for us, there's nothing that we can do for ourselves. We're here to stop this from happening to you. We're the testimony to what happens with nuclear contamination. So they weren't even trying to organize for their own survival, they were trying to organize for the world's survival. So again, we can see how another form of sexual violence has been perpetrated by, against Indigenous women, through these policies and environmental racism.

Another policy we can see that follows a similar logic is that of sterilization abuse. As Inez Hernandez notes, if you want to kill off a population you have to target the women. Otherwise the population may not be severely affected. And that's something that colonizers explicitly stated. They said, after massacres, make sure you finish off the women so that we can finish off that population.

So it's not a surprise then that Native women's ability to reproduce becomes imaged as inherently polluting, particularly in the population control movement we've seen. Many environmental groups are saying, the reason why there's so much pollution is there's too many of them polluting our environment. That they're destroying it for the rest of us. And so, particularly during the 1970s when the population control movement began to proliferate, we saw all these slogans, that we need to stop Native women from reproducing so that they don't pollute the world for everybody else.

You may be familiar with this, I won't go on to it, but basically this sterilization abuse became uncovered when one Cherokee Choctaw doctor had a woman come in for a "womb transplant." She had been given a hysterectomy and had been told that it was reversible. And when [the doctor] went to investigate she found that this was not an isolated incident. And actually, the US did its own investigation and found that there were mass numbers of women without consent being sterilized.

And [the doctors] were not following proper procedures. But interestingly, they would not find out if they had been given consent. Because they said women won't remember if they consented to a sterilization. Now you have to ask, if you don't remember consenting to a sterilization, something went wrong. But in any case, that was the logic used by the US government. They were even covering up the issue of informed consent. But in any case, and interestingly though, when you look at the kind of rhetoric that was being used by doctors for sterilizing women,

This is what doctor Connie Yuri found out. Again, we see the logic of pollution coming up. For instance, one woman was sterilized because, quote, she was told she was quote "dirty and unkempt." And hence she should be sterilized. Another woman went to a doctor for stomach problems, and the doctor said, well why the hell don't you get your tubes tied so you won't get sick anymore? One woman went to a doctor because she had headaches, and the doctor said that she had headaches because she was afraid of becoming pregnant and advised her to get sterilized. So she did, but the headaches persisted and she later found out she had a brain tumor.

And this happened to a friend of mine: she went into Indian Health for a back surgery, and they didn't touch her back but she came out without a uterus.

So in any case, after this issue became publicly known, Indian Health Services did put stricter measures to monitor sterilization.

But it comes up again in things like promoting Depo Provera. Which [is very] disturbing when we look at the major studies that were done to prove Depo Provera's safety. It's a long acting hormonal contraceptive that – you get a shot in your arm – and it's supposed to last for three months. [In] the biggest study in the Grady Clinic, in Atlanta, what happened was that any woman who had major side effects was simply eliminated from the data. So the Black Women's Health Project went to double check, and they found that half of the women had been eliminated from the survey results. And they found ... there were women having mastectomies at the age of 20, suicidal depression, cancer, etc. Major side effects that were just conveniently lost when the clinic had to report the safety data.

Originally when it first came up for approval by the FDA, it was not approved. But even though it had not been approved, it was still being used in Indian Health Services. For a woman with disability. And what was the reason given? Again, hygienics. We need to keep women cleaner, Native women cleaner. To quote ... from the Phoenix Indian Health Services:

We use it to stop their periods. There's nothing else that will do it. To have to change a pad on someone developmentally disabled, you've got major problems. The fact that they become infertile is a side benefit.

And then Raymond Jannett from Phoenix IHS said, quote, "Depo Provera turned them back into their sweet, poor, handicapped selves. I take some pride in being a pioneer in that regard." And

all of them admitted they were not getting consent from either the women getting Depo Provera or their parents.

I'll just briefly take a little aside to say that this also shows the need to look at issues of reproductive justice outside of a choice framework. That is, the way we look at these issues is often pro-life versus pro-choice. And the assumption behind this pro-choice – there's a number of problematic assumptions. But one big one is that the only important choice is the choice of whether or not you're going to have an abortion. And all the other economic and political and social conditions that gave rise to you having to make this choice suddenly kind of disappear from the analysis,

So for instance, when Bill Clinton signs into law an anti-welfare or anti-immigration legislation that certainly doesn't do anything to promote choice for poor women or immigrant women, nobody was organizing as an anti-choice president. Because we were looking at it in a very narrow way. And certainly for Native peoples, if we're going to fight for reproductive justice, we have to develop a holistic framework that looks at all the conditions that give rise to the so-called “choices” that we make.

