



**MASSACHUSETTS CENTER FOR  
NATIVE AMERICAN AWARENESS, INC.**

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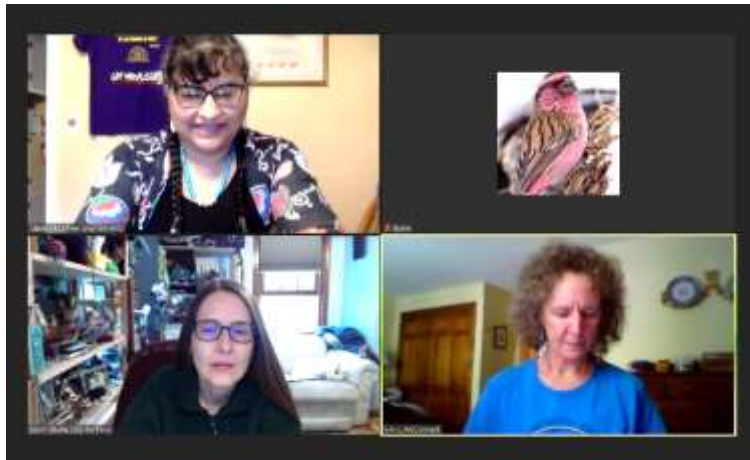
**MCNAA TurtleTalk – April – June 2021**

**WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING**

**MCNAA'S SECOND VIRTUAL BOOK GROUP IS A SUCCESS!**

*by Claudia Fox Tree, Erin McCormack, and Xóchi Kountz*

On April 20, 2021, MCNAA hosted its second book group for *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock* by Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes). In February, MCNAA hosted *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by American professor Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer (Citizen Potawatomi Nation).



*Claudia Fox Tree, Burne Stanley-Peters, Xóchi Kountz, & Erin McCormack.*

About 30 people attended the event which was facilitated by Claudia Fox Tree (MCNAA Board Member), Erin McCormack (MCNAA Advisory Council Member), and Xóchi Kountz (MCNAA Member) with Burne Stanley-Peters present for support. Besides MCNAA members and friends, representatives from Mass. Peace Action and Cambridge Naturals joined the discussion.

Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) is an independent writer and researcher in Indigenous studies. Having earned a bachelor's degree in Native American Studies and a master's degree in American Studies from the University of New Mexico, she also holds the position of research associate and associate scholar at the Center for World Indigenous Studies. Dina's work focuses on issues related to Indigenous nationalism, self-determination, and environmental justice. Previous to her current book, she co-authored (with Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz) *"All the Real Indians Died Off" and 20 Other Myths about Native Americans*.

As before, participants went into “breakout rooms” for small group exchange. The format included a protocol called “Three A’s,” where participants were encouraged to bring a quote from the book that “fit” one of the “A’s” - something you Agree with in the text (or Affirms what you know), something you want to Argue with in the text (or Add to), or something you want to Aspire to (or Act upon).



*Screen shot that captured how surprised our attendees were to see Dina.*

The highlight of the event was our surprise guest, the author, Dina Gilio-Whitaker herself, who stayed to answer questions for about 25 minutes. To say she “answered questions” does not capture her words of wisdom that continued to educate us on the topic of environmental justice. She talked about “settler supremacy” and how it affects Indigenous Environmentalism and is complicated by skin privilege. She encouraged us to think spatially, beyond linear history, by viewing the past as being something that happens in grounded places. Dina challenged us to consider the difference between “restitution” and “reparations” when thinking about colonizers making things right with the Indigenous peoples.

In the Q&A, Dina said that the section of her book on the establishment of the National Parks, and its direct impact on Indigenous people, had sparked strong responses from readers who were troubled to learn that part of U.S. history. She also advocated for readers to “act locally,” which tied into our examples of land/water contamination in Mashpee and in Plymouth that affects the Wampanoag peoples who live there. Dina spoke about her current research, working closely with lawyers, on issues of environmental and Indigenous regulations in order to achieve justice. It was very exciting to hear about her upcoming book and how she will be expanding on many of these concepts.

MCNAA gifted Dina with a necklace (*right*) created by Arawak Design and thanked her for taking time out of her day.

The afternoon ended with Erin sharing a poem that captured some of the teachings from “grass.”

**Mother Earth: A Native’s Perspective**

by Donald Soctomah

Taken from *Dawnland Voices: An Anthology of Indigenous Writing from New England* edited by Siobhan Senier



You ask me to plow the ground.  
Shall I take a knife and tear my mother’s breast?  
Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest.

You ask me to dig for stone.  
Shall I dig under her skin for her bones?  
Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again.

You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like the white men.  
But how dare I cut off my mother’s hair?