Finally I'll just mention another brief example of this policy of sexual violence, in which Native Peoples become seen as inherently inhuman, as property, as something for somebody else's benefit. This issue of medical experimentation. I mention this in case there's any scientists in the audience. Because what we've found is that many activists are looking at this, and finding these widespread medical experimentation programs going on in Native communities, but we don't necessarily have the medical expertise to do anything about it. To advocate for it.

And meanwhile, people who do have that expertise, they tend to unquestionably assume that if doctors are doing something, it must be good. So if there's anybody who's got the expertise and wants to do more investigation, this would be very beneficial. In fact, we remember in Chicago when we were looking at one of these programs – somebody from the local paper started doing this investigative report, and she was coming up with all this material. And then suddenly the Indian Health Services intervened. And then she was immediately silenced. And she was never able to publish the work that came out of that.

One problem, just to illustrate, was one that happened amongst Alaskan Native children in 1992. Where they were given a hepatitis B vaccine. And two activists, Mary Ann Mills and Bernadine Atchison, went to investigate, because they had not been given permission to be part of this trial vaccine. And in any case, they started to worry that that virus might have been tainted with other things, such as the HIV virus. But we haven't been able to find out conclusively whether or not it was. But in the process of these investigations, it was very interesting to look at the rhetoric being used by US agencies to support this trial vaccine program. For instance, the Interagency Research Policy Committee said that, quote, “Native villages were an extensive database and an ideal laboratory which provides a resource for studying health problems that will benefit other populations.”

And the company that did the vaccine, Merck Sharp and Dohme, said that they experimented on, quote, "chimpanzees and Alaska Native children." So again, we see Native people seen as laboratory animals, not as people deserving respect or integrity. And during this research that they were engaged in, they got a letter from Teresa Brown from Clearlake, California, to testify about her history of medical experimentation.

She says, quote:

In 1929, we were removed from the Catholic Church into the Indian Bureau. When we got into the Indian Bureau, we were used as guinea pigs. They gave us vaccinations. Needles broke in people's arms – they were not removed. Then they came into the reservation for dental work. They drilled from under our jaws and into our mouths, and caused infections. They put black stuff into our teeth as experiments. This was very painful. We were used by the government to test a new material as fillings for teeth. Today, the dentists look at our mouth and tell us there was never anything wrong with our teeth in the first place. They used us to make drugs for other people. They gave so many of us vaccinations, and after the vaccinations many of us became sick with tuberculosis. Most of our people died from tuberculosis and smallpox that were given to us by the government. This was forced on us, and we had no choice. And I will answer to anyone that this is what happened to us in Big Valley in California.

OK, so now after hearing all the depressing news, the issue is, what is to be done... This gives rise to the history of how we start to think about how to work on these issues differently. I had been involved in the anti-violence movement and we were getting annoyed with the approach to "multiculturalism" that was being adopted in these movements. Which was basically, take the model that has been developed with white women in mind and then put a medicine wheel on it and it becomes an Indian model. And we started to say, is there a different way to do this work? Because it seemed like all the money we put into this was not really ending violence. We were not seeing a decline in the rates of violence against women.

And in particular, what we started to see is that we needed to develop a different approach, that's beyond a politics of inclusion. Which is just include you in this, and then we will be all diverse and feel happy with ourselves, and instead develop an approach which we call recentering. Which is, what if we centered women of color in the analysis? How would we look at this issue differently?

And when we did that, we saw that women of color and Native women in particular are not just dealing with violence in our communities, we're also equally dealing with state violence. And as I've just demonstrated, the state is primarily responsible for the sexual violence in our communities. So it doesn't really make sense to think the state's going to be the solution to the problems it has created.

And we are seeing that today when we look at the effect of all the laws that we've tried to get passed. For instance, we passed these mandatory arrest laws, where you have to arrest

somebody on a domestic violence charge. And now, they're arresting the women who are being battered. Beth Richie, who is a sociologist in Chicago, found that a quarter to a half of the women in Chicago jails were there on domestic violence charges. And we see women who are undocumented – they report to police, and they find themselves being deported. I remember one woman that I had to work with, she was an African American woman who had been gang raped. When she called the police, the police arrested her for prostitution.

The New York Times in fact found a report that said that the effect of all these laws we tried to get passed has led to a situation in which battered women are killing their partners less often, but batterers are not killing their partners less often.

Why is this not going to really work? The basic problem with the prison system approach is that prison is based on the idea that you have a few wacko guys you have to lock up. But when we have surveys in which half the men say they would rape somebody if they thought they could get away with it, you would either have to arrest half the male population, or you see that that's not going to be the solution to what we really need, which is an approach designed to transform a culture that supports violence against women.

And indeed, if we look at the history of prisons, prisons have never, ever been shown to lead to a reduction in crime rates. For a number of reasons. And I would argue that that's not the reason for prisons. They're not primarily to stop crime. They're there primarily to incarcerate communities of color. But that's another story, if we would like to talk more about the prison industrial complex. In any case it becomes clear that if we want to address what's going on in the Native communities, we need an approach that addresses state violence at the same time that we're addressing violence within our communities. So then the question is, well, what? What is to be done?

Well, therefore we started to look at other models. This is how INCITE Women of Color Against Violence formed. And we looked to other models in terms of the restorative justice framework. If you're not familiar with that, that's a movement that's part of the anti-prison movement that says, well, crime is not just between a victim and a perpetrator, crime is about a breakdown in the whole community. So you need a community-based response. And if somebody is not following the norms of society, does it make sense to take them even more out of society, put them in prison where they're going to be even less likely to fit into that community when they come back? Or does it make sense to have the community develop a response that makes that person behave in an appropriate way.

So this looks all very well and good. But the problem is, these models all seem to break down when it comes to domestic and sexual violence. And the reason is that they're all based on the notion that we have a community that's intact. That's not sexist, homophobic or otherwise problematic. And that they will actually side with the person who's been victimized by violence. But as we all know, when it comes to issues of sexual and domestic violence, communities often don't side with the woman, or the person who's been victimized by violence. They often side with the perpetrator. So they're not going to hold him accountable.

So therefore, it became clear that we needed an approach that would be community-based, [but] would not depend on a romanticized notion of community. Or even depend on the notion that the community even exists. But it would have to be a political organizing project that was about creating communities that would hold people accountable. So with that, we came up with a number of recommendations or things that we learned in this process. And we're still learning as we go along.

One thing we strive to do is to develop strategies that directly address interpersonal and state violence at the same time. And there's been many of these, but I'll just briefly mention one, which is the Boarding School Healing Project. If you're not familiar with the history of boarding schools, this was the policy of the US government which was to "save the man by killing the Indian." Basically the idea was to abduct Native children from an early age. Take them from the homes, force them to be Christians, force them to speak English. And there was rampant sexual, physical, and emotional violence.

And this is really where we see the large scale introduction of violence in our communities. Where Native children were not parented, so then they couldn't pass that on to their own children. And in fact, I've been in many workshops where we're supposed to trace where does dysfunctionality start in your family? And almost invariably, it's the community that first goes to boarding school.

You might have heard in Canada, there's been all these lawsuits against residential schools, which was similar to the boarding schools here and all the rampant sexual violence. There turned out to be pedophile rings involving priests and police officers and clergy members. There were unmarked graves in some schools where children had been buried because they had been born to girls who had been raped by the priests. And some people were calculating as many as 15,000 were killed during this period.

But there hasn't been a similar outcry in the US, and many of the documentation programs tend to present a more sanitized view of boarding schools. So we started a documentation program to document these abuses. The idea was to not so much pursue individual lawsuits, but to build a movement for collective remedy [for] these Native peoples to address the continuing effects of human rights violations perpetrated by state policy.

This then enabled us to make two interventions. One, we were able to say, well, why do we think again the state's going to be the solution to ending sexual violence in our communities, when the state is responsible for bringing it into our communities?

And at the same time, it enabled us to talk a little bit more freely about issues of sexual violence within our communities. Because we could show, look, this isn't about we're so dysfunctional and that's why we have sexual violence, this is a colonial legacy. This is the effect of state policy. To which we should hold the state accountable. And as we pursue our struggle for

sovereignty, then let's make sexual violence part of that struggle. Because that's how colonization has been successful.

So again, we've been documenting this. And we're starting to find that the abuses that were extreme in Canada were happening here too. Just to give one example, one woman reported how in her school they used to hear babies crying all the time. And they didn't know what it was. But then later they tore down the school, and they found the skeletons of babies hidden in the walls of that school. So anyway, that's one approach as of many, where you can put the state policy together with interpersonal violence and address them simultaneously.

Another thing that we found is that one of the problems with the anti-violence movement, particularly as it got more federal and state funding, is that we stopped seeing survivors of violence as potential organizers and started seeing them only as clients for services. And consequently, that did not enable us to build a stronger and stronger base of survivors who could demand an end to violence in their lives and the lives of other people.