QUOTES from *As Long as Grass Grows* (shared in MCNAA Book Group)

- "Decolonizing the colonizers is necessary, so that they can once again learn how to respect themselves and others." p. 26
- "The national park system has long been lauded as “America’s greatest idea,” but only relatively recently has it begun to be more deeply questioned.” p. 93
- “The very thing that distinguishes Indigenous peoples from settler societies is their unbroken connection to ancestral homelands. Their cultures and identities are linked to their original places in ways that define them; they are reflected in language, place names, and cosmology (origin stories). In Indigenous worldviews, there is no separation between people and land, between people and other life forms, or between people and their ancient ancestors whose bones are infused in the land they inhabit and whose spirits permeate place.” p. 27
- “According to the Cultural Conservancy’s Melissa Nelson (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians), as many as four thousand food varieties and species are unique to the continent, but one-third of them are ecologically or culturally at risk of extinction or abandonment. As she notes, “Biological diversity and cultural diversity go hand in hand. When one becomes endangered the other becomes endangered.” p. 77-78
- “Following successes abroad, the movement to recognize the rights of nature, and a related undertaking known as Community Rights Movement...” p. 154.

Future plans include book groups on Indigenous authors in Fall & Winter 2021 and Spring 2022. ■

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE MCNAA OFFICE!

The MCNAA office is opening up slowly. Although we have been unable to hold meetings or other activities here, we have maintained a physical presence by having a couple board members work from the office a few days during the week. Over the past several months, we have welcomed a number of visitors who stopped by to pick up items they had purchased. All wore face masks and maintained a safe distance.

We know that many of you are anxious to know when we will return to in person events but as you can imagine, it has been challenging having to make decisions within an ever changing environment. So erring on the side of caution because of the surge of the Delta variant, we have decided no large in-person events will be held, at least thru September 2021. After that we will reevaluate our position. Despite a lack of live events, our days remain filled with other important work that keeps us very busy. Over the last three months, we:



- \* Assisted a number of needy Native families and Elders – mailed out food gift cards, and paid utility bills.
- \* Worked on routine tasks - memberships, bookkeeping, attended informational and training webinars, responded to e-mail inquiries, updated our social media, prepared for fiscal year end, etc.
- \* Helped plan several virtual events - the April book discussion, a future youth talking circle, and a Meet-Up for pow-wow organizers.
- \* Finalized two grant reports.
- \* Created a “Spring Fundraising” page on our website - select items that were donated for last year’s 2020 fundraisers were listed and now offered for sale. Please take a look - [www.mcnaa.org/for-salefundraiser](http://www.mcnaa.org/for-salefundraiser)
- \* Packaged and mailed items that were purchased from the new fundraising web page. ■

## BOARD MEETING HELD

On April 22, 2021, we held a virtual Board Meeting. Zoom was operated by Board Member Claudia Fox Tree and the meeting was chaired by Board President Burne Stanley-Peters.

In summary, lengthy discussions took place on:

- (a) the future of in-person events;
  - (b) the success of our first two virtual book discussions as well as the talking circle;
  - (c) the renewal of our office lease;
  - (d) updates from Board Members with info from the committees they sit on for MCNAA (Claudia - ECCF Racial Equity Committee, and Dawn - BSAS-Community Advisory Board); and
  - (e) ideas on other virtual events to offer during the upcoming Autumn & Winter seasons.
- This was another great meeting with a terrific Team! ■

## BOXFORD TRI-TOWN SOLIDARITY EVENT

by Burne Stanley-Peters

A student-led group in the Town of Boxford, who is working towards dismantling the pillars of systematic and interpersonal racism in their community, invited the Mass. Center for Native American Awareness (MCNAA) to take part in their Tri-Town Solidarity event. It was held on Sat., June 12, 2021. MCNAA Board Member, Dawn Duncan (*left front*), graciously agreed to participate. As a presenter, she held two separate discussions on “Historical Misinformation And How It Impacts Continued Racism Against Native Americans.”



At the event, not only was Black Lives Matter supported and amplified, but people from other minority racial groups were invited as well. A space of acceptance, unity, and support was created by the students making everyone feel comfortable and welcomed. And similar to last year, businesses that represented those within the BIPOC and AAPI

communities were set up as educational and interactive booths that attendees visited and learned from.

The group followed CDC guidelines by wearing masks and social distancing to keep all participants and attendees safe. Dawn reported that it was a lovely event. ■

## SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR THE 2021 FALL SEMESTER

MCNAA received another grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for our Scholarship Fund. For the 2021 Fall Semester, we will offer 20 scholarships of at least \$1,000 each to Native American students.



Students who are recipients of the Native American Tuition Credit are eligible to apply. That means you must (1) be a Mass. resident; (2) have proof of Native American heritage; (3) be attending a Mass. state college/university; (4) be enrolled in a degree program; and (5) have filled out the FASFA Form.

Parents and students, in late July/early August, please look for an e-mail with further details about this opportunity. ■

## OTHER NEWS AND INFORMATION

### A FACEBOOK LIVE EVENT HELD

DECOLONIZING:  
PLACING  
INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLES IN THE  
CONVERSATION.