So that's why some of these programs are now trying to focus on base building, which is not just working with other activists or not just working with other advocates but bringing new women and other people who aren't already activists into the movement. And so some of these base building responses – for instance, Sister to Sister in Brooklyn, New York – work with young women of color ages 13 to 18. So they're doing this on their own. And they started doing dance classes. And then they developed ... daycare centers. That brought all these women in the community.

But then through this process of political education, these women who went for dance classes or girls who went for dance classes end up becoming trained organizers. So they ended up doing an interesting video monitoring police violence in their own communities. And they got the Burger King across from the police station, and showed their video on the actual police station walls. This got them into a little bit of trouble, but they did get a lot of education work with their community. And then they've started their own community accountability model, where instead of calling 911 you can call them. And they've developed an entire accountability process.

However we've learned that in developing these models, it's important to not just look within the US, but look at what is going on globally. Because sometimes we have the idea that we in the US know everything. So we should share the light to the rest of the planet. But actually, on issues of violence, what we've found is that in other countries, there's just no illusion the state's going to do anything for you at all, except kill you. So groups have had to find ways to deal with violence on their own. And they've come up with some very interesting models.

I will just mention one of the many that we've learned from. And that's the Landless Movement in Brazil. Which is very much informed by Indigenous peoples' organizing strategies. The Landless Movement takes over an area that's been abandoned, and occupies it until they win the right to title over this land. And they call this occupation. So during this time, of course, they're not going to get any help from the police, because the police are trying to drive them off

the land. But what they do is ... set up their own governance system. ... They have different sectors but they make sure a man and a woman are equally represented in all areas of leadership. They also said they make sure women are equally in charge of security, because that makes women rethink – and other people rethink – women's vulnerability to violence. And in addition they also make sure leadership is rotating so that there's no static hierarchical leadership.

And then finally, they also make sure that all decisions are dealt with in a very public and transparent way. Because abuse tends to proliferate when there's isolation and nobody else knows what's going on. So they make sure everything's public so that it's harder to get away within this. What they say is that there's no panacea, but the longer an occupation happens, the less violence there is.

This I think is helpful for us in the US because we tend to focus on crisis intervention. What do you do after violence has happened? But what they're doing is creating communities where violence stops happening. So that's what we could think to do ourselves. Are there new ways of governing ourselves, are there new ways of structuring our world such that violence starts to become unthinkable?

I think we can also then be informed by Indigenous peoples' organizing, and particularly Indigenous women's theories about nationhood and sovereignty. Because what is coming out of this work is saying that there's a difference between a nation and a nation state. So you can have national sovereignty and self determination, but the model of governance that you might have may not be the nation state that we're used to, where somebody's in charge and they rule by power and might and they have a military, etc.

And they argue that if we look to pre-colonial forms of governance, we can see alternative models in which we were governed based on cooperation and mutual respect and responsibility. And the goal was not so much we're in, you're out, screw the rest of the world. But it was about being in a rightful and good relationship to everybody, including everybody in a global scale, as well as within your own particular community.

A similar philosophy is happening amongst Indigenous peoples in Latin America where again they're questioning the old forms of organizing where it was a hierarchical leadership and instead saying, no, we can have new models based on radical participatory democracy, where we all get to be involved in the decision making and where there isn't static leadership.

But they say to us, they say what you need to learn from our experience is that it's not just enough to have your own kind of autonomous area, because as long as you do that you're going to have a problem with US empire and multinational capitalism that's always going to try to squash you. So what we've had to do is not only establish our autonomous areas, but we have to proliferate them. So once we got a system going, a few people have to go to another place and develop another area. And they keep growing and growing until they're able to take over entire countries.

And we see what's going on in Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina etc. This is all the result of that kind of organizing. And it shows you that you can be democratic and still be efficient. You can still be powerful. I think this gives us hope to rethink how we might be able to do organizing here. However to do so ... we have to rethink the non-profit industrial complex. Which is where all of our social movements are done through the non-profit system, in which most of our money tends to come from foundations.

And what has happened is – as our movements have become folded into the non-profit system – is that we have lost our incentive to build movements. Because if we were funded by our constituents, we would have a big financial incentive to make sure we had as many constituents as possible. However if we're funded by a foundation, we don't have that same incentive. So we end up with executive directors working 5,000 hours a week trying to make up for the work that millions of people need to be involved in. And if we look at our current political situation, we basically have an economic situation in which five percent of the population controls 95 percent of the wealth. So the bad news is that they have all the guns and money.

But the good news is there's a lot more of us than them. However, we're going to need to get these numbers behind us if we really want to change that pyramid system. So that means we need to develop mass, mass movements for change. And that needs to be the focus of our work. I was talking to, again, folks from Latin America and they said, we laugh at your protests. They said, you have a ... protest, you have 200 people walking around in a circle, and then you get a police permit to protest police brutality. So that was their understanding of our movement organizing. And they said, you know, in Chile after [President Salvador] Allende's assassination, we were able to get out one million people every week. That would be the equivalent of 40 million people in the US out every week.

That's the kind of scale they're charging us to start to look to. How can we build that type of mass movement for change? To do this, of course, all these millions of people are not going to be able to get paid to do the work. So we're going to need to think of a different model of organizing in which you don't become a career activist necessarily, but you do your organizing as part of your day to day life.

You may not be able to give 30 hours a week for organizing, but maybe you could do a half hour a week. But if 40 million people did a half hour a week, that could really change the system we have here in the country. So this makes us rethink our non-profit system, again. What they're saying is that non-profits aren't necessarily bad. However, they differentiate movements from non-profits. They say, you don't do a movement through a non-profit.

You do a movement through your people. And you fund it through your people. Then you get a non-profit to support the movement, and the non-profit answers to the movement. And if the non-profit gets defunded, you're OK, because you still have your movement. But that doesn't mean you can't set up a non-profit and get support and get resources whenever you have the possibility to do so. So what if we thought about the anti-violence movement in that way?

Instead of thinking of the current kind of agencies as the anti-violence movement, what if we developed an independent anti-violence movement that was funded by its own constituents, but then was supported by non-profit domestic violence and sexual assault agencies. Where we had a, a relationship of accountability between the two...

I would say that this might all sound very pie in the sky and blabby blah. But I do think it's important to not lose track of a long-term political vision for no other reason than there's no other way to measure whether your short-term strategies are working. For instance I was at one program where we were supposed to talk about what do you want to see in the long term with the anti-violence movement? And everybody said, I want better hotlines, I want more shelters. And not one person said, I want to see an end to violence against women. Like everybody had forgotten what the whole point of why we were doing the work. Now if we had kept that long-term vision in our heads, we could then come back to our strategies and say, hey, is the criminalization approach actually working? I don't think it is. OK, let's measure the two. If it's not taking us closer to where we want to go, maybe we need another short-term strategy.

And by doing that, we always make sure our short-term strategies are taking us closer to our long-term vision. And finally while we may not be able to envision what a world that's not structured on oppression might be and look like, given the fact that we've all been raised under this current society that's based on oppression, that doesn't mean that we can't be part of a collective vision and a collective movement, that will go past our lifetimes, in which we can contribute towards becoming closer to building the kind of world we actually want to live in.

And so I will close with a quote from [a speaker] from the 2003 World Social Forum. He said, "We know what we don't want. But the new world belongs to the liberated freedom of human beings. There is no way – you make the way as you walk. History doesn't fall from heaven, we make history."

Thank you.

--- [Question period begins at 47:58] ---

Host: We're going to spend about a half hour at least for Q&A. And if you have questions, do start making your way to one of the two mics on the side. Because we're recording this, which means it's going to be re-broadcast on the public access channel sometime in the very near future. So if you have questions, just step up to one of the mics and we'll go side to side.

Andrea Smith: So are there any comments, or disagreements or ideas that people would like to share?

Question: It seems that one of the primary challenges for any marginalized, oppressed population is to get people who are in privileged positions to pick up the mantle of concern for that. And until that happens, you ordinarily, you historically do not see any change, certainly not in this culture. So aside from praying for your misfortunes to become deposited upon the

privileged classes, how do you – do you have any strategies for getting the concerns of marginalized people to be heard, and felt and acted upon by the privileged class?

Andrea Smith: I should give an example here. When I was in Chicago, I had been involved in a non-violent witness program around the spear fishing struggles in the late 1980s. And what was happening was that when the Chippewa were going spear fishing, they were getting surrounded by all these white, racist mobs saying things like "save a fish, spear a pregnant squaw."

And when I first went there, this did not engender lots of positive feelings towards white people. Especially when they're like, shooting at you. But one of the persons who was involved with this, Walt Bresette, he provided a new framework that really changed my way of looking at the issues. He said it would be a mistake to look at these mobs as your enemy because these are actually not your real problem. He told us the real problem is these multi-national corporations like Exxon and Rio Tinto who wanted to come here, and they want to start mining. And when they do that, they're going to destroy the environment, not just for Native peoples but for also these people who are harassing us. And so what we need to do is de-escalate the violence. But do it in such a way that we don't create such hostility with our neighbors that we can't go back to them later when we need to. And I thought he made no sense at all. Like, I didn't get the whole non-violence things. It seemed silly. But it turned out I was completely and totally and utterly wrong.