**Are you Placing  
Indigenous Peoples'  
Perspective, History, and Current Realities Into Your Anti-Racist Conversations?**



On Tuesday, June 8, 2021, Claudia Fox Tree participated in her first "Facebook Live" event with Debby Irving in a conversation as they explored how U.S. narratives have shaped their understanding of themselves, one another, and the complex world we live in. It was entitled: "Decolonizing: Placing Indigenous Peoples in the Conversation." Claudia said that after a technical difficulty/rough start, it went really well and was delighted to be part of it. ■

### NATIVE AMERICAN ACTIVIST FROM COLRAIN NAMED COMMONWEALTH HEROINE

Rhonda Anderson of Colrain, MA was honored on Wednesday, June 23, 2021 as a member of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women's 2021 Commonwealth Heroines. She is Iñupiaq-Athabascan from Alaska, where her Native enrollment village is Kaktovik. She is a member of the Commission on Indian Affairs representing Western Mass., as well as a founding member and co-director of the Ohketeau Cultural Center, and the Native Youth Empowerment Foundation. According to a press release, she is helping to advance the statewide Indigenous Agenda with a special focus on banning Native American mascots.



Sen. Jo Comerford, D-Northampton, recommended Ms. Anderson for this recognition because of her leadership around the rights and interests of Native Americans, both nationally and statewide. She said: *“Rhonda’s prophetic leadership is advancing civil and human rights in the commonwealth. We are all stronger because of her critical work.”*

The Commonwealth Heroine awards, now in their 18th year, are granted to women who don’t always make the news, but always make a difference. Thousands of women in every community of the state perform unheralded acts on a daily basis that make our homes, neighborhoods, cities and towns better places to live. Commonwealth Heroines use their time, talent, spirit and enthusiasm to enrich the lives of others in their community. People like Rhonda are mentors, volunteers and innovators who strive to protect and represent the interests of seniors, victims of violence, children, immigrants and other vulnerable populations. They are the glue that keeps a community together.

We are very proud of Rhonda. Congratulations from MCNAA! ■

## SUBSIDIZED HOUSING OPPORTUNITY – IPSWICH, MA

**O**ak Hill Apartments, located in the heart of downtown in Ipswich, MA, is accepting applications for their waiting list. Oak Hill Apartments are subsidized housing and consists of spacious one bedrooms with amenities. Units are available for seniors 62 years of age or older, and handicap/disabled regardless of age. The waiting list is between 1-2 years.

Income limits are up to \$33,750 for one person and \$38,550 for two persons. Qualified applicants will pay approximately 30% of income for rent.

Applicants must complete a pre-screening check of previous landlord, income and assets, credit/housing, and criminal background to be accepted as a resident of Oak Hill Apartments.

If you are interested and meet the eligibility guidelines, please contact the rental office for an application to get on the waiting list.

Oak Hill Apartments  
35 Central Street  
Ipswich, MA 01938  
Phone: 978-356-1530 Fax: 978-356-5247  
TDD # 1-800-545-1833 Ext. 100  
oakhilloffice@verizon.net



Thank you.  
Mass. Center for Native American Awareness ■

## COMING UP

MCNAA is looking ahead to the Autumn and Winter seasons. We are in the planning stages of two new virtual book talks. And if it's safe for in-person events, a small outdoor social gathering will be held in late September, early October. When the dates and titles for the book discussions are confirmed, we will post them on our website and on Facebook as well as share them via e-mail. ■

## AN EASY WAY TO SUPPORT MCNAA

### BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

As many of you might have noticed on our membership application, there is a section you can check-off that says *"I want to do more. Instead of the annual membership fee above, I want to pledge \$\_\_ monthly."* We have similar language on our website as well. We feel recurring gifts are a great way for our organization to receive funds on a regular basis to help more families and/or to put towards some of our other important initiatives.



From our appeal last year, a few additional members joined the monthly giving circle. We are grateful to them for this steady influx of small gifts that are helping to boost our monthly revenue stream. But as you can imagine, more donors are needed. We hope you and others will hear your heart speak and commit to "giving monthly".

In the spirit of 'giving-back' all year round, we also invite businesses, small and large, to help make a difference by joining the circle of monthly giving. We are a 32 year old, non-profit, tax exempt organization that can use additional support throughout the year. Donations will be applied to either our college scholarship program, our social assistance-needy fund, or our social change/social justice initiatives.

If your heart speaks and you would like to support the organization this way, please go to your PayPal account and make a donation to the Mass. Center for Native American Awareness (or [mcnaa@aol.com](mailto:mcnaa@aol.com)) then click "reoccurring" or "make this a monthly donation." Or you can mail a check monthly to the organization at: MCNAA, ATTN: Monthly Giving Circle, 85 Constitution Lane, Suite 3-B1, Danvers, MA.

If you would like to discuss monthly giving further, please call Burne Stanley-Peters at 617.642.1683 or schedule a time to visit us at the Danvers Office. Thank you. ■