And for one, I saw what non-violence meant. It wasn't a passive strategy. It was a very powerful strategy. Because at one point for instance, they were starting to get this escalation between some of the nonviolent witnesses and some of the mobs, and everybody's getting all uppity. And then one of the leaders said, OK everybody, stop paying attention to them, we're going to just do a powwow. So somebody got the drum, people started dancing. And the white people got bored and left. So one, I saw that nonviolence can be a very powerful strategy. But two, as it turns out, Walt Bresette was exactly correct.

It was not long afterwards that Exxon went in to make a bid to mine in that area. And the people who had been involved were able to go back to these same sports fishers and say, you know, you thought we were the enemy, but clearly we need to work together to deal with Exxon. And they were successful. They were so successful that they were able to pressure a pro-mining governor into supporting an anti-mining moratorium. So the point of that story is to say, that made me rethink who I think my friends and enemies are. So what he was saying is, keep the bigger picture in mind.

Really, there's only a few people at the very top who have the major power in our society. Everybody else has privilege on a number of ways, but ultimately most of us are not benefiting from the current political and economic system. And our challenge is to get them to exchange their short-term interests in keeping those privileges in return for their long-term interest in transforming the political system. So that's how we have to think about base building. You start with your own community, you start to build that base. Then you start to build allies.

People who are next closest to you. And you keep going on and on. Until you can build a big enough base that can challenge that system. And that's what people are doing slowly by slowly. But again, what we see in Latin America is, that it can be done. Any other thoughts?

Question: Hi. I don't think it's a question so much, but just a thought that I'd like you to respond to. Thinking a lot about how violence happens towards, against women, I think a lot of it has to do with a feeling of power over your own body and ownership of your own fate. And I think a lot of where that gets cut off of is in childbirth. And that women will go there and feel like it's out of their hands, and allow it to be out of their hands, when it used to be something that was very much the business of women. And like, my mother for instance, she was a home birth. And then I'm her seventh daughter. And she was gassed for all of us. Wasn't awake for any of our births. And it's like, in this country, like three quarters of women end up having Caesarian sections. Because it's all about intervention. So I wonder, if there's anything that, if that makes sense to you that that's part of the movement, to have it be more natural childbirth and to take that back in our hands.

Andrea Smith: Yes, I think you make an excellent point. I mean, the whole way gynecological obstetric services are done is almost its own form of sexual violence. Where power is taken away from women's bodies and it's up to somebody else who gets to intervene. And I think of the work of Alice Skenandore for instance, who's very active, and her mantra is, every woman is a midwife. This isn't some mysterious thing that we can't learn how to do. We all have the power to be able to do that. I actually found this out myself when I inadvertently had to [help] give birth to one of my nephews. But my sister said, I don't want to deal with doctors, come here. I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing. She goes, fine, I'll do it myself. So anyway, I had to go there.

And then I had to go the next door neighbors like, can we have a Sunday paper? Like, why? Oh, we're giving birth, we need – like, oh, fine, take the paper. And anyway, it worked out perfectly fine. And that made me realize like, hey, what's happened to us that we feel like this is some weird knowledge that's about our own, very own bodies. We learn not to trust ourselves but trust everybody else over ourselves. So I think that's key. And a lot of people are doing it in Native communities. Kind of reclaiming that knowledge and teaching ourselves. And that was also part of the feminist health centers again. Where women learned how to do their own pap smears, you know, do their own gynecological exams. And then, and seeing that this isn't knowledge that we can't do for ourselves too.

Question: Welcome again Andy. We appreciate you being here this evening. I was wondering how the dance class turned into building activism. I guess what I do in the community, trying to build a base of consciousness and empowerment, it's hard to get the conversation started. And when you think of the issue of violence in the community, that is totally silent. Beyond the racism and the sexism, the institutional racism that a lot of my clients go through – the violence, the sexual violence is totally silent. And it's not talked about. So how does that conversation begin? Say for instance, if you had a group of teenage girls here at the Wealthy Street Theater, and they attended a dance class, how does that conversation begin where you are questioning them about the silences in the community around violence?

Andrea Smith: Well I could just say, for that particular model, what happened is they started doing dance classes, and at first they just did that for a long time, before they did any organizing project. But part of the dance class is they would gradually put political education in there, talk about racism, sexism etc. And then another thing they did is rather than just say, here's your issue, they decided to do their own street survey. Where they would ask girls, what's the big problem that you're facing. And they all said violence.

Like, they didn't know going in that that was the major issue. But when they started just talking to people, that's the number one thing they said. So then, after a number of people had gone through the dance class and they say, well, if you're interested in doing something about this problem, would you like to join our freedom school? So they had this freedom school set up. Where then they'd become kind of trained organizers. And then it just starts to grow from there. Because then the organizers go talk to people on the street, etc. And then they also develop creative ways to get the education through. That's why we kind of developed this multimedia tour.

Because a lot of the problem with our organizing is, it tends to be very intellectually based. Like the idea, if I tell you the right thing you'll be convinced. But a lot of times we don't make our decisions based on just that. It's how we feel about it emotionally. So there needs to be other ways to communicate ideas, through the arts, through song, through music, etc. So one thing they did for instance was street theater. Where one person would be harassing somebody else, and they would model ways you could intervene when you see harassment. And then ... we ended up doing this multimedia tour throughout the country. We had different kinds of artists.

And looking at how – not just performing – but how do you use arts as an organizing strategy? To reach people in different ways. But those are just a few things. It's a slow process. It's not like it's a quick thing. But it ends up being able to open up a conversation. And then what you'll also notice about these conversations, when there's silence, it's a long time to break the silence. But once you do, it tends to mushroom quickly. ...

I remember when I worked in violence in Chicago it was the same thing ... we would go to the Indian Center every month and do blood pressure testing. And we just had our sexual assault brochures. And just like, you would be there for eight months. But then one day somebody reads it and tells three people. And it grows from there and there. But you have to have patience for that kind of long-term commitment to building the issue.

I'll just give you one example, another example in Minneapolis. I'm sorry, because there's so many – they said they wanted to bring the issue of domestic violence. And this is before even domestic violence was an issue being talked about. So they were kind of tricky. What they did was they got the match book things for their matches. And they put in a little conference thing and they went to the bowling alley. So they distributed at all the bowling alleys. And they said, there will be a special meeting to address domestic violence, but registration is very limited, so call now. Only 50 people allowed. So it made it look like it was this big to do. And they were

trying to just get five people to show up. But they ended up with like 100 people. So you know, creativity is the key, and persistence as well.

Question: And one more question. Can you address the resistance? I find that this issue of violence in the community, it's like service sector. If the mom or whoever has been violated brings up the fact that that's taken place, then an agency becomes involved. That person becomes a victim. Child protection services can be called in. All their living arrangement around this issue is put in that family in detriment. And so how does your consciousness raising deal with the institution of the people who are saying they're trying to help the situation of violence in the community?

Andrea Smith: Well that's precisely why we decided we needed to develop community accountability strategies that didn't rely on these institutions. And we felt there was always a problem. Because we know there's a problem when they were telling them to go someplace that we know was going to make their life worse. And yet we don't feel like they had anything else to do. And then we got to a point which is, well, wait, why don't they have anything else to do? Why do we have to accept the terms as they've been set forth? Can we think outside the box and say, maybe we want to do something else?

So that's when people started to say, what is the response we would like? What are the other options that people could do besides calling the police or calling CPS? Now, this doesn't translate into us saying, well, if a survivor calls, we tell them, don't call the police. The issue isn't saying to somebody, no, you can't do X. The issue is, why have we only given her X to do. Let's provide as many options as possible, and we might find that these other options might be a lot more helpful and effective in addressing violence in our communities.

Question: And the institutions, do you see them coming around to like-mindedness?

Andrea Smith: Yeah, I'm not going to kind of advocate this politics of purity where it's like, this is the only right way to do work ... In other words, you need people on the inside, wherever that inside is. However, your work on the inside is going to work a lot better if you have one foot on the outside. In other words, if we have a base that's outside these institutions that grows and grows and is more powerful, then those on the inside will listen a lot more.

They're not going to listen when they think you're not getting anywhere. And just to give a classic example of this, when I was working as part of CASA, women of color had been putting up the issue of criminalization for like 20 years. Did we get anywhere? No, no, no, no, no. But when we started INCITE, and we went someplace else, we got the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence to sign our statement in three months. So developing the independent power base got things to change on the inside much faster than if had we just worked on the inside by itself.

Comment: Thank you.

Question: Hello. Looking at the back of your book, it offers that you might expand our conception of violence to include the widespread appropriation of Indian cultural practices by whites and other non-Natives. And I don't know if you've had touched on that or not. That was also in the advertisement for your talk tonight.

Andrea Smith: OK. I can touch on that. Yeah, I covered that in the book but I was trying to make the talk a little bit shorter. But what I was trying to argue in this book – and you're probably familiar with everybody who kind of was Indian in a former life, and everyone wants to do their own sweat lodge and this kind of thing. And so what I was trying to argue is that I think that that kind of cultural appropriation is another form of sexual violence. And ironically, I look to the Bible for this. Because if you look at the Hebrew word “to know,” that's the word used to connote sexual relationships, but also it's the same word to know somebody. So there's an idea about, when you want to know about somebody, it's often an act of intimacy. But it can also be an act of control or possession. And that's what I think has often happened in the history of Native genocide. It's not a mistake that this goes hand in hand with anthropology's desire to know everything about Indian people. So part of mastery over a colonized people is to know everything about them. To study them, to understand them. Because when you know them, you can control them.

So I see that as almost an act of sexual possession. An act of sexual violence. And then ... it doesn't become a surprise that many of the people who are often engaged in spiritual appropriation use us for pornography. So I was looking at something for instance – there's this pornographic film called *Native American Love Techniques*. Where it says this man and woman – of course, everybody was Cherokee – the thing was, this man and woman will show the sacred circle in their sexual act, otherwise known as 69.

It's totally out of control. Then there was another book called *Native American Love Secrets*, etc. So we see how Native spirituality becomes transformed into an act of pornography, and once again Native people are not seen as people, but are seen as objects for consumerist interests for non-Native people. So that's just a brief discussion of the issue in the book.

Question: OK. And what would you say to someone who was perhaps practicing, a non-Native who was practicing or attempting to practice spirituality and their retort when questioned would be, well, who says it belongs to the American Indians, you know?

Andrea Smith: ... OK, first of all, there's two things. One is that I think people tend to look at Native spiritual traditions like Christianity. So they assume that because Christianity is a missionary religion, they assume Native traditions are as well. And not look at [the fact] that Native traditions are generally land-based, specific to a specific land base. And hence there's not necessarily a desire to spread the word to everybody on the planet.

The second thing I would say is that spiritual appropriation is really part of an ideology of genocide ... In other words, what the logic of genocide says is that Native peoples must always be disappearing. And because we are disappearing, that it's OK for other people to be here.

And part of this act of disappearing then is that non-Native peoples become the inheritors of all that was Indigenous.

So that's why non-Native peoples get to do the Boy Scouts. That's why they should go do the ceremonies. 'Cause we're not around to do it. And when you think about it in a fundamental way, why would everybody else think that they should be doing Indian things if they really thought Indian people were still here to do it themselves? So really that whole desire is based on a logic of genocide.

Question: I just wanted to know what your feelings were regarding inter-generational grief. And all the substance abuse that takes place in our communities. And how that plays into trying to empower people to even look at this vision, and do something about it. And like you said with the boarding school issues, how we have – and I think it's across the cultures too – is that there's a lack of parenting throughout the United States. And I just wanted to know some of your thoughts about that.

Andrea Smith: Yeah. In the Boarding School Project, it's almost overwhelming. The issue is so clearly there. It's maybe more intense in this particular area, but I think it's true maybe about organizing in general. I think a lot of times when we think about organizing, we tend to have a gendered distinction. Kind of a private-public way of looking at organizing. That is, if you have a problem, take care of it at home. Or go get social services. But if you're organizing and you're rabble rousing, you need to be strong. You need to be cool. ... And we don't want to hear about your problems. And of course, because you actually have problems but you don't get to talk about it, it ends up screwing up the organizing work.

Instead, how can we have an organizing model that recognizes the trauma that we've dealt with and we're still dealing with, and all of the effects of that trauma? How do we organize around trauma? And not just see it as an ailment to be cured, but something that's part of the reality of our lives, but that we can still organize, given the reality of our lives.

This became totally apparent when we were doing the Boarding School Project and this still happens. We have meetings, it's almost the rule rather than the exception where people will travel 200 miles. They will drive, to great expense and great difficulty, because they really want to attend this meeting. And they get there, and they can't get into the door. Because the flashbacks or the emotional trauma is just so intense. So then we're having to rethink, how are we looking at this organizing?

So that we're organizing with the reality of the trauma that people are dealing with. And this is what we learned from Canada. Because the folks there said, when the disclosures of abuse first came up, people were filing these lawsuits, but there was no one there to deal with the trauma. And as a result they said that out of the first 29 men who disclosed abuse, 22 committed suicide.

So that's why within our organizing we've tried to make the healing central to the work at the same time. So it's not seeing people simply as clients but also as organizers. But at the same time, not having this idea that people aren't real people that have real trauma, that have real pain. That needs to be addressed openly in a supportive way. So I think what you're saying is in a certain way the central question to be addressed if we're going to move forward. Because I think that will put forth for us a new vision about how to do organizing that will really match the reality of our communities.

Well, thank you very much. Wado!

Host: [Introduces drummers and singers]

(Transcribed for Catalyst Project by Yael Chanoff)